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Ligia Deca
Remus Pricopie *Editors*

European Higher Education Area

Challenges for a New Decade

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European Higher Education Area: Challenges
for a New Decade

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Editors

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Cezar Mihai Haj · Romita Iucu · Liviu Matei ·
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European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade

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Editors and Contributors

About the Editors

Adrian Curaj is a former minister of education, science and innovation in Romania. He is the head of the UNESCO Chair on Science and Innovation Policies at the National University of Political Sciences and Public Administration and professor at the Politehnica University of Bucharest. Adrian Curaj has been working as a consultant with World Bank, UNESCO, UNIDO, ETF and EC for studies in Tertiary Education, Science and Innovation, and Foresight. He has been actively involved as project leader, country or group leader and expert in many research projects, most of them in research management, higher education management and foresight, areas where he also published scientific articles and books. He has been the initiator and co-chair of the Bologna Process Researchers Conferences (2011, 2014, 2017, 2020). Adrian Curaj was member of the Board of Directors of the US Fulbright Commission in Romania and the Romanian representative at the Bologna Follow-Up Group. Also, professor Curaj is member of the Romanian Association for the Club of Rome, member of the Romanian National Commission for UNESCO and fellow to the World Academy of Art & Science (WAAS).

Ligia Deca is currently the Presidential Adviser for Education and Research within the Romanian Presidential Administration. In this capacity, she also coordinates the "Educated Romania" National Project. She graduated a Ph.D. program in Political Sciences and Educational Policies at the University of Luxembourg and was a research fellow at the "New Europe College", with a focus on internationalization of higher education. Author of several papers and studies in the field of educational policies, Deca also worked as an expert for the Council of Europe, European Commission, EQAR, DAAD etc. In 2014 she was a member of the 'Science in Education' Expert Group set-up by the European Commission and in 2019 she was chosen as an evaluating expert for the European Universities pilot project. Ligia Deca is also a member of the Board of Directors at Fulbright in Romania, since 2017.

Remus Pricopie, Ph.D. is the rector of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) and former Romanian Minister of National Education. His activity within the Romanian Ministry of National Education began in 1996, and includes positions such as Spokesperson, Secretary General, and Deputy Minister—(Secretary of State) for Higher Education, International Relations and Teacher Training. Dr. Pricopie is also professor of public relations and public communication at the National University of Political Science and Public Administration in Bucharest (SNSPA). He has been elected rector of the SNSPA in March 2012, a position he occupied until he was appointed minister of education.

Dr. Pricopie has a Ph.D. in Political Science at the SNSPA and he is a Millennium Fulbright alumnus. His educational background includes a rich international experience especially in the United States of America and the European Union. Dr. Pricopie has been Chair of the Task Force on Fostering and Building Human Capital (FBHC) of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and President of the Board of Directors of the Romanian-US Fulbright Commission, to name just a few of the significant activities of representation he carried out during his professional career. The activity of Dr. Pricopie encompasses trans-disciplinary research in the areas of higher education management, internationalization of higher education, public communication, public participation and collaborative public management.

Sjur Bergan Head of the education department of the Council of Europe and leads the current Council of Europe projects on Competences for Democratic Culture and the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees. He has represented the Council of Europe in the Bologna Follow Up Group and Board since 2000 and chaired three successive working groups on structural reforms 2007–2015. Sjur was a member of the editorial group for the Council's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and a main author of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as of recommendations on the public responsibility for higher education; academic freedom and institutional autonomy; and ensuring quality education. Sjur Bergan is series editor of the Council of Europe Higher Education Series and the author of Qualifications: Introduction to a Concept and Not by Bread Alone as well as of numerous book chapters and articles on education and higher education policy. Sjur was also one of the editors of the Raabe Handbook on Leadership and Governance in Higher Education (2009–2015) and one of the session coordinators at the 2015 and 2018 Bologna Process Researchers' Conferences. He is the recipient of the 2019 EAIE Award for Vision and Leadership.

David Crosier Joined Eurydice, the European Union's education information network, in September 2008. He is responsible for the network's activities on higher education and is the coordinator of the Bologna Process Implementation Reports prepared for each Bologna Ministerial Conference. He also works on a range of thematic reports and other information related to European priorities. Before joining Eurydice, David worked for the European University Association

where he was responsible for a variety of projects focusing on different aspects of implementation of the Bologna Process. He managed EUA's Trends reports, co-authoring the Trends V publication in 2007. He was also responsible for leading EUA's work on joint programmes and degrees.

Michael Gaebel Director of the Higher Education Policy Unit of the European University Association (EUA), which follows the Bologna Process, issues in learning and teaching, including lifelong learning, digitally enhanced learning, internationalisation and global dialogue. Michael represents EUA in the Bologna Follow-up Group, and has been actively involved in several of its working groups over the past decade. He is also one of the authors of the Trends 2018 Report, which provided some of the data of the learning and teaching chapter of the 2018 Bologna Implementation Report. The European University Association (EUA) represents 33 national university associations (rectors' conferences) and more than 800 universities from all over Europe. Michael graduated from the Free University of Berlin, Germany, in 1994, in German literature and linguistics, and Middle Eastern Studies. Before joining EUA, for more than a decade, Michael has held positions in international higher education exchange and cooperation in the Middle East, the former Soviet-Union, and South-Asia.

Cezar Mihai Haj, Ph.D. in Political Science from the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest.

His experience as policy expert includes coordinating a number of studies on internationalization, equity, university management, internal quality assurance and data collection. He has written articles in Springer and Central European University publications and recently co-authored the "Study on the impact of admission systems on higher education outcomes" commissioned by the DG-EAC.

He is a member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group and Social Dimension Advisory Group. He is currently coordinating an extensive national project focused on delivering evidence based policy recommendations.

Romita Iucu President of the Board of Trustees, of the renowned higher education institution in Romania's Capital City, the University of Bucharest and professor at the Department of Educational Sciences. He has been appointed as Steering Committee Member of the EUA—European University Association, Teaching and Learning Initiative. Professor Iucu held several professional and management positions (former Acting Rector of the University of Bucharest 2016–2017, Vice-Rector for Academical Affairs, for more than 16 years) on designing, managing and validating higher education and adult education policies, at international and national level. He was, since 2010 to 2015, the ENTEP Coordinator (European Network on Teacher Education Policies) and between 2016–2017 country reprezentative in The BFUG—Bologna Follow-up Group. In the field of Policy analysis and development: Vice-President National Council for Educational Reform, EU—member of Cluster Teachers and trainers, EU—member of the Expert Group on Improving the Education of teachers and trainers, in 2015–2016,

he was the Coordinator of QUALITAS—Barometer of Higher Education (National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), MofE Ministry of Education and Research (deputy general director, designed and implemented the National Strategy for Adult Education), Consultant for Teacher Training Policies, National Socrates Agency / EURIDYCE—consultant for lifelong learning policies and country expert in the Modernization of Higher Education in Europe—Academic Staff—2017, UNICEF—Coordinator for National Project—Strategy for Preschool Teacher Training, World Bank expert for rural Romanian Education. Since 2011 he has been inducted as a member of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame. He was working for ECORYS as country expert dealing with NRP, Themes of the Ad-Hoc requests, country updates. As a relevant experience to this assignment, Prof.Iucu was selected as senior expert in the Project: "Development of the capacity of the Ministry of National Education to monitor and forecast the evolution of higher education in relation to the labour market—SIPOCA 3", coordinated by the Romanian Academy of Sciences.

Liviu Matei Provost of Central European University (CEU), a Professor of Higher Education Policy and Director of the Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education. He taught at universities in Romania, Hungary and the U.S., consulted extensively in the area of higher education policy and conducted applied policy research projects for the World Bank, UNESCO, OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and other intergovernmental and non-governmental international organizations, national authorities and universities from Europe and Asia. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the American University of Central Asia and serves on the editorial boards of the Internationalisation of Higher Education Journal and the European Journal of Higher Education.

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Hans de Wit Since 2015 professor and Director of the 'Center for International Higher Education' (CIHE) at Boston College, USA. Before, he was Director of the 'Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation' (CHEI) at the Università Cattolica Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy, and Professor of Internationalization of Higher Education at the Amsterdam, University of Applied Sciences. He was Vice-President for International Affairs of the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 1996-2003. He is a Senior Fellow of the International Association of Universities (IAU), and chair of the Board of Directors of World Education Services in New York/Toronto. He is founding member and past president of the

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Thérèse Zhang Deputy Director for Higher Education Policy at EUA. She works on topics related to higher education learning and teaching, including developments in the Bologna process, lifelong learning, digitalisation and internationalisation.

Thérèse has experience in higher education policy/management and, more generally, project management in education and culture. When she first joined EUA in 2008, she worked in the field of quality assurance and institutional development. She was also the Programme Manager for the Institutional Evaluation Programme, and was involved in the development phase of EUA's Council for Doctoral Education. More recently, she held the position of Project Manager at the Belgian French-speaking quality assurance agency, AEQES. Her earlier experience includes serving as a French teacher for several years.

Thérèse holds a Ph.D. in Romance Philology from the Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium, as well as a Master in European Studies from the same university. She completed part of her education at the University of Bologna, Italy, and as Visiting Researcher at Brown University, United States.

Contributors

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Enora Bennetot Pruvot Deputy Director for Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development at EUA. She has published on the topic of university financial sustainability (2011), higher education funding (2013), university mergers (2015) and university autonomy (2017). She is responsible for the organisation of EUA's biannual Funding Forum and for EUA's annual Public Funding Observatory, which monitors the evolution of public funding to higher education institutions throughout Europe. Before joining EUA in 2008, Enora gained experience in the field of European research and development policy. Enora holds Master's degrees in

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Jana Berg Researcher at the project "WeGe—Pathways of Refugees into German Higher Education" at the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) and a doctoral candidate at Leibniz University Hannover. She studied Sociology (M.A.) and Linguistics (B.A.) at Johannes Gutenberg-University in Mainz and the University of Vienna.

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Rachel Brooks Professor of Higher Education at University College London, UK and an executive editor of the British Journal of Sociology of Education. Her research focuses largely on the sociology of higher education, and her recent publications include: Materialities and Mobilities in Education (with Johanna Waters) and Education and Society: Places, Policies, Processes. She is currently leading a large European Research Council-funded project exploring how higher education students are conceptualised across Europe.

Madalin Bunoiu Vice-rector of the West University of Timişoara, responsible for the academic strategy of the institution. He is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Physics being specialized in materials science, crystal growth and characterization and educational physics. He is, or was, member of some important national associations such as: the National Council for the Recognition of Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU), the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). He was also the president of the Advisory Board for R&D and Innovation (CCCDI). For his research activities he was rewarded in 2012 with the "Constantin Miculescu" prize of the Romanian Academy, Physics Section.

Mihaela Carausan Currently works at the Faculty of Public Administration, Department of Law, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration and leads the Romanian Association of Academic Excellence. Mihaela does research in Public Law (national and EU), Public Administration and Curriculum Theory. Her current projects are 'Romanian Public Administration Studies' and 'Augmented Reality in the Public Sector'.

Mădălina Chitez Holds a doctoral degree in English Philology, specialisation corpus linguistics, from Albert-Ludwig University of Freiburg in Germany. Before graduation, she obtained a position as a researcher at the Department of Applied Linguistics of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland, where she

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Daniela Crăciun Currently a lecturer at Bard College Berlin (Germany). She earned a Ph.D. in Political Science from Central European University (Hungary). Daniela's teaching and research interests lie in the area public policy, specifically higher education policy. Additionally, she is interested in issues of research design, content analysis and conceptualization. Recently, Daniela has been a visiting scholar at the University of Yangon (Myanmar), the Federal University of Sao Carlos (Brazil), and the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College (USA).

Ștefan-Marius Deaconu Former president of the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (2017–2018), having previously been vice-president for educational affairs between 2015–2017. Mr Deaconu has a rich experience in representing students, being a member of various structures such as the National Council for Higher Education Financing, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education or the National Council of Ethics and University Management. During this period, he participated in several events organized by the European Students Union. He was a scholar of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER) (2015–2016) and was a trainee at the Open Society Archives in Budapest, Hungary (2016–2017). Mr Deaconu is a Ph.D. candidate in History at the University of Bucharest. He currently works at The Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI).

Mari Elken Senior researcher and the deputy head of research at the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) in Oslo. She also holds an adjunct position as an associate professor at the LINK centre at University of Oslo. She has an interdisciplinary background and holds a Ph.D. from the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Oslo. She has been employed at NIFU since 2013 and has been primarily working on themes related to organization and governance of higher education.

Armağan Erdoğan Associate professor in higher education studies. She is conducting research and coordinating projects on higher education, gender and internationalization. She was the country coordinator of a Horizon 2020 project "EduMAP" focusing on good practice adult education programs to make vulnerable young adults active citizens; and the coordinator of "Elite Dialogue" Projects (I and II) which analyze Syrian university students and academics in Turkish Higher Education System. She worked as the advisor to the president of the Turkish

Council of Higher Education between 2008 and 2014; and as head of the International Unit at the Council between 2008 and 2012. She was also Bologna Follow up Group Representative of Turkey, worked as the contact person of Turkey at the ENIC-NARIC Network and acted as the Secretary General of the Turkish Rectors Conference at the EUA Council. She coordinated the Euro-student V Project team in Turkey on behalf of the Council of Higher Education. She was the member at the Gender Committee of the UNESCO National Commission of Turkey between 2009 and 2018.

Murat Erdoğan Director of Migration and Integration Research Centre-TAGU at Turkish German University, Istanbul. He is the founder and former director of Migration and Politics Research Centre-HUGO at Hacettepe University, where he worked as the associate professor at, Department of Political Science and Public Administration. He received his Ph.D. degree from University Ankara University in political science with the dissertation "Turkey-EU Relationship after the Cold War: 1990-2005". He conducted the research of his doctorate at the Universities of Freiburg and Bonn with a Ph.D. scholarship from Konrad Adenauer Foundation. He was as guest researcher at the University of Duisburg-Essen (2008), Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V. Berlin (DGAP) (2009), Humboldt University, Berlin (2010), Oxford University (2012), SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Berlin) (2013), Johns Hopkins University (AICGS) in Washington DC (2014) and again Humboldt University (2019). His research of interests are voluntary and forced migration, refugees, Turkish migrants in the world, diaspora policies, EU-Turkey Relationship, political behaviors, public opinion, Islamophobia, political cartoons, Germany and the Turkish foreign policy. Professor Erdoğan is conducting comprehensive and regular public opinion surveys titled "Euro-Turks-Barometer" for Turkish diaspora in Europe and "Syrian Barometer" for Syrians in Turkey.

Hakan Ergin Holds a Ph.D. in higher education from Bogazici University, Turkey. He earned his master's degree in adult education and bachelor's degree in foreign languages teaching from Bogazici University. During his master's, he studied as an international student at the State University of New York at Binghamton, U.S. During his doctoral studies, he studied as an international student at Wurzburg University, Germany. His research interests include internationalization of higher education, adult education, migration, right to education and distance learning. He has previously served as a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), Boston College. He currently teaches at Istanbul University.

Thomas Estermann Director for Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development at EUA with responsibilities for its work aimed at strengthening universities' autonomy, governance, management and their financial sustainability. Before joining EUA in July 2007, Thomas was Deputy Head of Strategic Development and Deputy Head of Administration at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, a member of the universities' senate and involved in the

last two reforms in higher education in Austria. Before joining the University in 1997, he pursued a career as a lawyer. Thomas Estermann was previously a member of the Executive Committee of HUMANE (Heads of University Management & Administration Network in Europe) and founding chairman of WSAN, a network of senior university managers in Europe. He is also a member of the editorial board of the UK-based journal 'Perspectives', which focuses on policy and practice in Higher Education. He holds a Master's degree in law from the University of Vienna.

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Cristina Ramona Fiț Has an experience of more than 10 years in higher education. Presently, she is as a public policy expert on higher education at the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), with a special focus on internationalisation of higher education and the Bologna Process implementation. She coordinated different work-packages in national projects, financed from structural funds and implemented by UEFISCDI, and different national conferences on higher education and research. She is author and co-author of academic articles, studies and reports on internationalisation of higher education, equity and social inclusion. She coordinated the development of www.studyinromania.gov.ro, the official Romanian website dedicated to promote the Romanian HE abroad. She has a bachelor degree in International Relations and European Studies and a master degree in marketing, both at West University of Timișoara. Withal, she studied at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute. She is an accredited project manager and an experienced and accredited trainer. Also, she has an experience of more than 10 years as PR Manager or PR Executive on education, on human rights, women, minorities and ethnic groups, corporate communication and in cultural projects.

Alexandru Foitoș Is currently a MA student at the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology of the West University of Timișoara, specialising in Literature and culture: Romanian contexts, European contexts. His major interests are academic research in fields such as Romanian literature, stylistics and poetics, linguistics and semantics, foreign languages, the use of digital tools and quantitative studies in domains such as literature, stylistics or poetic lexicography.

Pam Fredman Professor of Neurochemistry at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and been and is active in many of scientific and scholarly contexts. This includes board member of scientific organisations, academies and review

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Marita Gasteiger Studied Slavonic Studies in Vienna, Vilnius and Minsk and is currently completing her Master degree in Interdisciplinary Eastern European Studies at the University of Vienna. She is working as officer for certification, quality assurance and national qualification framework at the Austrian National Youth Council in Vienna.

Irina Geanta Has been involved in higher education policy activities since 2010. She is a former member of the Romanian BFUG Secretariat (2010–2012), contributing to policy support, including the drafting of the Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué. She has been involved as policy expert in several national and European HE projects focusing on internationalization, social dimension, quality assurance, etc. and has recently co-authored the "Study on the impact of admission systems on higher education outcomes" commissioned by the DG-EAC. She is currently coordinating the internationalization activities in a large scale national project focused on evidence-based policy recommendations, focusing on the StudyinRomania website and related promotional efforts. She was also involved in the coordination of the previous editions of the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference, and contributed to the subsequent Springer publications.

Delia Gologan Is an educational policy expert that has collaborated with the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI). She is a program and project evaluator within the National Agency for Community Programs in the Field of Education and Vocational Training (ANPCDEFP) and external evaluator for Higher Education Institutions and study programs for the Quality Assurance Agency of Kosovo. She was a Councillor within the team of the Secretary of State responsible with quality assurance in education (September–December 2016) and vice-president of the National Alliance of Students Organizations in Romania (2011–2013). Main fields of expertise consist in equity policies and policy for quality assurance of education —areas in which she has facilitated trainings and workshops for the NGOs/institutions she collaborated with.

Gabriela Grosseck Is associate professor in the Department of Psychology at the West University of Timişoara, Romania. She has particular expertise in ICT in education (teaching, learning and researching), a solid experience in students'/

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Andrew Gunn At the University of Leeds, United Kingdom, Andrew Gunn completed a competitive scholarship funded doctorate in the School of Politics and International Studies, followed by an externally funded postdoc in the School of Education. Andrew is currently completing a project on the European Universities Initiative. Previously, he was Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) Visiting Researcher at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and in the United Kingdom was a Principal Investigator and Grant Holder of a Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded project. In Southeast Asia Andrew has been involved in two higher education projects funded by the British Government's Newton Fund. More recently, he undertook research at the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) in Melbourne, where he contributed to the high profile Monash Commission into the future of post-compulsory education in Australia. He is currently writing two books: 'Public Policy and Universities: The Interplay of Knowledge and Power' with Cambridge University Press, and 'Teaching Excellence? Universities in the Age of Student Consumerism' with Sage. Andrew is also an Associate Editor of 'Higher Education Research and Development', the peer review journal of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

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Ann Katherine Isaacs Born in Astoria, Oregon (1943), Ann Katherine Isaacs studied at the University of California, Berkeley, and the State University of Milan where she received her degree in Modern Letters, summa cum laude. Research and teaching fellow at the Superior Normal School of Pisa from 1971 to 1975, from 1975 to 2013 she has been professor first of Renaissance, then of Early Modern History at the University of Pisa. Active in various key projects on the modernisation of higher education, she participated in the ECTS Pilot Project from 1989; she coordinated the European History Networks from 1999 to 2012, including designing and coordinating the Sixth-Framework Network of Excellence, CLIOHRES.net, in which 180 researchers from 31 countries addressed issues of

citizenship, identity and inclusion/exclusion (www.cliohres.net). As coordinator of the European History Networks, she edited and published the research results and the teaching materials created in that context, in total 61 volumes. Isaacs has been deeply involved the Tuning Process around the world (Europe, Latin America, Canada, USA, Russia, Georgia, Central Asia); she is ECTS/DS counsellor and Bologna expert; she received the Erasmus Gold Award for Innovation and Creativity in 2008, and a Doctorate honoris causa from the University of Latvia, Riga, for her contributions to the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

At present she participates in Tuning Southeast Asia and Tuning China. She designed and coordinated the large-scale Tempus project to build a Central Asian Higher Education Area (www.tucahea.org), as well as a project on enhancing Public Health education in Uzbekistan (www.uzhelth.org). She is Erasmus+ Ambassador for Italy; and expert for the European Commission on the implementation of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). For some years she represented the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research in the European Commission's ET2020 working group on Modernization of Higher Education. Currently she also participates in a World Bank project for modernization of Higher Education in Tajikistan, and as expert in a UNESCO TVET project for higher technical and professional education in Iraq.

From 1 July 2018, and until July 2020, she is Vice-Chair of the Bologna Follow Up Group of the European Higher Education Area, currently comprising 48 countries, numerous consultative members and partners. She is Co-Chair of the BFUG's Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue; member of the BFUG's Bologna Implementation Group; and Chair of the Drafting Committees for the Ministerial Communiqué to be agreed by the EHEA Ministers who will meet in Rome in 2020, and for the Statement to be agreed by the participants in the Global Policy Forum to be held in conjunction with it.

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Introduction

European Higher Education Area (EHEA)—Two Decades of European Investment in the Future

Adrian Curaj, Ligia Deca, and Remus Pricopie

Setting the Scene

2020. The year with an astounding numerical symmetry seems to encapsulate more uncertainty than we have seen since World War II, perhaps with the exception, at least for some countries and people, of the political changes that reshaped Europe in the early 1990s. Nature has made one of the footnotes in our emergency plans—a global pandemic—a dire reality that resets policy debates like no politician or social movement has done in recent decades. Digitalization has suddenly become the way of preserving our social contacts and thus our humanity, instead of being viewed as an obstacle to real human interaction. Scientists and medical doctors have become the most sought after speakers in televised and online programs, trying to make sense of how the COVID-19 crisis will be overcome and when—and whether—we resume our lives as we know them.

The fourth edition of the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference was organized just a few weeks before it became impossible to move freely in Europe. This freedom of movement is a political success we partly owe to the Bologna Process. At its fourth edition, the event gathered, in January 2020, in Bucharest, 170 researchers and policy-makers from more than 20 countries in order to provide EHEA ministers a research-based input at a crucial time, before they agree to the forthcoming Ministerial Communiqué, a policy document that will aim to guide the next EHEA decade. For the first time, the event was organized jointly by the Ministry of Education and Research, the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding, Romania, as well as three major universities—University Politehnica of Bucharest, the National University for

Political Studies and Public Administration and University of Bucharest, in a true display of inclusive partnership between academia and decision-makers.

In the past decade, this event was the promise made by the Bologna Process that political decisions in the 48 country-wide European Higher Education Area will be linked to what research demonstrates and researchers have to say. The first Bologna Process Researchers' Conference took place in 2011, in Bucharest, before the Ministerial Conference, but soon after the official launch of the EHEA (2010). Two other editions followed, in 2014 and 2017, aside from the current. And the remarkable achievement is not only limited to offering an agora for policy-makers and researchers and bring the best of the two worlds in the same venue; each conference was followed by a book, based on the best articles presented in the conference, which informed ministerial decisions and became a reference in the world of higher education research.[1] The quality of the articles is demonstrated by the number of citations and by the strict adherence to the Open Research principles.

In order to make sure that the ideas discussed and validated scientifically in such conferences are put to good use, we need free, autonomous and responsible academic communities to disseminate or use them in further research endeavors.

The next ministerial meeting of the EHEA should have taken place in June 2020, in order to chart the way for the third decade of formal cooperation in the frame of the Bologna Process. The conference was postponed to November 2020, in light of the recent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions. There is no certainty regarding what will happen when the pandemic subsides and we will all try to come back to our lives. Many say things will never return to what we had before, since the world will change. We do not know how Europe will look like after this crisis. But what we do know is that the decisions that we will take need to be based on sound scientific arguments, and this is precisely what the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference offers. One of the few certainties we have is that European cooperation should be based on shared academic values, in order to make sure that we are stronger together.

But as any sound political decision, European cooperation in the field of higher education has to be based on a lucid analysis on the added value of joint action. Especially since the "do nothing" option is increasingly preached in some European countries, in which the isolation caused by the pandemic was preceded by political isolationism, nationalism and autocratic measures. Some political forces even welcomed the closing of borders, and they will most likely be reluctant to reopen them even after the pandemic subsides. In this context, Europe has to make explicit the benefit that cooperation in the field of higher education and research brought not just for academic communities, but for societies as a whole. The time to a vaccine

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[1]2012, European Higher Education at the Crossroads: Between the Bologna Process and National Reforms, Curaj, A., Scott, P., Vlasceanu, L., Wilson, L. (Eds.)—109,000 downloads; 2015, The European Higher Education Area: Between Critical Reflections and Future Policies, Curaj, A., Matei, L., Pricopie, R., Salmi, J., Scott, P. (Eds.) – 779,000 downloads; 2018, European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies, Curaj, A., Deca, L., Pricopie, R. (Eds.)— 308,000 downloads link.springer.com, accessed March 2020.

against COVID19 is significantly shortened by cooperation among established research centers across Europe and beyond. The quick move to online teaching and learning was also possible due to improvements supported by EU funded projects and by shared approaches facilitated by the Bologna Process. At the same time, our ability to treat COVID19 patients depends on medical research developed through international cooperation and data sharing. And last, but certainly not least, universities became frontline supporters of medical professionals—through super-fast delivery of ventilators and protection materials according to in-house designs, by providing dormitories as places for accommodating those needing to be quarantined, and by developing reliable research that helps and will help in recovering after the crisis. And all this while digitalizing every academic process—teaching, learning, research, community engagement. This is a huge opportunity for a leap forward. It is what J. Kingdon (1984) called a "window of opportunity" when talking about how public policies change.

The Fourth Edition of the Bologna Process' Researchers Conference—Preparing for the Future by Listening to the Voice of Scientific Reason

The conference featured five thematic sessions, each uncovering areas in which the Bologna Process could and must rise to contemporary challenges.

The first thematic session looked at how the internationalization agenda could be developed towards the concept of comprehensive internationalization. Research has shown that internationalization of higher education has become an umbrella concept, but mobility and student recruitment are too often given priority over quality and equity. As such, there is a risk of deepening the existing divide, which means that more could be done to integrate those not at the forefront of this trend if we want Europe to maintain and increase its overall attractiveness and cohesion.

It is clear that education is central to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG),[2] with SDG 4 as a direct vector, but there are reasons to underline the essence of education and particularly of higher education for fulfilling all the SDGs. The question of the role and impact of internationalization of higher education on fulfilling the SDGs was considered by the participants in the conference as worthy of further academic investigation. Finally, the interlinks of other European Union policy priorities—such as European Universities Initiative[3] or the European Green Deal[4]—with the EHEA internationalization agenda were also considered as a good starting point for developing existing policies, while having in mind that physical travelling will probably change for a good period of time in the future.

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[2]https://www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300.

[3]https://www.ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universi-ties-initiative_en.

[4]https://www.ec.europa.eu/info/publications/200114-european-green-deal-investment-plan_ro.

   The second thematic session looked at what some would call the Achilles' heel of the Bologna Process—the social dimension.[5] The focus on access and success of every student in higher education is almost two decades old, as an integrated European approach, with concrete national commitments since 2009, but not much progress has been achieved, especially in comparison to other EHEA action lines, such as structural reforms or quality assurance. Missing data or problems in primary and secondary education were often quoted as reasons for this status-quo, but more and more researchers are asking whether it is not, in fact, the lack of political will and the still engrained mentality that higher education belongs to the elites that cement the current inequalities. Interpretations of the General Data Protection Regulation in Europe[6] are recently used as an excuse to limit access to student data, in a field where comparisons between countries are challenging anyway. This difficulty also comes from the diversity between the type and size of under-represented groups. For example, if for some European countries the integration of migrants is the main topic, for others ensuring access of learners from rural areas is the priority. But peer learning, supported by real political commitment, has shown that this is not an elusive goal of the EHEA, especially if we want to stand by our European values—public responsibility for ensuring the right to quality higher education. In a time when 1 billion pupils from 150 countries have had their educational experience interrupted or disrupted by the pandemic,[7] higher education has a moral imperative to rise up to the challenge and deliver solutions so that we can bridge the gaps in education for the benefit of every single one of us.

   The third thematic session of the conference paved the way for understanding developments and trends regarding a rather recent focus of the EHEA—teaching and learning, as well as their link with research. Research-based higher education has been the tradition of European academia, but renewed efforts are needed to make sure that the educational experience is student-centered and imbued with the latest pedagogical methods. Furthermore, the empowerment of the learner and the changes in mentality that it must bring are very timely in this age of fast-paced changes. Those higher education systems and institutions that have managed to support autonomous and responsible teachers and learners had a much easier time in the time of social isolation that COVID-19 brought about. Researchers also put forward additional tools and policy changes that could bring welcome change at European level, such as the creation of a European Framework for the initial and continuing education of the academic staff, which could include professional standards for higher education professors, or expanding the ERASMUS program with a funding line for joint training programs of university professors.

   The last two sessions (fourth and fifth) focused on two important subjects for today's context—how could the EHEA look like in the future and what is the role of digitalization in this process. The first of these two sessions underlined the idea

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[5]http://www.ehea.info/page-social-dimension.

[6]https://www.ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection_en.

[7]http://www.pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/450881585235950757/COVID19-Education-Sector-Guidance-Note-March26.pdf.

that the most important accomplishment of the Bologna Process is perhaps the common space for policy dialogue and practice in higher education, based on shared values and readable systems and qualifications. Bergan and Matei (present volume) underline four main ways in which education and research are essential in times of crisis—firstly, we need to learn more about the crisis in order to understand it before we act. Secondly, what is already known needs to be widely and freely distributed in order to build the knowledge base needed to solve the underlying puzzle. Thirdly, public authorities need to build sound policies to counter the effects of the crisis, but without overreacting and destroying the fabric of democratic and functional societies. And lastly, disinformation must be countered with hard evidence and scientific facts in order to tackle populism and *fake news*. The Bologna Process is the longest standing process of voluntary cooperation in higher education and continues to be an inspiration globally. Its continuity will make it even more interesting, and relevant, in these times. It is ready to support and inspire the stakeholders in higher education to regain their rightful place in national contexts, as well as at the European level, in order to make academia a powerful force in rethinking our societies to become more resilient and visionary.

The fifth session focused on digitalization and its role in enhancing a true European experience to students across Europe. But digitalization can also act as a magnifying glass for the EHEA strengths and weaknesses. Autonomous students and dedicated professors thrive in online learning environments. However, online connections and remote joint work supported by electronic means only made things that needed to be addressed in the past more visible. But they also put forward unprecedented opportunities to make sure even those that cannot be physically mobile have access to a European or global dimension in higher education. Pressure transforms carbon into diamonds, but it can also crush. What needs to happen in order to make sure this crisis is not wasted?

One of the main strengths of the EHEA is its participatory nature. The areas where we desperately need to see progress—the social dimension, student-centered learning, digitalization of teaching and learning, comprehensive internationalization—can only be advanced if they are addressed at the level of higher education institutions. And in order for this to happen, the way in which the EHEA is governed needs to be upgraded. Many reforms have stood the test of time, but they could benefit from innovative formats in order to make sure the EHEA fulfils its promise of implementing its main actions lines, but also retains political relevance.

A new vision-building exercise is necessary, and it will take time. In the conference, we heard from three key players of the EHEA—Pavel Zgaga, one of the ministers who signed the 1999 Bologna Declaration, Barbara Weitgruber—the mastermind behind the launching event of the EHEA in Budapest and Vienna, as well as Pam Fredman, the President of the International University Association. All three raised significant points related to the importance of the values and history of the EHEA in defining its future, the intrinsic link between the EHEA and the European Research Area, as well as the role of higher education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and in leaving no one behind. These three

contributions are part of this introductory chapter, as a way of nudging into the research articles included in the book.

Looking Ahead With the Eyes of the Editors

"What's next? or Quo vadis?" has been the question in the minds of all those involved in the Bologna Process, one way or another for the past ten years. The EHEA is the most senior and one of the key performers of a new triple-helix of European policy processes—the European Higher Education Area, the European Research Area and the European Education Area. How much evolution and how much revolution are needed, if we were to paraphrase the whole co-creation and policy process behind the Horizon Europe program? This question becomes even more urgent in light of recent developments.

The current global crisis shows once more, but at a larger scale, the intensity of our fragility. It is not exactly a "black swan", because it was discussed and announced on and by many different channels, but it seems we, as humankind, did not take it seriously enough to have "real scenarios" capable to channel and drive our initiatives under such difficult times. One way—or, maybe, the way—of making sure that next time we are better prepared is:

(i) to invest in a more consistent and sustainable way in science and innovation,
(ii) to widen the legal and financial framework of international cooperation on specific research topics,
(iii) to acknowledge the role of science for policy and to give a more visible voice to the scientists, when public policies are designed and implemented, and
(iv) to combine political responsibility with scientifically informed policy solutions, especially when making crucial assessments like those related to public safety.

Alternatively, if we were to put it more bluntly: society—including politicians and big industries—has to understand that science is as important as economic gains. And that part of the responsibility of elected officials is to prioritize areas with greater impact, such as education and public health, even if it means losing votes in the immediate future.

The European Higher Education Area continues to be both a reality in continuous construction and an ambitious goal still to be achieved, sometimes even a *fata morgana*, as coined by Bergan and Matei (present volume). As with any policy agenda, it has different representations in the minds of all those involved—the ministers, the stakeholder representatives, members of academic communities and citizens. Implementation of such policy agendas was never a linear process—it required reconceptualization, reframing and re-gaining ownership in order to acquire the human and financial capital to make commitments reality. In this process of building personal representations of what each of us wants and agrees to achieve, one thing has to come first—aligning our actions with our core values. And in this quest of co-creation, based on individual visions and aspirations—one simple potential goal comes to mind—free movement in the EHEA for students or

academic staff "for academic reasons", which can easily be translated into "for the interest of the whole society". This would entail everything else in the Bologna Process to work in a concerted fashion—full recognition based on readable degree structures and robust qualifications systems, trust based on sound quality assurance, lack of barriers for accessing higher education and true democratic and inclusive societies which view mobility as an opportunity and not as a threat. If we believe in Bologna's core values—academic freedom, participation, institutional autonomy, equity, public responsibility and the right to education—and our actions are guided by these beliefs, then the European Higher Education Area will continue to be the greatest achievement of European higher education, even if beautifully imperfect.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

This research volume, as all scientific works, is full of data, policy options, research theories and potential recommendations. Some readers might say all these are for the sake of the academia. However, one should remember that, as human history demonstrates, there is no sustainable progress, even in times of crisis, without education and research. Therefore, all these debates about the future of the EHEA, which are in fact debates about the future of universities in Europe, are not just for academics, researches and their students. This is a conversation about the way society—more exactly, our European society—will look like in the future and about how academic communities can contribute to it. Therefore, we (the editors and the authors) hope and trust that EHEA ministers responsible for higher education will consider the body of knowledge gathered in this volume, as they have previously done in the past decade. And that this unique and on-going balance between the voices of researchers and policy-makers will lead to better decisions in higher education and, ultimately, to a renewed sense of European ownership for its higher education cooperation.

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EHEA: The Future of the Past

Pavel Zgaga

The fourth edition of the Bologna Process Researchers Conference—and of this publication—coincides with the commemoration of important anniversaries: 2019 marked the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Bologna Declaration, and 2020 marks the 10th anniversary of the proclamation of the European Higher Education Area. Anniversaries are important social events, usually accompanied by festive gatherings of different actors and stakeholders[8]—but what role can historical anniversaries play in a research conference? Before I answer this question, I need to address some specific questions that will help prepare the way for the answer I want to give.

When we celebrate anniversaries, memories cannot be avoided. This is certainly true of the gray-haired heads; for them, history is not just a petrified structure, a fact that cannot be changed, but in a certain sense always remains subjectively present. Since I have a gray-haired head, I cannot avoid this deviation.

Therefore, I take the liberty of making one more deviation. In December 2019, my university celebrated its first centennial. On this occasion, my generation thought back almost fifty years, to when we enrolled in academic studies as freshmen. Over the next fifty years, we were personally closely linked to our institution. But our attitude towards the first fifty years was quite different. We knew from books and archives that the University of Ljubljana was founded as a typical national university immediately after the end of World War I, we knew that it had great difficulties in its early development and that it encountered even greater difficulties during the later World War II occupation. My generation would have done many things differently if we had had the opportunity. We had none. But we did have opportunities later. Today, we have had the very personal experience that our university, for example, was heavily involved in events connected with the symbolic year 1968, or that it was a pillar of the country's modernisation, or that it was the intellectual axis of the political conflicts and processes that gradually led to national independence in 1990 and later to accession to the European Union.

Likewise, the Bologna Process and the development of the EHEA are an important part of my personal experience.

The thoughts, polemics and decisions of that time have been preserved in this experience, mainly as a proactive response to the Zeitgeist. The 1990s were a time in which different countries were confronted with different challenges, but which also united them in their need to respond together to common challenges. This happened in several areas, and one of them was the path that led to the Bologna Process.

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[8]As was the case for the 20th anniversary of the Bologna Declaration, with an anniversary conference at the University of Bologna on June 24–25, 2019, see http://www.bolognaprocess2019.it/, accessed April 6, 2020.

I do not want to go into the details of these challenges now. At least when it comes to higher education, the readers of a publication like this one are well aware of them, even if not everyone has a gray head. I think it is more important to show how much and how deeply everything has changed since then than to sketch an overview of the events themselves. It is not only that the Bologna Declaration has contributed to a change in higher education in Europe. The whole spirit of the times has changed. And so, a casual conversation of old dons about how it was twenty years ago may not only bore the younger generation; it may also show that the original idea has lost its sharpness and thus its original productive charge. Today, we are facing completely new challenges, and we must respond to these challenges, we must respond with all possible sharpness and productive charge. A new generation is coming to the fore.

Although I broadly agree with this view, I have some concerns. Should such a strategy really ignore any question of where we come from and how we meet the new challenges? Forget the past? I think not. In order to meet new challenges well, we need, among other things, to undertake a critical analysis of our successes or failures in dealing with previous challenges: What worked well and what did not? To what extent were we able to achieve our goals and at what points were these plans hindered, stopped or blocked? Which potentials did we start with, which of the old potentials can still help us today and which new potentials do we have to activate in the further process?

One of the key questions in the discussions of the decade just ending is the implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Process. This question should certainly not be ignored, although it seems that new challenges require the formulation of new goals and not just a narrow focus on the "final realization" of goals formulated a decade or more ago. Implementation or non-implementation should not be seen as a technical problem that we face on the way to "solving all problems". On the contrary, I believe the second reason why we should not ignore this issue is to be found in some of the fundamental dilemmas that have arisen in the process so far, but which have perhaps been swept under the carpet too quickly.

I will address that later. First of all, I have to answer—at least very briefly—the question of what is on the list of fundamental changes observed over the past ten or twenty years. There are many such questions, and I cannot by any means list them all. I will limit myself to a few that might serve to roughly mark out the most important shifts while at the same time roughly defining the scope of the new challenges.

In my view, the *first* shift concerns the area of *teaching and learning in higher education*; an area that has been rather neglected in the past. Various actors at different levels are devoting more attention to this area this decade. The period 1999–2010 has been characterized by structures and instruments. This does not mean that the issue of the teaching and learning process as it takes place at the micro level—in the classrooms of the institutions of the EHEA—has been completely neglected. It has just been approached in a different way, from the perspective of qualifications frameworks, quality standards, recognition of qualifications, credit systems, mobility programs, etc. This perspective seems to

have changed during the period 2011–2020 in favour of active students and the actual learning and teaching process at our institutions. This is an experience from the era of mass, if not universal, higher education. I think we can describe this as a step forward from a decade of structural reforms. The so-called *social dimension*, which appeared somewhat delayed in the first decade of the Bologna Process (Bologna Process 2001: 3),[9] including the extremely complex contemporary issue of inclusive education, is now coming to the fore. This also includes other issues such as digitalization, etc. These issues will certainly continue to be at the forefront in the next decade. Even this shift is very sensitive to the question of whether or not the objectives of the EHEA will be reached and its policies implemented.

I see the *second shift* in a completely different area, which cannot be described simply in short words. These are changes that take place not at the micro level but at the macro level. Put simply, it is the *problem of knowledge in the age of populism*. In the mass media, fake news is far more common than the popularization of modern scientific knowledge. For example, the rejection of scientifically based warnings about the negative human impact on climate change reminds us of the anti-Darwinian hysteria of the 19th century. At this point, the progressive instrumentalization of knowledge must be added: A key characteristic that increasingly legitimizes the production of advanced knowledge is the supposed "practical use", or in economic terminology: profit. The trend I have described only very briefly seriously challenges both the fundamental mission of the university as an institution for the production of advanced knowledge and the very concept of knowledge, science and research that has underpinned the cultural development of humanity to date. I believe that this is one of the important issues that we are already facing and will face even more seriously in the coming decade.

The *third shift*, closely related to the previous one, concerns *values*, both academic and European, and not least global, sustainable ethics. Again, these are changes at the macro level that cannot be described in brief. In short, unlike what we almost believed at the end of the last century when some referred to "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1992), we have encountered problems during this decade—that should not be repeated in a united Europe based on a certain set of values. On a broader social level, we need to counter contradictory, homophobic and exclusive ideologies. In parallel with this trend, cases of violations of institutional autonomy and academic freedom as fundamental academic values are emerging. We face this not in a dictatorship that is far away—in space and time—but within the EHEA, which was founded only ten years ago. However, it is not just a question of higher education. The issue is broader and also concerns the continuing controversies about respect for the rule of law in individual Member States or the question of the future of European integration, whether it is a question of the "exit" of an old country or the "entry" of a new one. Ultimately, these are not just political issues, they are closely linked to values and the future. In 1999, these questions led us in a direction that is completely opposite to current trends. They were introduced in this

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[9]For an overview, see also http://www.ehea.info/page-social-dimension, accessed April 6, 2020.

direction half a century ago, the decade after the end of the bloodiest war in human history.

Academic values have been included in virtually all ministerial documents of the Bologna Process, but even in this case, one could speak of implementation or non-implementation. In this respect, it is time to remind ourselves of a fundamental dichotomy that is at stake in the discussion of the implementation of one of the objectives of the EHEA Bologna Process: the question is whether the voluntary approach of each country in the EHEA should mean that each member is expected to implement all the commitments agreed so far or whether this should be done *à la carte*. Should the previous agreements be seen only as a vague orientation towards distant goals and not as a set of strict commitments that should already guide the actions of members?

Let me remind you that this is an old dilemma in the European integration processes, and it is also an old dilemma within the Bologna Process. The most recent outcome of a political discussion on this issue is set out in the Paris Communiqué (Bologna Process 2018): Reforms that are driven by the Bologna Process require "both successful implementation and full ownership"; they require concerted efforts by all stakeholders. In Paris, the need to "unlock the full potential of the EHEA and ensure the implementation of the key Bologna commitments" was recognized. As we know, a "structured peer support approach" was confirmed as key to this involvement.

While we are waiting for the Rome Ministerial conference in November 2020, we can reconsider at least part of the road we have already travelled. We recall that "the issue of non-implementation of key commitments" was raised, for example, in the Yerevan Communiqué (Bologna Process 2015). The gray-haired heads remember, however, that the issue had been discussed at least ten years earlier. By mid-2004, in preparation for the Bergen conference, a serious debate was already underway on the basic "Bologna principles" and even the "Bologna philosophy" behind these principles. At least four of the five principles mentioned in a working document from that time had a clear reference to "European values" (Bologna Process 2004: 2), and it was proposed to the BFUG to expect the member countries to fully respect them. The essence of this proposal was adopted but the later develpoments showed that the 2004 consensus had not been maintained. I reported on this case in the first edition of this conference in 2011 (Zgaga 2012; see also Zgaga 2019). It seems that we are still dealing with a similar, if not the same issue.

This brought us back both to the question of history and to our introductory question: What role can historical anniversaries play in a research conference or in a research article? Let me answer this question by the shortest route: history counts! The esteemed audience at the conference, as well as the esteemed readers, certainly do not need explicit proof that history is a kind of "beachhead" of research, if I may use military jargon. Anniversaries must remind us that the task of researchers is to discover and determine where and how it all began, where we are now and why, and in which directions we can go from here. Research is always about the past, the present and the future.

I would, therefore, like to conclude this article with a modest proposal on one of the possible items on the agenda for further research. I believe that the history of the Bologna Process should be placed on the research agenda. It is particularly important to work on the history of higher education policy ideas, both on a European and global scale. In my recent work, I have discovered how difficult, if not impossible, it is to gain access to certain documents, particularly from the early "Bologna period". Recently, in my research center, we have been collecting documents, photographs and other historical material from the turn of the century[10] and we were surprised to see how little of this secondary material has been preserved. Now, we still have time to build a comprehensive archive; in ten years' time, it will be much more difficult. This is important not only for researching the past and understanding the present but also for outlining possible scenarios for the future.

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Synergies between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA)—From Words to Action?

Barbara Weitgruber

Education, research and innovation have been strategic policy fields in the European Union ever since the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 set the ambitious goal for the European Union "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (Council of the European Union 2000). National policies in higher education and research had been strongly influenced by this goal over the past two decades.

The concept of a European Research Area (ERA) took concrete shape in 2000 with the European Commission Communication *Towards a European Research Area* (European Commission 2006) adopted by the European Council in Lisbon, with a view to overcoming fragmentation and isolation of national efforts and systems and reducing disparities of regulatory and administrative frameworks.

In 2002, the European Council agreed in Barcelona on two further ambitious targets: the overall spending on research, development and innovation in the European Union should be increased with the aim of approaching at the average 3% of GDP by 2010, and the European education systems should become a worldwide quality reference by 2010 (Council of the European Union 2002).

The European Council committed in 2006 the (then) 25 EU Member States to spending 3% of the GDP on research, development and innovation as a national target—another milestone on the way to the 3% target for the EU (Council of the European Union 2006). This was crucial as public research funding is primarily a national task with only a small percentage of the overall public research funding coming from European sources.

With the Lisbon Treaty, signed on 13 December 2007, a legal basis for the achievement of the ERA was established making its implementation a "constitutional commitment" and a joint responsibility of the European Commission and the Member States (European Union 2007).

In 2008, member states were asked to show in their national reform programmes how their Reasearch and Development strategies would contribute to the realisation and better governance of the ERA (Council of the European Union 2008). The European Council on 13 and 14 March 2008 made clear that the implementation of reforms in higher education was an important element in the creation of the "fifth freedom" by removing barriers to the free movement of knowledge.

In February 2011, the European Council confirmed the need for a unified research area to attract talent and investment and called for the completion of the European Research Area (ERA)—which should originally have been established by 2010—by 2014 (Council of the European Union 2011).

The European Commission confirmed its engagement in the ERA with its ERA communication in 2012 (European Commisison 2012), which included a renewed partnership between Member States, the Commission and research stakeholders adopted in Council Conclusions.

With the adoption of the ERA Roadmap 2015–2020 (European Research Area and Innovation Committee 2015) and the development and implementation of national ERA action plans, the focus shifted from the European to the national level. Framework conditions at EU level were considered to be already well in place. The role of the European Commission, therefore, focused on supporting and monitoring as well as on the EU framework programmes for research and innovation in delivering a fully functioning ERA.

With the shift to the national level, the ERA implementation focused on more effective national research systems, transnational cooperation and competition (including research infrastructures), an open labour market for researchers, gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research, optimal circulation, the access to and transfer of scientific knowledge, and on international cooperation.

Over the past two decades, a wide range of ERA-related policy reforms and initiatives have been successfully implemented both in national research and innovation systems and on the European level, contributing towards the overarching objective to make the ERA a reality. Nevertheless, progress has been slowing down, and there are still major disparities between countries and regions, some of which are even diverging rather than converging, as stated in the *ERA Progress Report 2018* (European Commission 2019). Such an insufficient co-evolution of European, national (including regional) research and innovation systems and an unbalanced mobility and knowledge circulation contradict, however, the ERA policy objectives.

The need for a new ERA paradigm was recognised in the European Council's *New Strategic Agenda 2019–2024* (Council of the European Union 2019), which underlines that "we must step up investment in people's skills and education, do more to foster entrepreneurship and innovation and increase research efforts, in particular by addressing the fragmentation of European research, development and innovation".

The building of a true ERA pulling together national and EU efforts is also prominently mentioned in the mission letter of Commissioner Gabriel, which guarantees that it will remain high on the policy agenda of the Commission: "I want you to work with Member States to build a true European Research Area in which we pull together all national and European efforts." (Gabriel 2019).

The European Research Area and Innovation Committee adopted its *Opinion on the future of the ERA* (European Research Area and Innovation Committee 2019) in December 2019 after an intensive process with the ERA working groups and relevant stakeholder groups. This opinion will feed into the European

Commission's ERA communication in 2020. The discussion on the future of ERA on the ministerial level will take place during the German presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2020.

In higher education, sweeping structural and institutional reforms have started all across Europe in the framework of the Bologna Process since 1999 when the Bologna conference, at which ministers of 29 European countries responsible for higher education signed a declaration (Bologna Process 1999) aiming at establishing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010, took place. The Bologna Process as a voluntary intergovernmental cooperation closely linked with stakeholders based on trust, cooperation and respect for the diversity of cultures, languages and higher education systems in Europe regards higher education as a public responsibility. Its main principles encompass academic freedom, autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions.

Since 1999, 48 parties to the European Cultural Convention[11] of the Council of Europe have joined the Bologna Process and have made a strong commitment to implement commonly agreed reforms in higher education across Europe. In a joint effort, public authorities responsible for higher education, higher education institutions, staff and students, organizations representing employees and employers, quality assurance agencies, international organizations and European institutions have engaged in these reforms and have jointly shaped the EHEA. As foreseen in 1999, the EHEA was launched in 2010 (Bologna Process 2010) even though it was clear that some of the original aims had not yet been achieved. The progress made in the Bologna Process since its beginning was assessed in 2010 from different stakeholders' perspectives.[12] This was crucial as student and staff protests in a number of European countries had shown that some of the reforms had not been implemented properly and some of the original ideas had not been clearly communicated and explained. Besides, measures and developments not even related to the Bologna Process had been criticized as measures implemented in the Bologna Process, and many "Bologna myths" had developed.

At the Bologna Ministerial Anniversary Conference in March 2010, it was therefore agreed by the then 47 members and the stakeholders participating in the Process that more efforts and also adjustments—involving staff and students as those mostly concerned—were necessary at European and national, but above all at institutional levels to realize the EHEA as originally envisaged in 1999 and re-confirmed in 2010 as follows:

"The Bologna Declaration in 1999 set out a vision for 2010 of an internationally competitive and attractive European Higher Education Area where higher education institutions, supported by strongly committed staff, can fulfil their diverse missions in the knowledge society; and where students benefitting from mobility with

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[11]https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/018/signatures, accessed 29 March 2020.

[12]The various parts of the assessment as well as on overview and background are available at http://www.ehea.info/cid103687/independent-assessment-the-implementation-the-bologna-process-2007-2009.html, accessed 29 March 2020.

smooth and fair recognition of their qualifications, can find the best suited educational pathways." (Bologna Process 2010, para. 3).

From the very beginning of the Bologna Process, research has been regarded as an integral part of higher education both at the system level and at the level of higher education institutions.

The Bologna Declaration, for instance, underlined that "Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge." (Bologna Process 1999: 2).

In Prague, in 2001, the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education stressed that "the quality of higher education and research is and should be an important determinant of Europe's international attractiveness and competitiveness." (Bologna Process 2001: 3).

In 2003, Ministers responsible for Higher Education agreed "that efforts shall be undertaken in order to secure closer links overall between the higher education and research systems in their respective countries. The emerging European Higher Education Area will benefit from synergies with the European Research Area, thus strengthening the basis of the Europe of Knowledge." (Bologna Process 2003: 2).

A concrete area for synergy and cooperation was the field of doctoral programmes leading to the inclusion of the doctoral level as the third level in the Bologna Process. Doctoral studies and the training of young researchers, third cycle students and early stage researchers became corresponding terms in the EHEA and ERA contexts, respectively.

In 2005, the so-called Salzburg Principles were elaborated and adopted in the Bologna Process as a basis for reforms for doctoral education (Bologna Process 2005).[13]

In 2010, at the time when the EHEA should have been completed, ministers envisaged that "by continuously developing, enhancing and strengthening the European Higher Education Area and taking further the synergies with the European Research Area, Europe will be able to successfully face the challenges of the next decade." (Bologna Process 2010: para 12).

Still, it was only in Paris in 2018 that ministers did not only refer to the need for synergies but also asked for concrete action: "We call on the BFUG [Bologna Follow-up Group] to establish interaction with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) by 2020 in order to develop synergies between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA)." (Bologna Process 2018: 4).

In October 2019, the Finnish presidency of the Council of the European Union organised a joint conference of the Directors General for Higher Education and the European Research Area Committee in order to enhance the policy dialogue between higher education, research and innovation in a structured form, followed by a dialogue between the BFUG and ERAC.

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[13]Bologna Seminar on "Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society" (Salzburg, 3-5 February 2005), Conclusions and Recommendations, available at: https://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/salzburg%20recommendations%202005.pdf, accessed 27 January 2020.

Synergies and joint efforts might be beneficial for both processes. On the one hand, the ERA is hardly known beyond a small group of experts and specialists; not even all researchers and higher education and research institutions are familiar with the concept. Many simply associate the EU research and innovation framework programmes with the ERA. On the other hand, the Bologna Process and the EHEA are well known, but they are not always positively connotated.

Nevertheless, many structural and systemic reforms have been implemented effectively across countries in the EHEA based on a voluntary process while the ERA, despite its strong legal basis in the EU Treaty, has not yet led to such sweeping structural and systemic reforms across Europe as the EHEA.

Maybe a joint effort could lead to a new positive impetus for both the European Higher Education and Research Areas. Barriers at national, including regional, and European level to a fully functioning ERA cannot be overcome by Reasearch and Innovation policy alone. They need to be addressed by a broader set of horizontal and sectorial policies in a coherent whole-of-government approach. An integrated, coherent approach between education, research and innovation policies and instruments will be necessary in order for the ERA to effectively achieve its wider objectives.

The fact that Commissioner Mariya Gabriel as Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth (2019–2024)[14] has the responsibilities for higher education and research and that her mission letter includes both the development of the European Research Area in cooperation with Member States as well as the implementation of the European University Initiative can be seen as a window of opportunity for policy objectives in the same directions. Besides, at the next EHEA Ministerial Conference which will take place in 2020 in Rome, ministers will outline their priorities and objectives for the future of EHEA. Also in 2020, the future of ERA will be discussed by ministers in charge of research and innovation at EU Council meetings and in a ministerial conference on ERA—so the year 2020 could be the year in which synergies between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area are translated from words into action.

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The Role of Higher Education in Making Our Society Sustainable: An International Perspective

Pam Fredman

The world faces unprecedented challenges in ensuring a sustainable future. The United Nations Agenda 2030 "Transforming our world for a sustainable development" and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been adopted by 193 countries. The Agenda 2030 is a key document for all stakeholders. The UN has also outlined the key role of higher education in helping reach the SDGs, and not only the SDG4, the one that concerns education most directly. The UN Agenda 2030 is a global agenda that can and should be embraced by higher education; it provides for a good roadmap for higher education to foster sustainable development.

Thus, the future of higher education requires that higher institutions and organisations cooperate on the basis of trust and respect.

The International Association of Universities (IAU[15]) was established by UNESCO in 1950, and we are now the leading global association of higher education institutions and organisations. The IAU counts 650 member institutions and more than 30 organisations in 130 countries. The IAU develops and maintains the World Higher Education Database,[16] which lists more than 1900 higher education institutions, acts as the global voice of higher education in UNESCO and has been given special consultative status by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

70 years ago, the IAU was created in response to the need for a global network of higher education leaders. They needed to promote and support the role of higher education in fostering democratic social development and preserving peace. When the IAU was established, our predecessors already stated that in order for higher education institutions to fulfil their role in creating, developing and disseminating knowledge through research and education they must enjoy academic freedom and institutional autonomy. This is a must for the academic community and our institutions to be able to identify research topics, determine course content and develop methodology free from political, ideological or economic pressures. Therefore, academic freedom and institutional autonomy are the core values of the IAU. They are also the fundamental principles of higher education, as expressed through the Magna Charta Universitatum, which has been signed by more than 1000 universities.

Higher education, then, plays a key role in the sustainable development of our societies. At the same time, however, we hear voices criticising this role and the relevance of the fundamental principles. These voices grow louder, also among community stakeholders. Therefore, higher education institutions and organisations

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[15]https://www.iau-aiu.net/, accessed 27 March 2020.

[16]https://www.iau-aiu.net/World-Higher-Education-Database-WHED, accessed 27 March 2020.

must speak with a common voice locally, nationally and globally promoting fundamental values. This way, we can regain societal trust and recognition. In this way, we can deal with the societal development and needs that are changing very rapidly and that cannot be adequately addressed without the contribution of higher education.

Higher education itself is changing and has done so for decades, even centuries. We do not see the "same" institutions today as 1999 when the Bologna Declaration[17] was signed. As I write these lines, higher education institutions around the world are transforming incredibly fast to address the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teaching and education, meetings and conferences have moved online, and this situation will affect the future of higher education. But higher education should and will not just adjust to new circumstances. We should develop and shape the world in which we live. To do so, we must gain acceptance for the fact that research and education operate with a longer-term perspective than many other areas of society. There is a reason higher education has not only survived but also thrived for centuries. Knowledge will always be needed.

To meet the demands of the development of a knowledge society, the number of individuals enrolled in tertiary education and of higher education institutions has increased substantially. This rapid expansion has resulted in many institutions, not at least in developing countries, conducting education with little connection to research. This decoupling of research and education, which goes against one of the characteristics of higher education, is less frequently noticed and discussed than academic freedom and institutional autonomy. This de facto separation means that new knowledge and understanding developed through research as well as an understanding of the methods of research will not be transferred to students, and through them to all sectors of society where they will act. In addition, the dialogue between students and researchers is lost, a dialogue that stimulate unexpected questions and new ways of seeing things, and that is a base for developing the critical thinking, analytical skills and innovation. Students are the future decision-makers, citizens and labour market actors. They are key to sustainable development of all around the world.

Another challenge for the future of higher education is the separate funding systems, private as well as public, for research and education. Funding of large research programmes nationally and not at least in Europe is rarely linked to education, and education achievements are not part of evaluation of success. This decoupling must be reconsidered to ensure advanced, academically based competence in society.

The local mission of higher education, to meet local and regional challenges and the needs of local communities for knowledge and competence, is getting increasing attention. Cooperation between higher education and local communities is both increasing and improving. It both requires and develops mutual trust and respect between higher education and the various actors without which we cannot

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[17]http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/1999_Bologna_Declaration_English_553028.pdf, accessed 27 March 2020.

meet these challenges. Such collaboration is often done locally while research funding often requires broad cooperation beyond the local scene. Higher education institutions and organisations need to jointly define and then implement the requirements for higher education to fulfil is social responsibility. This is part of and not contradictory to high quality and excellence in research or education.

Ranking and evaluation systems constitute another obstacle to promoting the social responsibility of higher education, as traditional measures for research performance weighs much more heavily than societal impact, which also needs new evaluation parameters. The merit system in higher education, which determines careers, is built on the same parameters. Academics as well as institutional leaders have a crucial role in promoting due recognition of societal impact.

Yet another concern is the fact that the funding of research and education very often gives preference to selected areas like technology, medicine and natural science, leaving much less for disciplines that are key to the social dimension of higher education and research. The humanities, social sciences and the arts are disadvantaged when it comes to funding, and therefore, the development of skills for research and education in these disciplines is challenged. This also affects the education of the schoolteachers, those responsible for good quality in primary and secondary schools, which is crucial to global sustainable development and our ability to reach the goals of Agenda 2030.

There are obstacles that need to be addressed within the education community, too. These include standardisation of education programs and curricula on national, regional and international level, aiming at strengthening quality and facilitating mobility. An amount of standardisation is required, but we must avoid lock-in effects for the development of programmes to provide the new knowledge and skills we need, not least for lifelong learning. The financing system often counteracts flexibility in education development and favours readymade programmes instead of innovative courses. Since 1999, when the Bologna Declaration was signed, the societal demands on higher education have changed, and maybe the very aim of the Bologna Process should be reconsidered and adjusted to the current reality and demands. We will need funding and governance that promote flexibility in programmes and courses enabling coupling of education to knowledge development and needs of society and with the perspective of lifelong learning.

Digitalisation and social media have not only changed the speed with which information is disseminated but also the ways in which it is received and interpreted —and sometimes not even digested. Information has become global but too often digested without factual scrutiny, often received without the critical eye needed to ensure democracy and innovation, in a word: sustainable development. Today, due to CIVID 19 pandemic, much teaching is moving to online. In the future, digitalisation of higher education may grow exponentially. The digitalisation impacts of Covid-19 due to the closure of higher education campuses must be evaluated once the crisis is over in the light of the concerns and priorities I have just outlined. In addition, social media have lowered the threshold for personal attacks and bullying, as well as for political smear campaigns. This affects our students and teachers directly in their education and research. Digitalisation and technological

development open up new opportunities for higher education but also has detrimental consequences that must be considered and dealt with. Our culture of ethics and integrity needs to be strengthened.

Recently, the IAU launched a report based on an open consultation of higher education institutions on technology,[18] as a basis for developing an IAU policy document on technology 2020. More than 1000 higher education institutions from 127 countries were involved. From this consultation, it is obvious that most but not all institutions are developing their pedagogy with technological aids, mostly in the form of blended learning and distance education, but there is surprisingly little interest in creating open online courses. However, on a global perspective, national infrastructure and financial support for technology development are extremely diverse. Higher education institutions and organisations need to raise awareness among policy and decision-makers of the inequality of global capacity building. A common voice from higher education institutions and organisations will be important for fulfilling our social responsibility globally.

There are also expectations that technological development will facilitate international collaboration in both research and education by enabling people to meet face-to-face without having to travel and to hold seminars and give presentations to students simultaneously in different parts of the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has given a push in this direction, and we will see whether this will be a lasting development. However, as shown in the IAU consultation and as experienced by many academics, infrastructure and experience are so unevenly spread around the world that anything close to equal access to education through digitalisation is still a dream of the future rather than a reality of the present.

Knowledge has no borders, and the internationalisation of research and education aiming at knowledge transfer and exchange and cultural understanding is an important part of higher education. Internationalisation is and has always been a priority for the IAU, *to promote* inclusive, fair and ethical process of internationalization of HE. In 2019, the 5th IAU global survey on internationalisation[19] was published, and the results invite a discussion on rethinking internationalisation. The consequences of the Covid-19 consequences will probably have effects on managing internationalisation beyond physical mobility that we cannot foresee today.

From the survey, it is obvious that internationalisation as a part of the strategy and vision of higher education institutions is increasing in importance. However, the answers reflect diverse national and regional conditions for this internationalisation. There is agreement that higher education is and must be international. A common view was that international collaboration should increase and that it should contribute to capacity building as well as increase the international awareness and commitment of students on global issues. However, for that to become reality, internationalization needs to be ethical and inclusive.

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[18]https://www.iau-aiu.net/Higher-Education-in-the-Digital-Era-The-Current-State-of-Transformation-Around, accessed 27 March 2020.

[19]https://www.iau-aiu.net/Global-survey-on-Internationalization, accessed 27 March 2020.

The most common and outspoken threat to a sustainable internationalisation is the commercialisation of the higher education. Students are too often seen as customers and higher education—not to speak of diplomas—as a commodity from which profit is made. Many higher education institutions have a significant share of their budget from tuition fees. The number of scholarships is limited, and their distribution throughout the world is unequal. The effect is an increasingly socially skewed recruitment related to socioeconomic background. How is the job market for international students? Recruiting the academically high performing students is an option for only a few of the more 19000 institutions in the world. Exchange programmes tend to favour the top-ranked institutions, with serious consequences for the majority of institutions.

Linguistic competences and the predominance of certain languages is another issue. Several countries, for example in Africa, wish to develop the use of their local languages in higher education in order to better reach out locally. French, Spanish and Portuguese are widely spoken languages, and higher education is often provided in these languages rather than in local and national languages. In addition, lack of competence in the English language of teachers and students often prevents international mobility beyond language groups. This can lead to quality deterioration in teaching. Whether we like it or not, English is the most commonly shared language in higher education, not least for publishing research, sharing knowledge and developing cooperation.

Criticism grows against assessments made on the basis of purely quantitative measurements such as the number of outgoing and incoming students and teachers without assessing the outcomes and the quality of the exchange. Does international academic cooperation lead to the exchange of knowledge and cultural learning that is being sought?

On the research side, international co-publications are valued in evaluations and rankings, but most of the 19000+ institutions in the world are never considered for participation in the exclusive group of the established research universities.

Successful internationalisation must address the social dimension, issues related to accessibility, equality and quality and long-term capacity building worldwide. If the Western world is to "recruit the best" for its own development, large parts of the world will be left outside, and we will not be able to achieve neither climate goals nor the other sustainability goals in Agenda 2030. This diversity applies also to within European higher education.

Higher education institutions and organisations must demonstrate responsibility for their key role, as clearly stated by UN, in reaching the goals of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs and building a sustainable future.

Therefore, institutions and organisations must cooperate to:

- Promote and defend the fundamental principles of higher education: academic freedom, and institutional autonomy;
- Promote the necessary link between research and education;
- Promote the social responsibility of higher education;
- Promote research and education to meet the local and global needs of society;

- Ensure inclusiveness, equity and ethics;
- Promote involvement of students in higher education development.

I wish the future of higher education to be a shared responsibility of institutions and organisations and of society at large, because our future will be shared.

Furthering the Internationalization of Higher Education: Particular Challenges in the EHEA (Coordinated by Hans de Wit and Ligia Deca)

Internationalization of Higher Education, Challenges and Opportunities for the Next Decade

Hans de Wit and Ligia Deca

Internationalization has evolved in higher education over the past 30 to 40 years from a marginal aspect to a key aspect of the reform agenda. It also has evolved in different directions and, in that process, some previous values have got lost, and past priorities have been replaced by others. Economic rationales have become more dominant, but as the society is facing extreme challenges, summarized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, internationalization needs to respond to these challenges and goals. Some of the papers in this section address the sustainability and quality of the current state of internationalization, others look ahead and analyse whether new initiatives such as the European Universities initiative (EUI) are an answer, or how internationalization can address the need for higher education of refugees. It is important to place the papers in perspective of the evolution of internationalization as a basis for the next decade.

1 Internationalization in Perspective

Universities have always had international dimensions in their research, teaching and service to society, but those dimensions were, in general, more ad hoc, fragmented and implicit, rather than explicit (de Wit and Merkx 2012).

Comprehensive strategies are a rather recent development of the past three decades. In the last decade of the previous century, the increasing globalization and regionalization of economies and societies, combined with the requirements of the knowledge economy and the end of the Cold War, created a context for a

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more strategic approach to internationalization in higher education (Knight and de Wit 1995). This became manifest first and foremost in Europe (the EU programs and the Bologna Process), but gradually also elsewhere. The European Commission, international organizations such as OECD, UNESCO and World Bank, national governments, as well as higher education organizations such as the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the European Universities Association (EUA) placed internationalization at the top of the reform agenda. Internationalization became a key change agent in higher education, in the developed world, but also in transitional democracies and developing societies, who also used international trends to justify unpopular reforms (de Wit et al. 2015). Some of these societies, particularly in regions such as Central and Eastern Europe, can be seen as 'laboratories of reform' in terms of the effect of internationalization of higher education on the overall evolution of the higher education system (Dakowska and Harmsen 2015; Deca 2016).

Mobility of students, scholars and programs; reputation and branding (manifested by global and regional rankings), and a shift in paradigm from cooperation to competition were the main manifestations of the agenda of internationalization in higher education over the past 30 years. International education became an industry, a source of revenue and a means for enhanced reputation and soft power.

Quantitative data about the number of international degree- seeking students, of international talents and scholars, of students going for credits abroad, of agreements and memoranda of understanding, as well as of co-authored international publications in high impact academic journals, were not only the key manifestations of this perception of internationalization, but also did and still do drive its agenda and actions.

All these aspects of internationalization resulted in an increasing dominance of English in research but also teaching, created the emergence of a whole new industry around internationalization, forced national governments to stimulate institutions of higher education going international, and did enter new buzz words such as cross-border delivery and soft power in the higher education arena.

In the period 2010–2020, we see not only the number of international students double to five million, but we also notice an increase in franchise operations, articulation programs, branch campuses and online delivery of higher education. There is fierce competition for talented international students and scholars, and selective immigration policies have shifted from low-skill to high skill immigration.

National excellence programs have increased differentiation in higher education, with more attention being given to a small number of international world-class universities and national or even regional flagship institutions which compete for talents, for positions in the global rankings, for access to high impact journals, and for funding, at the cost of other institutions.

But internationalization has also become more globalized, and regional, national and institutional initiatives are developed in the emerging and developing world:

> In the current global-knowledge society, the concept of internationalization of higher education has itself become globalized, demanding further consideration of its impact on policy and practice as more countries and types of institution around the world engage in the process. Internationalization should no longer be considered in terms of a westernized, largely Anglo-Saxon, and predominantly English-speaking paradigm (Jones and de Wit 2014, p. 28, see also de Wit et al. 2017).

Internationalization became defined by the generally accepted definition of Jane Knight (2008):

> The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education

describing clearly the process in a general and value-neutral way.

Some of the main trends in internationalization in the past 30 years have been:

– More focused on internationalization abroad than on internationalization at home;
– More ad hoc, fragmented and marginal than strategic, comprehensive and central in policies;
– More in the interest of a small, elite subset of students and faculty than focused on global and intercultural outcomes for all, so little to no inclusiveness and equity;
– Directed by a constantly shifting range of political, economic, social/cultural, and educational rationales, with increasing focus on economic motivations;
– Increasingly driven by national, regional, and global rankings;
– Little alignment between the international dimensions of the three core functions of higher education: education, research, and service to society;
– Primarily a strategic choice and focus of institutions of higher education, but increasingly also a priority of national governments (soft power, reputation and/or revenue- driven) and regions (European Union, Bologna signature countries, ASEAN);
– Following already well-established models—mainly promoted by "big players" with enough economic clout and tradition in higher education promotion: the UK, USA, France, Germany etc.

Traditional values that did drive international activities in higher education in the past, such as exchange and cooperation, peace and mutual understanding, human capital development and solidarity, although still present in the vocabulary of international education, have moved in that process to the sideline in a strive for competition, revenue and reputation/branding.

2 Rethinking and Redefining Internationalization

Around the change of the century, we observed already a first response to these developments. The movement for *Internationalization at Home* within the European Union started in 1999 in Malmö, Sweden, asking more attention to the 95% of

non-mobile students, not participating in the successful flagship program of the EU, ERASMUS.

In the UK and Australia, a similar movement asked for attention for internationalization of the curriculum and teaching and learning in response to the increased focus on recruiting income- generating international students.

And in the US, attention emerged around internationalizing the campus and developing more comprehensive approaches to internationalization as an alternative for the marginal and fragmented focus on undergraduate study abroad on the one hand and international student recruitment on the other.

These reactions were and are important manifestations of concern about the competitive, elitist and market-oriented direction of internationalization, and call for more attention to the qualitative dimensions of internationalization, such as citizenship development, employability and improvement of quality of research, education and service to society, from output to outcome and impact.

In the past decade, one can observe an even stronger reaction to these trends. While mobility is still the most dominant factor in internationalization policies worldwide, there is increasing attention being paid to internationalization of the curriculum at home and from physical mobility to virtual mobility and exchange, collaborative online international learning.

There is also a stronger call for the comprehensiveness of internationalization, addressing all aspects of education in an integrated way. Although economic rationales and rankings still drive the agenda of internationalization, there is more emphasis now being placed on other motivations for internationalization, political, academic, social, cultural.

For example, attention is being paid to integrating international dimensions into tertiary education quality assurance mechanisms, institutional policies related to student learning outcomes, and the work of national and discipline-specific accreditation agencies (de Wit 2019).

A wide range of academic scholars and international education practitioners push with their publications and presentations the agenda for change and rethinking internationalization.

A study for the European Parliament on the state of internationalization in higher education gave this push an extra dimension. Not only provided the study a comprehensive overview of the literature and the practice of internationalization in higher education around the world, but also—based on a global Delphi Exercise—it promoted a new agenda for internationalization for the future, by extending the definition of Jane knight of 2004, defining that direction as follows:

> The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society (de Wit et al. 2015, European Parliament Study)

This definition gives a normative direction to the internationalization of higher education by emphasizing that such a policy process does not and should not go on by itself, but needs clear intentions, that internationalization is not a goal in itself, but

needs to be directed towards quality improvement, that it should not be of interest only to a small elite of mobile students and scholars, but directed to all members of academic communities, and that it should make a clear contribution to society.

3 Challenges and Opportunities for the Next Decade

Over the past five years and in light of the new UN agenda for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, this new approach has received positive attention, and at the start of a new decade, it is important to see if this shift back to a more ethical and quality approach with respect to internationalization is indeed taking place and what new dimensions one can observe in that shift.

Internationalization of higher education is entering a new phase. A shift from internationalization abroad with a strong focus on a small elite of mobile students, faculty, administrators and programs towards internationalization at home for all students, faculty and administrators is even more urgent than ever.

Making internationalization more carbon-neutral (de Wit and Altbach 2020), addressing more the importance of the contribution of internationalization to society (Brandenburg et al. 2019) and linking the global to the local are imperative. Reducing short-term mobility of less than 8 weeks, making mobility in programs like Erasmus+ obligatory carbon-neutral, diminishing the need for administrative travel, supporting more actively virtual exchange and collaborative online international learning, addressing the needs of immigrant and refugee populations, are some of the key tasks of internationalization in the next decade. The benefits of emerging in a different culture, such as developing intercultural competences and skills, are without discussion, but a policy focused on making these more carbon-neutral—longer stays, using more sustainable forms of transport—would be welcome.

Also, it is high time to talk about what should be the role of national authorities and how much national strategy building is beneficial to the efforts of higher education institutions in terms of internationalization. Even the notion of national strategy for internationalization is something that needs more reflection, especially in light of the need to support institutional autonomy and public responsibility of higher education institutions. Finally, the impact of high profile new projects needs to be assessed, such as the European Universities Initiative, since they might redefine internationalization as we now know it, as well as national legal frameworks if original intentions materialize.

Several papers in the internationalization section address some of these new key issues: institutional, national and regional initiatives such as the European Universities Initiative; and how to deal with forced internationalization of refugees in higher education.

4   National Policies

National governments increasingly see internationalization of higher education as an important factor in national economic development, trade and reputation. In light of enhanced student and staff mobility, the increased presence of branch campuses and international providers, and booming competition for international talent, tertiary education institutions and national governments are mobilizing to both leverage and steer internationalization. National tertiary education internationalization strategies and plans represent the most tangible and direct attempts by governments to play an active and decisive role in relation internationalization, but there are substantive differences in their approaches, rationales and priorities.

A worldwide census of explicit national policies carried out by Crăciun (2018) reveals that only 11% of countries have an official strategy for internationalization, most having been adopted in the last decade. Such strategies have been developed predominantly by developed countries—3 in 4 come from members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). European countries have taken the lead in promoting strategic thinking about internationalization at the national level—2 in 3 come from this world region, and programs such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 have led to further regional harmonization of higher education systems (British Council 2017).

This is not to say that other countries have not taken measures to promote internationalization. In fact, to support internationalization processes, many countries have taken both direct measures (e.g. re-evaluating their visa policies to give preferential treatment to international students and scholars, establishing bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreements through memoranda of understanding, and promoting transnational education through free-trade deals) and indirect measures (e.g. supporting internationalization in political discourses and giving universities autonomy to pursue internationalization activities).

The main focus in internationalization strategies and plans is still at the institutional level. Indeed, institutions operate in many cases without a national plan in place. Where national plans do exist, institutions may operate in conflict or in alignment with the national agenda. A national policy can serve as a catalyst or a drag on internationalization processes, but is mostly seen as a highly positive element for the advancement of internationalization. They align internationalization with other key national priorities, such as economic growth and national security. They incentivize institutions and individuals to assist in meeting national strategic goals through internationalization. In short, national internationalization strategies and plans offer not only a good overview of the manifestations of internationalization, but can also shape key action, provided they are reasonably well-resourced and monitored.

However, it would be a misconception to assume that national plans and policies have common rationales and approaches to internationalization. Differences exist between and among high-income, low-income, and middle-income countries with respect to their policies and practices, despite the obvious temptation to focus on flagship dimensions of internationalization, such as mobility, rankings or publishing

performance. Also, there are differences in explicit and implicit policies and practices, with some countries having well- documented plans, and others having no plans but well-defined activities. More research could perhaps go into what drives similar approaches in terms of higher education internationalization based on national historical and social context, as well as cultural heritage.

Three papers analys e national policies for internationalization. Ligia Deca compares the national policies of Romania and Portugal, as two countries that went through transition from dictatorships to democracy in a similar regional context. Robert Santa and Cezar Mihai Haj look at demographic policies in the internationalization of Romanian higher education. And Pusa Nastase analyses drivers for internationalization in Georgian higher education.

5 European Universities Initiative

In 2018, a major European Union initiative was the call for proposals and consequent approval of pilot networks for the European Universities Initiative (EUI). This scheme followed French president Macron's political impetus to create a new type of university collaboration scheme that will drive educational innovation and quest for excellence across Europe. Although it is still too early to come to conclusions on this initiative, for which the second call just opened, Andrew Gunn in his contribution places the initiative in a context of alliance formation and a means for furthering the internationalization of higher education. The challenges with the EUI are several, in particular: is it possible to get universities comprehensively work together, and will the networks be more political and geographic compromises or realistic institutional alliances? One has to see if this attempt will be more successful than previous initiatives to create truly European universities (Orr et al. 2019).

6 Increased Erasmus+ Support

Both the European Commission and European Parliament are supportive of increasing the funding for and mobility of students and teachers in the flagship Erasmus+ program. In itself, this is positive, but it requires more analysis of the conditions under which this program can be successful and what are its measurable benefits. Several papers address these questions. Adriana Perez and Jerome Reichmann look at the current context and status of European career services, trying to identify how the formation of international career service consortia could contribute to improving the benefits of internationalization. Daniela Crăciun, Kata Orosz and Viorel Proteasa try to answer the question: does international student mobility have a positive impact on graduate employability? Cristina Ramona Fit takes a different approach, giving an example of how Romanian universities promote their educational offers and whether these marketing efforts are in line with their wider institutional strategies. And Peter

Holicza provides an insight in a complementary scheme, CEEPUS, focused on collaboration and exchange in Central and Eastern Europe, with a focus on how this existing program could and should evolve in the future.

7   Forced Internationalization

As Ergin and de Wit state in their paper, much attention has been given over the past recent years to the challenges of developed countries in receiving refugees from developing countries, as in the Syrian case where the refugees who have been able to enter countries like Germany were closely followed by media reports. But the large majority of refugees are not only coming from the developing world, but are also hosted in the developing world. The unceasing war in Syria and long stay of the "unexpected" Syrian guests "forced" the Turkish government to make academic and financial reforms to enhance their access to Turkish higher education, which is introduced as 'forced internationalization of higher education' in the literature (Ergin et al. 2019). Attention to access, support and retention of refugees within the European Union countries is important, but as they state, based on the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey, attention to these issues in the developing world is even more important.

In summary, internationalization in higher education is an evolving process and changes in response to changes in the local, national, regional and global environment. The Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and Climate Change initiatives by the European Union will most likely be the inspiration for a rethinking of internationalization from a competitive market orientation to a social enterprise. At the start of the 2020 decade, it is important to look at the challenges and opportunities for the future and how the Bologna Process can influence that process. And this reflection will surely add to a wider conversation that keeps coming back in the context of the European Higher Education Area—what can European cooperation add to forward- looking, high quality, equitable higher education systems at national level?

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The European Universities Initiative: A Study of Alliance Formation in Higher Education

Andrew Gunn

1 Collaboration in Higher Education

Alliances are a longstanding feature of the higher education landscape. *The Universities Bureau of the British Empire* represents an early example which was founded in 1913 and would later become the *Association of Commonwealth Universities* that is still in operation today (Pietsch 2013). Another important milestone in the development of global alliances includes the *International Association of Universities*, which was first proposed in 1948 by the government of the Netherlands and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and launched in 1950. Moodie (2010) notes that the "number of international associations of universities has exploded since the 1970s. In the 35 years from 1972 to 2007 at least 38 international associations of universities were established, more than one each year. Neither is the pace slackening."

Alliances take many forms and operate at different territorial scales. To help classify the myriad of different manifestations of cooperation in higher education, Beerkens (2002) uses concepts from organisational and management studies to develop a multidimensional typology of international inter-organisational cooperation. The critical dimensions within the typology are size, scope, nature of integration and intensity. Tadaki and Tremewan (2013) observe how the internationalisation strategies of universities increasingly feature activities of engagements with and through international consortia which they see as a "new set of actors, logics and relations between and beyond institutions of higher education and research" (p. 367). We can position the EUI initiative as a new regional scheme within this context of heightened collaboration.

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2   The Idea of a European University

The idea of a supranational university is as old as the European political project.[1] A European university was first mooted in 1948 by German economist Alfred Müller-Armack who believed European integration would require 'a community of the intelligence' in order to be completed. Here, a supranational university would help to fulfil this requirement while also acting as a 'role model' institution (Lehmann 2019, p. 77). The idea was later taken forward by German academic and diplomat Walter Hallstein in 1955, when he was the representative of Germany at a meeting of the original six members of the European Coal and Steel Community (SCSC) in Sicily (Küsters 1998). The German[2] delegation produced a paper for the summit on European integration which set out how their government "hopes to show tangible testimony to young people of the desire for European Union through the foundation of a European University to be created by the six SCSC states" (cited in Corbett 2005 p. 26). In presenting the paper, Hallstein argued that the view in Bonn was that integration ought not to be solely about the economic domain but should also involve some sort of cultural integration (Corbett 2005 p. 26). This point identifies what would be an enduring fault line running through the European political project: is it about economics and trade or culture and social solidarity, or both? And where does higher education fit into both of these differing rationales?

Müller-Armack and Hallstein continued to pursue what was now the German position, where a European University would be an 'intellectual homeland' that contributed to cultural integration and nurtured a European elite (Corbett 2005, p.38). Although not opposed to the idea, European leaders, faced with the pressing problems of immediate post-war Europe, didn't see a new university as being their number one priority. Yet, the issue was significant enough to remain on the agenda and was taken up by France. However, the French position differed from the German one, and the disagreement over the supranational university would be an early example of how the Franco-German relationship would be prominent in determining the dynamics of integration (Cole 2010; Webber 2005; Hendriks and Morgan 2001). The French saw the value of a European university solely in the then-emerging area of nuclear energy research and training, so placed the proposed university within the Euratom[3] Treaty, not the European Economic Community (EEC) Treaty which concerned economic and political union, thus blocking the German vision for a supranational university (Corbett 2012, p. 45).

This juncture had consequences for the European University, as Orr et al. (2019) explain, whereby it became untethered from the broader work of the community "and was instead linked primarily to innovation and development rather than European

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[1]This history of this debate from the late 1940s onwards has been well documented by Palayret (1996), Corbett (2005) and Lehmann (2019).

[2]Federal Republic of Germany, Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

[3]The European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) Treaty was signed the same time as the European Economic Community Treaty, 25th March 1957, but is a distinct document concerned with nuclear power.

cultural integration. This tension, between a Europe united through culture and a Europe united in development, has followed the university project ever since."

The university included in the Euratom Treaty was never realised (Corbett 2012, p. 35). Discussions continued throughout the 1950s but remained gridlocked owing to a lack of consensus over its legal and financial status, if it would be a nation state competency, where it should be built/based and whether it should be a comprehensive or specialist institution. Another critical dimension which hampered the creation of a supranational university was the strong opposition from existing universities. Lehmann (2019) argues that "university representatives were decisive informal actors, influencing the formal negotiations", and that a European University was "first and foremost rejected due to academic resistance which especially heads of universities from western continental European countries organised in the late 1950s" (p. 76).

Despite the opposition, a worked out scheme was presented in 1960 where the new European University would be a two-year postgraduate residential institution for 500 students, teaching subjects of relevance to European integration. This would be accompanied by national research institutes which could access European funding and a structure for exchanges amongst existing institutions. But the lack of agreement endured, and this proposal was killed off at the Bonn summit of 1961 (Corbett 2005 p. 45). The idea remained sidelined for most of the decade until the Italians—who had now assumed responsibility for the university, thus distancing it from Franco-German wrangling—proposed a new institution be created in Italy. This came to fruition in 1969 when European leaders agreed to fund the *European University Institute,* a postgraduate and post-doctoral institute for teaching and research in the social sciences, in Florence, which opened in 1972 (Palayret 1996). However, this small, specialist institute wasn't the supranational university featuring the full range of subjects many had envisaged.

The debate remained dormant until 2005 when Commission President José Manuel Barroso proposed a *European Institute of Technology* which would undertake "high level education, research and innovation activities, both in some strategic thematic areas and in the field of science and innovation management" (Barroso 2006). The new institute, proposed to have a large campus in Strasbourg, was never created as it lacked sufficient backing from member states, existing universities and the businesses it was supposed to benefit (Meller 2006; Meller et al. 2006). The supranational university, therefore, remained the unfinished business of the European political project. The issue would go quiet until the election of pro-European Emmanuel Macron as French President in May 2017 who sought a complete overhaul of the European Union including tax convergence, reformed institutions, a joint EU budget and shared defence. Within this sweeping set of reforms, the sleeping idea of a European University would be reawakened.

3   From Idea to Implementation

On the 26th September 2017, President Macron delivered a speech at the Sorbonne University, Paris, entitled *New Initiative for Europe.* The address sets out Macron's vision for a 'fair, protective and ambitious Europe' which stands in solidarity, united by the bonds that have always bound the European Union together: 'culture and knowledge'. The President argued that "fragmentation is only superficial' and that diversity is, in fact, our 'greatest opportunity''. Macron used the example of the many languages of Europe which should be made an asset rather than being deplored, arguing that Europe should be a place where all students can speak at least two European languages by 2024. Moreover, instead of lamenting the divisions between nations, exchanges between them should be increased so by 2024 half of students "should have spent at least six months in another European country by the time they are 25, whether they are university students or learning a trade". To realise this vision, the President proposed the creation of new structures in the European higher education landscape:

> I believe we should create European Universities—a network of universities across Europe with programs that have all their students study abroad and take classes in at least two languages. These European Universities will also be drivers of educational innovation and the quest for excellence. We should set for ourselves the goal of creating at least 20 of them by 2024. However, we must begin setting up the first of these universities as early as the next academic year, with real European semesters and real European diplomas (Macron 2017).

Macron's Sorbonne speech was an influential driver of change, shaping the character of European higher education policy making in the coming months. This vision was embraced by the European Commission, who produced the report *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture* presented to EU Leaders at their meeting in Gothenburg on the 17th November 2017. The report placed at the heart of this agenda a renewed emphasis on the creation of a European Education Area "based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and exchange of best practices, mobility and growth", which should be in place by 2025 and would foster "a sense of a European identity and culture". Specifically, the report recommended "creating world-class European universities that can work seamlessly together across borders" (EU Commission 2017a).

The Commission also produced an accompanying document entitled *Network of European Universities* which considered actions for the next two years. This advocated a range of new initiatives aligned to Macron's speech, including establishing a School of European and Transnational Governance based on a network with partner institutions, development of further strategic partnerships between higher education institutions, creating 200 more Erasmus Mundus master's programmes, and increasing the visibility of the U-Multirank tool to promote the EU as an attractive study location. The report also set out potential initiatives with a 2025 perspective which included the creation of a European universities network "to reinforce and structure cooperation among higher education institutions". This would involve, first, the

establishment of networks of universities and joint delivery of programmes with the use of distance learning tools, second new joint ventures and third the creation of institutions (EU Commission 2017b).

In December 2017, the European Council published the conclusions of the Gothenburg summit. These included a call for Member States, the Council and the Commission, in line with their respective competences, to take work forward with a view to:

> strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities', consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities (EU Council 2017).

This position was then reaffirmed by the Education Committee of the Council who met on the 22nd May 2018. The Committee supported the emergence of 'European Universities', which they saw could play a flagship role in the creation of a European Education Area, as the main theme of the meeting (EU Council 2018).

With the political ground work within EU institutions complete, steps could now be taken to realise the new network. As a first step, to help conceptualise the new initiative, the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and the Directorate-General Joint Research Centre commissioned research to map out existing transnational collaborative partnerships, which captured forms of formal cooperation between higher education institutions from at least two European countries in the areas of education, research and/or innovation. The findings supported the argument that the new network would add value when compared to what currently exists. In particular, half of all respondents believed existing funding instruments—which are complex and require applications to multiple calls every year—are not suitable for deepening and extending transnational cooperation between higher education institutions. Furthermore, the study identified a number of administrative and legal issues—such as lack of common accreditation standards and differences in academic calendars – which prohibit more intense and sustainable cooperation. Here, we can note how the study identified specific issues that could be addressed with a European Statute to help achieve common EU-wide standards (Karvounaraki et al. 2018).

The next step involved refining and defining the new scheme which required developing selection criteria, following the procedures stipulated in the Erasmus+ Regulation, for a pilot phase and setting objectives. The pilot round was intended to test different innovative and structural models, while supporting the "creation of alliances, ideally composed of 5 to 8 partners". Two main objectives for the EUI were agreed:

1. Promoting common European values as enshrined in article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and a strengthened European identity by bringing together a new generation of Europeans, who are able to cooperate and work within different European and global cultures, in different languages, and across borders, sectors and academic disciplines.

2. Reach a substantial leap in quality, performance, attractiveness and international competitiveness of European higher education institutions and contributing to the European knowledge economy, employment, culture and welfare by making best use of innovative pedagogies and striving to make the knowledge triangle a reality. 'European Universities' will be key drivers to boost the quality of higher education and where possible to strengthen its link to the research and innovation landscape in Europe and its outreach towards the society and economy (EU Commission 2018, p. 125).

Three 'key elements' were developed to indicate what was expected from successful alliances by 2025. This included, first, a shared, integrated, long-term joint strategy for education with links to research and innovation and society at large; second, a European higher education inter-university 'campus', where all students and staff can move seamlessly (physically or virtually) between any of the partner institutions who have embedded mobility at all levels and deliver new joint and flexible curricula; third, European knowledge-creating teams of students, academics, and other parties of relevance to the alliances, to address societal and other challenges in a multi-disciplinary approach.

The call for the first round of pilot funding closed at the end of February 2019, and 54 applications for new alliances were received. The applications were initially reviewed by three experts and then considered by an evaluative committee who ranked the proposals. Those ranked the highest were selected, based on the funds available. The proposals were assessed against five criteria: relevance of the proposal, geographical balance, quality of the proposal and implementation, quality of the alliance cooperation arrangements, and sustainability and dissemination. From this process, 17 European Universities, involving 114 higher education institutions from 24 Member States (see Table 1), were selected and announced in June 2019 (EU Commission 2019). Each alliance of university networks will receive up to €5m over three years.

The second call opened in November 2019, similar to the first, the main difference being the initiative is now backed by more money, meaning there may be around 24 new alliances funded, rather than 17 in the first round. The results of the second round are expected in July 2020.

It is evident that the number of alliances after the second round will be far greater than the goal of 'at least 20' in Macron's Sorbonne speech. We can also see how this has produced a unique structure of alliances which can be described as a 'network of networks'—a series of self-contained, unique, alliances developed using a bottom-up approach, which are united through their membership of a top-down strategic scheme with common overarching aims and objectives. This is a novel organisational form for a university alliance, as it differs from established multilateral structures.

Table 1 EUI alliances funded in the first pilot by university members and nation state

UNA Europa - 1EUROPE	
Alma Mater Studiorum - Universita di Bologna	Italy
Freie Universitaet Berlin	Germany
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	Belguim
The University of Edinburgh	United Kingdom
Universidad Complutense de Madrid	Spain
Universite Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne	France
Uniwersytet Jagiellonski	Poland
The 4eu+ Alliance	
Kobenhavns Universitet	Denmark
Ruprecht-Karls-Universitaet Heidelberg	Germany
Sorbonne Universite	France
Universita degli Studi di Milano	Italy
Univerzita Karlova	Czech Republic
Uniwersytet Warszawski	Poland
CHARM European University (Challenge-Driven, Accessible, Research-Based, Mobile)—CHARMEU	
Eotvos Lorand Tudomanyegyetem	Hungary
Trinity College Dublin	Ireland
Universitat de Barcelona	Spain
Universite de Montpellier	France
Universiteit Utrecht	The Netherlands
CIVICA - The European University In Social Sciences	
European University Institute	Italy
Handelshogskolan I Stockholm	Sweden
Hertie School of Governance Mmeinnutzige Gmbh	Germany
Institut d' Études Politiques de Paris	France
Kozep-Europai Egyetem	Hungary
Scoala Nationala de Studii Politice Si Administrative	Romania
Universita Commerciale Luigi Bocconi	Italy
CIVIS - A European Civic University Alliance	
Eberhard Karls Universitaet Tuebingen	Germany
Ethniko Kai Kapodistriako Panepistimio Athinon	Greece
Stockholms Universitet	Sweden
Universidad Autonoma de Madrid	Spain
Universita degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza	Italy
Universitatea din Bucuresti	Romania
Universite d' Aix Marseille	France
Universite Libre de Bruxelles	Belguim
CONEXUS—European University For Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability	
Agricultural University of Athens	Greece
Fundacion Universidad Catolica de Valencia San Vicente Martir	Spain

Table 1 (continued)

Klaipedos Universitetas	Lithuania
Sveuciliste U Zadru	Croatia
Universitatea Tehnica de Constructii Bucuresti	Romania
Universite de La Rochelle	France
ECIU University—ECIUn	
Aalborg Universitet	Denmark
Dublin City University	Ireland
Kauno Technologijos Universitetas	Lithuania
Linkopings Universitet	Sweden
Tampereen Korkeakoulusaatio Sr	Finland
Technische Universitat Hamburg	Germany
Universidade de Aveiro	Portugal
Universita degli Studi di Trento	Italy
Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona	Spain
Universiteit Twente	The Netherlands
Universitetet I Stavanger	Norway
European digital UniverCity—EDUC	
Masarykova Univerzita	Czech Republic
Pecsi Tudomanyegyetem	Hungary
Universita degli Studi di Cagliari	Italy
Universitaet Potsdam	Germany
Universite de Rennes I	France
Universite Paris Nanterre	France
European Partnership for an Innovative Campus Unifying Regions—EPICUR	
Albert-Ludwigs-Universitaet Freiburg	Germany
Aristotelio Panepistimio Thessalonikis	Greece
Karlsruher Institut Fuer Technologie	Germany
Universitaet Fuer Bodenkultur Wien	Austria
Universite de Haute Alsace Uha	France
Universite de Strasbourg	France
Universiteit Van Amsterdam	The Netherlands
Uniwersytet Im. Adama Mickiewicza W Poznaniu	Poland
Alliance for Common Fine Arts Curriculum—EU4ART	
Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma	Italy
Hochschule Für Bildende Künste Dresden	Germany
Latvijas Makslas Akademija	Latvia
Magyar Kepzomuveszeti Egyetem	Hungary
European University Alliance for Global Health—EUGLOH	
Communaute d'universites Et Etablissements Universite Paris-Saclay	France
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitaet Muenchen	Germany

Table 1 (continued)

Lunds Universitet	Sweden
Szegedi Tudomanyegyetem	Hungary
Universidade do Porto	Portugal
European Universities Transforming to an Open, Inclusive Academy for 2050—EUTOPIA	
Goeteborgs Universitet	Sweden
The University of Warwick	United Kingdom
Universidad Pompeu Fabra	Spain
Universite de Cergy-Pontoise	France
Univerza V Ljubljani	Slovenia
Vrije Universiteit Brussel	Belguim
Fostering Outreach within European Regions, Transnational Higher Education and Mobility —FORTHEM	
Johannes Gutenberg-Universitat Mainz	Germany
Jyvaskylan Yliopisto	Finland
Latvijas Universitate	Latvia
Universita degli Studi di Palermo	Italy
Universitat de Valencia	Spain
Universite dijon Bourgogne	France
Uniwersytet Opolski	Poland
The European University of the Seas—SEA-EU	
Christian-Albrechts-Universitaet Zu Kiel	Germany
Sveuciliste U Splitu	Croatia
Universidad de Cadiz	Spain
Universita Ta Malta	Malta
Universite de Bretagne Occidentale	France
Uniwersytet Gdanski	Poland
University Network for Innovation, Technology and Engineering—UNITE!	
Aalto Korkeakoulusaatio Sr	Finland
Institut Polytechnique de Grenoble	France
Kungliga Tekniska Hoegskolan	Sweden
Politecnico di Torino	Italy
Technische Universitat Darmstadt	Germany
Universidade de Lisboa	Portugal
Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya	Spain
Young Universities for the Future of Europe—YUFE	
Ita-Suomen Yliopisto	Finland
Universidad Carlos Iii de Madrid	Spain
Universita degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata	Italy
Universitaet Bremen	Germany
Universiteit Antwerpen	Belgium
Universiteit Maastricht	The Netherlands
University of Cyprus	Cyprus
University of Essex	United Kingdom

4 Accounting for Success

We can observe from the sequence of events set out above the EUI quickly gathered approval and moved to the implementation stage. This is an important milestone in European higher education policy history as in doing this the EUI overcame the political and practical obstacles of various schemes suggested over the preceding 70 years. For this reason, it is worth considering why the EUI succeeded where previous attempts at a supranational university failed. Here, a series of factors are presented to account for this breakthrough.

This first set of factors relate to the innovative 'network of networks' approach, which overcomes several obstructions all at once. First, it removes rivalry between nations as it locates the scheme and its beneficiaries in a wide range of locations without favouring one particular country. As Table 1 shows, the successful alliances include universities from a wide range of European states. Second, it eliminates disagreements over what form the institution should take as multiple forms of higher education can take place concurrently across different networks. One network, for example, can contain likeminded specialist institutions or those with a similar ranking, thus meaning the EUI overall creates multiple spaces for a wide range of universities. Third, it removes the expense of building a new physical campus and the difficulties of launching a new entity in a sector where history, esteem and status are paramount. Launching a new university isn't just expensive; it's also a high risk venture as institutions can take time to develop recognition and reputation. Fourth, it turns a threat into an opportunity. A new supranational university would be seen as a rival amongst not only existing universities but also nation states who have allocated considerable resources nurturing their own flagship universities. As Lehmann (2019) explains, one of the factors which inhibited the creation of a supranational university in earlier periods was the opposition from existing universities who saw it as a threat, particularly in the political battle for scarce resources. The EUI inverts this problem by creating a new source of funding which existing universities can bid for.

A second set of factors concern changes that have taken place in recent years within European universities—driven by the EU, nation states and universities themselves— that have made realising the EUI more feasible. First, the Bologna Process has resulted in greater harmonisation across the continent, along with an improved understanding of the processes and organisation learning needed to achieve this. This includes harmonisation at the most elementary level, such as common terminology across countries as well as a shared understanding of the meaning and purpose of quality assurance. Moreover, Toderas and Stăvaru (2018) find participation in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) results in 'spillover effects' across higher education systems, such as strengthening the culture of quality, increased use of deliberative policy-making instruments and the fostering of public accountability. The Bologna Process, therefore, produced structural changes which are conducive to the implementation of a new regional scheme such as the EUI. Second, as Maassen and Stensaker (2019) conclude, research-intensive universities have been changing their internal governance and organisational structures through "strengthening their

organisational governance hierarchies", which "is often associated with increased professionalisation and specialisation with respect to managerial and administrative tasks and responsibilities". This leads to "tighter vertical steering and the emergence of more integrated organisations" which can respond to the "continuous need for flexibility and adaptivity". Universities are therefore now more like corporate entities driven by a strategic planning process which facilitates the implementation of new strategic schemes within institutions. This relates to the third factor—institutional autonomy. As state oversight of higher education has moved away from traditional forms of 'command and control' towards new forms of public management (Paradeise et al. 2009; Dobbins and Knill 2014; Amaral et al. 2013; Krüger et al. 2018; De Coster et al. 2008), universities now have increased autonomy which frees them to invest, innovate and enter into alliance negotiations which they see as strategically beneficial. There is also a financial dimension to this argument as universities are expected to be more self-financing and be less dependent on direct state grants (De Dominicis et al. 2011; Stachowiak-Kudła & Kudła 2017; Altbach et al. 2019 p. 74). As universities increasingly seek new streams of income, schemes such as the EUI are met with enormous enthusiasm as they provide new sources of funding to bid for. A fourth factor can be seen in the ascendancy of the internationalisation agenda across Europe (de Wit et al. 2015; Seeber and Lepori 2014) which has produced more outward-looking institutions that are more likely to collaborate with foreign partners. Moreover, European collaboration is now more established, following the activities of bodies such as the European Research Council. Fifth, the pursuit of national excellence schemes (Froumin and Lisyutkin 2015) and flagship universities (Gornitzka and Maassen 2017) in many European countries has not only produced a group of better-resourced institutions, but has also embedded the ideas of differentiation and stratification within higher education systems. This has fostered an environment where universities are strategically well placed (in terms of resources and status) to enter into alliances with similar counterparts.

5 The Scope for Collaborative Advantage

In 2011-12 Gunn and Mintrom embarked on a project which originated from the observations that university alliances were increasingly 'strategic', that in a period of increasing competition among universities collaboration represents a curious phenomenon, and that the behaviour of these alliances in the early 2010s appeared to match behaviour of private business in the first half of the 1990s. To provide a theoretical background which deals with these themes, the research drew upon the *Art of Alliances,* the seminal work by Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1994) which considers how partnerships can produce 'Collaborative Advantage'—the mutual benefit, or symbiotic advantage, yielded from the synergy of creating new value together. Applying this theory to higher education, a study was undertaken of three alliances—the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, Universitas 21, and the Worldwide Universities Network—which identified five factors which shape the ability of global university

alliances to create collaborative advantage for their members. These are: (1) The alliance's strategic intent; (2) the comparative status of member universities; (3) the opportunities created for mutual learning among members; (4) the salience of the alliance inside member universities; and (5) the on-going relevance of the alliance and its capacity for change (Gunn and Mintrom 2013).

Guided by the first strand of Kanter's theory, which considers the attributes of effective alliances, we can see the EUI, by design, has the potential to generate collaborative advantage for its members. This is evident in how each alliance is not a short term deal but part of a long term process to deliver change over time, i.e., the alliances can be seen as 'living systems' which is indicative of longevity. The design of the EUI also places emphasis on each alliance addressing the challenges of achieving the expected transformational change by working together to jointly create new provision, i.e., they are about more than mere immediate exchange, which is a criterion for success. Moreover, each alliance has sufficient scope to shape their own internal infrastructures and linkages, i.e., they are not tightly controlled by a formal system. However, we should note each alliance will be different and some will be more effective than others.

The second strand of Kanter's theory considers how organisations seek out and select suitable partners. Here, the 'bottom-up approach' adopted allows groups of likeminded universities to freely collaborate and develop their own response to the call based on their local priorities. This means, at the level of each alliance, the universities involved are more likely to be compatible as they chose to work with each other. This matters as a degree of compatibility (similar specialism or strategic mission, comparable status or ranking, for example), including the less tangible aspects of compatibility (such as institutional values and cultures), is an important variable in determining harmony, longevity and success. At the aggregate level of the EUI, the creation of multiple alliances running concurrently creates separate spaces for collections of likeminded universities to cluster together. This diversity across all the alliances harnesses the power of very different types of institutions who are doing different things; this helps the overarching goals of the EUI to be achieved as its vision is being pursued in multiple ways.

We can also argue it could make the overall initiative more inclusive, as a broader range of institutions have a place where they can find compatible partners and contribute to the initiative. The extent to which this manifests itself in practice depends on the profile of institutions funded after the second round. Alternatively, the EUI may comprise of elite institutions, furthering the stratification of higher education in Europe. On this theme, Birk (2019), Director of the Erasmus+ National Agency for Higher Education at DAAD argues there may be a tension between inclusiveness and excellence,[4] i.e., is the EUI for the elite big research universities or for all universities

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[4]Birk finds Macron's Sorbonne speech supports both interpretations of the EUI, depending on if you read the German or the English translation. The sentence "Des universités européenes qui seront aussi des lieux d'innovation pédagogique, de recherche d'excellence" when translated into German became "Orte ... exzellenter Forschung" ("places of excellent research"), i.e., the EUI should be about excellence. The English translation was "drivers... of the quest for excellence", i.e., this is a quest which is open to being inclusive.

who put forward a convincing case for intensified cooperation? And if it includes both, can it work? Moreover, this is set against the need to ensure all regions of Europe are included. Although some will advocate the need to concentrate resources in places of established excellence, Claeys-Kulik (2019), policy coordinator at the European University Association (EUA), urges European and national funders to be aware of the Matthew Effect[5] and "find a balance between supporting such alliances and funding smaller scale collaboration projects that are in high demand under the current Erasmus+ programme". Claeys-Kulik (2019) warns "if too much funding was to be concentrated on a few alliances, this could hit resources in the higher education and research system as a whole" which would not help close the innovation gap within Europe.

The third dimension within *The Art of Alliances* addresses the different types of integration needed for a productive alliance. This draws our attention to what will perhaps be the greatest challenge for the new alliances as new approaches of integration will be needed to deliver transformational change. For example, a notable feature of the EUI is the 'embedded mobility' component, which the funding call describes as "a standard feature", where at "least 50% of the students within the alliance should benefit from such mobility, be it physical, virtual or blended." This target is highly ambitious and perhaps unprecedented. To involve over half of all students across a whole alliance is a much higher level of interaction than has hitherto been achieved through a bilateral or multilateral collaboration. In order to achieve this, many of the selected pilot alliances emphasise the use of virtual or blended forms of mobility as a means to meet the target. We can learn two things from this development. First it provides another example of how new forms of technology are reshaping higher education, in this instance, the mass mobility of students in the context of an alliance. This illustrates the use of digital technologies and virtual forms of integration in the modern academy. 'Virtual' mobility is also used by some to address concerns about the high volume of travel, and therefore large carbon footprint, produced by universities (Rumbley 2020). Second, it illustrates the growing relevance of 'Internationalisation at Home' (IaH), a concept that first appeared twenty years ago, but has become more prominent in recent years (Robson et al. 2018). We can see how the EUI has the potential to be a driver of IaH through not just curriculum reform and the promotion of foreign language learning, but through bringing international experiences to the home campus through virtual means.

Another factor is the time needed to achieve the level of integration required to deliver results. A criticism that has been levelled at the EUI, which may limit the benefits derived from alliance membership, is that it is perhaps too ambitious for the prescribed timeframe. For example, a major challenge comes from the need to ensure the compatibility of curriculum and qualifications required for the credit and joint degrees to be awarded for time spent at other institutions within the alliance. This is a move that requires standardisation well beyond what has been achieved through the Bologna Process since 1999 and evokes many of the same difficulties (Sin et al.

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[5]The Matthew Effect of accumulated advantage can be summarised by the adage "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer". The concept is applicable to matters of fame or status.

2016; Yergebekov and Temirbekova 2012; Cippitani and Gatt 2009; Reichert 2010).
This process may take time to implement and has triggered comments such as those
from Sriram Pavan, President of the *Erasmus Mundus Association,* who spoke at the
2019 European Association for International Education conference in Helsinki:

> With institutions having to overcome numerous legal and administration hurdles in each
> country, as well as quality assurance and credit recognition issues, three years would not
> be enough time to integrate processes ... Instead, institutions should be given at least seven
> years to forge meaningful links with each other (Pavan quoted in Grove 2019).

An issue related to the timeframes for establishing an alliance is whether the
alliances funded as part of the EUI are completely new or established entities. Mem-
bers of the Cesaer Network—the European association of leading specialised and
comprehensive universities of science and technology—lobbied the European Com-
mission, arguing that the second round of pilots should "put funding towards tried
and tested institutional networks" and that "the results of the first call indicate that
the European Commission is funding innovative approaches to higher education
cooperation rather than already established and functioning models. In our view, the
networks do not necessarily need to be new, but must demonstrate excellence, effec-
tiveness and efficiency" (Cesaer 2019). Another argument that established networks
may be more effective comes from Professor Eugenijus Valatka, Rector of Kaunas
University of Technology, representing the ECIUn alliance which was successful in
the first pilot round, who notes, concurring with the point above, that the EUI is a
huge transformation, but then argues the ECUI network is capable of tackling these
challenges, as the network isn't new but has a twenty-year history. Professor Valatka,
speaking at an event held by the European Commission on the EUI on the 7th of
November 2019 in Brussels, identifies a problem arising from the EUI pilots being
expected to demonstrate a transformational ten-year vision within a three-year test
period.

6   Conclusion

This chapter has explained how the EUI represents a unique approach to alliance
formation in higher education described here as a 'network of networks'. In adopting
this model, the EUI has overcome the difficulties that hampered various proposals to
create a supranational university over the preceding 70 years. Moreover, the design of
the EUI is congruent with the current climate in European higher education, making
it appropriate for its time and place. The analysis presented here has considered
how the new alliances have the potential to deliver collaborative advantage for their
members. However, the EUI expects transformational change within a tight time
frame. Moreover, this chapter only deals with the introduction of the EUI and the
pilot phase, meaning the extent to which the EUI delivers its objectives remains to
be seen.

The launch of the EUI marks a new chapter in the evolving position of higher education in the European political project. If we accept the argument that the idea of a supranational university can be realised without the creation of a new physical campus, then we can now say the European University is much nearer a reality. The strong emphasis President Macron placed on European languages, identity and solidarity when inaugurating the initiative, which has been carried through into its design, illustrates how the EUI is primarily about European cultural integration. The French position on the European University has therefore aligned with the German position of 70 years earlier, where the EUI is placed to realise the original goals of the supranational university, albeit in a different form.

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How Do Romanian Universities Promote Their Educational Offer and What Mechanisms Are Used to Attract International Students?

Cristina Ramona Fiţ

1 Research Question and Purpose of the Research

1.1 Research Question and Aim of the Study

Strategies at the European level together with the Bologna Process, underline the importance of internationalization. Mobility is of utmost importance on the European agenda and was assumed by the Bologna member countries through the past Ministerial Communiques, by adopting a dedicated strategy for mobility ("Mobility for better learning", Bucharest 2012), by supporting mobility through digital tools (Paris, 2018) or by prioritizing transnational cooperation (Paris, 2018). Romania is still far from reaching the 20% mobility target by 2020, but Romanian universities are more and more interested in attracting international degree-seeking students. The reason for this is the decrease in the number of Romanian students over the past years and the aim to increase internationalization (which is mostly perceived as mobility) in the context of a competitive education market. This paper aims to identify how Romanian universities promote their educational offer, if there is a link between their internationalization of higher education strategies and their specific actions. The purpose is to contribute to the improvement of internationalization of Romanian higher education policies by understanding universities' perceptions regarding strategies, actions and mechanisms they use in order to develop mobility and contribute to a better quality of higher education. The paper will present the link between the internationalization strategies of the Romanian universities and the status quo of promoting their educational offer. The article also includes a short analysis on how universities promote their study offer nationally and internationally, taking three Romanian universities as case studies and looking into their institutional internationalization

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strategies, the strategic plans for institutional development and the instruments used for promoting their educational offer.

The main research questions considered are:

- Is there any correlation between the institutional internationalization strategy, the strategic plan for institutional development and the main activities actually performed to promote their educational offer?
- How do universities promote their educational offer and what mechanism do they use to attract international students?
- Which mechanisms are most efficient in attracting international students?

1.2   Methodology

The methodology of the article has a mix of qualitative and quantitative data analysis of documents and data collected through a perception questionnaire. As Byrman (Bryman 1988) stated, each research needs to have a specific research method in order to better answer to the research questions of the study. Therefore, there will be a document analysis of the internationalization strategies and the strategic plans for institutional development, understanding the methods and instruments used for promoting their educational offer.

The universities that were asked to complete the questionnaire will remain anonymous. These institutions were chosen based on the number of students (small or big), their geographical location, in order to cover all areas from Romania, type of institution in terms of public and private, and the institution's mission, comprehensive or technical.

In the end, the article will provide several recommendations on ways to improve the level of promoting the educational offer.

One of the research limitations is the low number of universities that contributed to the questionnaire. However, Romanian universities are rather similar, which is why I considered the institutions that contributed to this study representative at national level.

1.3   Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Jane Knight defined internationalization as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight 2008). Internationalization of higher education, according to Knight, is a process that has two important components—"internationalization at home" and "internationalization abroad". De Wit and others (2015) have updated the first definition by Knight on the internationalization of higher education, describing internationalization as being" the intentional process of inte-

grating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (De Wit et al. 2015).

OECD defines internationalization in general terms, according to Pricopie et al., as "the totality of processes whose combined effect, planned or not, is to ensure the international dimension of higher education experience in universities and similar educational institutions" (Pricopie et al. 2009).

Debates from the last several years in the academic communities expanded and lead to a redefining and rethinking of internationalization of higher education. If, at first, the main rationale of internationalization of higher education was perceived as increasing the "international dimension in teaching and research or fostering a climate of greater appreciation for and understanding of other cultures, languages and different ways of approaching and analyzing issues" (Egron-Polak and Hudson 2012), now, according to the 5th Global Survey Report, developed by IAU (Marinoni 2019), the benefits of internationalization are seen as predominantly improving "international cooperation and capacity building" and the "quality of teaching and learning", as the main important benefit. The relevance of internationalization is becoming more and more important, depending on the size of the institution. As stated in the Global Survey Report (Egron-Polak and Hudson 2012), the way institutions approach international dimensions depends very much on the size of the HEI: institutions of small size have the tendency to concentrate more on the mobility dimension (having a strong economic motivation related to the extra funds brought by foreign fee- paying students), while HEIs with a comprehensive character have the tendency to concentrate more on research partnerships.

According to the 5th IAU Global Survey Report, HEIs worldwide increased their interest in internationalization. "However, this increase has happened mainly in HEIs where the level was already high, whereas it has not happened at HEIs where the level was low. This might lead to a growing inequality between HEIs" (Marinoni 2019).

As an EHEA member, Romania has made a series of commitments in the field of education which imply both the internationalization of education and the increase of quality.

During the London Ministerial Conference in 2007, the first strategy that included objectives regarding the development of the internationalization of higher education, "European Higher Education in a Global Setting", was adopted. During the 2012 Bucharest meeting (EHEA 2012), three priorities for 2012–2015 were established: offering quality higher education for everyone, increasing the employability of graduates and enhancing mobility as a way for better learning. At this meeting, internationalization of higher education was recognized as a priority, and the 2020 Strategy for Mobility in EHEA was adopted. Strategies at the European level underline the importance of mobility, such as the newly launched Erasmus+ Program, that has a substantial increase in funding, which translates in better support for universities.

Since mobility has become a priority, especially in the context of a decrease in the number of students in Europe where "populations in many countries are getting older,

and, in the process, the key 15-to-24-year-old college-aged cohorts are shrinking" (Monitor ICEF 2017) and in the context of a worldwide competition for students (Redden 2019), promoting higher education offers should be among the key topics that dominate the internationalization of higher education agenda in Romania.

2 Romania—Context and Status Quo

2.1 Details About the Internationalization of Higher Education in Romania

The student population in Romania has been decreasing drastically in the last ten years. If in 2009/2010 the total number of students at public universities was around 624,000, in ten years the number of students dropped by 26%, reaching 463,000 students in the 2018/2019 academic year. There are many reasons for this, namely population decrease and the decrease in the number of Baccalaureate graduates. Also, there is a major phenomenon of "loss", more specifically "following a generation of children enrolled in the 1st grade in 2003/2004, only 27% of them reached higher education, and only 20% finalized the 1st year of higher education." (UEFISCDI P. P., Access in higher education policy brief 2018). Some of the reasons for this loss are repetition, dropout, and migration (Table 1).

In terms of the evolution of students at public universities (Bachelor, Master, PhD), please see below a set of data from CNFIS and ANS:

Table 1 Evolution of Student Population in the last ten years for public HEIs

	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019
Total no of students	624,654	616,506	576,290	520,853	479,876	461,582	448,939	426,567	473,304	463,135

Source (2009–2015) CNFIS, available data according to public HEIs reports—data ref January
Source (2016–2018) ANS

Since the paper analyzes the correlation between the institutional internationalization strategies and the main activities actually performed to attract international students, it is relevant to write a short introduction on the number of international students, countries of origin and evolution in the last ten years. Romania had its record on international students in the early '80s, when 10% of students were international. As a result of political changes, the number of international students began to decrease (Deca and Fit 2015). In the last years (UEFISCDI P. P., Internationalization of Higher Education Policy Brief 2017), analyzing data from 2017, the most popular academic programs with foreign students are taught in French. Most of the international students study a bachelor's degree, and more than one third of the non-EU students in Romania study mostly Medicine, Dental Medicine and Pharmacy.

Most of these fields are accessed by students from Israel, Moldova, Tunisia, Syria, Morocco, Lebanon, Albania, Jordan and Iran.

In terms of the evolution of incoming international degree students, in the last ten years in Romania there was a 74% increase from 15,538 international students in 2009/2010 (together with Romanian ethnics) to 27,048 in 2018/2019. The last available clear data is from 2018. If in 2015/2016, the percentage of international degree students out of the total student population (considering the INS data, meaning public and private universities) was 5.5% (MENCS 2016, pp11), in 2018/2019 the percentage is 5.8%.

Top incoming countries for international degree students in 2018/2019 are Republic of Moldova, Israel, France, Italy, Germany, Tunisia, Morocco, Greece, Serbia and Hungary.

In terms of incoming credit mobility students, in 2009/2010 there were 1,359 incoming credit mobility students while in 2018/2019 the number of incoming students increased by 194% to 3,995 number of students.

As for outgoing credit mobility students, in 2009/2010 there were 4,768 students, and in 2018/2019 there are 7,812 students outgoing.

National Policies

Romania does not have any national internationalization strategy formally acknowledged by the Ministry of Education and with a dedicated budget. There is still the internationalization strategy developed during the IEMU[1] project in 2015 which does not have any action plan and it was not politically approved.

An in-depth analysis of public strategic documents of Romanian HEIs from 2013, made during the IEMU project (2014), reveals that 43 of 92 universities had vague or missing information on internationalization and mobility in their institutional strategies and operational plans. 30 universities mentioned internationalization of education, mobility and partnerships in general terms, but HEIs had no comprehensive strategy with concrete targets on this dimension. Thus, only 19 universities have set detailed objectives and concrete references regarding the internationalization of HE (at the date of the study 2014) (Deca et al. 2016).

As for internationalization governance, Romania has no institution dedicated to managing the internationalization of higher education. The Ministry of Education is the official institution that manages internationalization currently but with no dedicated national strategy or objectives. In terms of attracting international students, Romania has no marketing strategy, policies or projects.

Between 2016 and 2017, The National Council of Rectors (NCR) started in a more informal way to manage one of the aspects of internationalization, namely promotional activities. Unfortunately, by the end of 2019, there are no clear objectives, a strategic approach or joint requests to the Ministry of Education for support in the

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[1]Internationalization, equity and institutional management for a quality higher education' (IEMU) project, managed by UEFISCDI during 2013–2015, and financed by the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), seek to promote the development of a national strategy by September 2015.

development of internationalization. Managing promotional activities (participation at educational fairs and conferences) by NCR has so far proven to be successful, as developing a bottom-up process of involvement rather than a top-down is a positive aspect, but there are, unfortunately, some negative aspects of this approach as well. Not all universities are actively involved in the process of promotion or developing internationalization at national level, there is no common budget dedicated to internationalization activities, as well, every HEI has an individual and different budget for promotional activities.

Following the recommendations from the Strategic framework for internationalization of Higher Education in Romania, a document developed during the IEMU project, The Ministry of Education started the FDI[2] program to incentive HEIs that want to enhance their internationalization activities.

As for budgets for internationalization activities, HEIs started to have internal budgets dedicated mostly to promotional activities, more specifically for participation at educational fairs or conferences.

Nationally, as a result of the IEMU project, www.studyinromania.gov.ro was launched in 2015, a website dedicated to promoting the Romanian higher education and attracting international students. If in 2015 there were 12 HEIs which submitted their educational offer with 740 study programs, in 2019 there were 45 universities that submitted at least one study program, which is a total of 3,677 study programs in 15 languages, most of them taught in Romanian or in Romanian and another language, as well as in English, French, German or Hungarian.

Presently, according to the HG no. 326/2019, there are 235 programs in English, 95 programs in French, and 88 programs in German offered by Romanian universities.

An analysis of the main findings in 20 HEIs self-studies, SWOT analysis and summaries of the universities' goals for internationalization together with the observations of the expert teams reveals that around half of all universities which participated in the IEMU project reported that they had no marketing or communication strategies (UEFISCDI 2015). The conclusion is that most universities had very limited capacity and resources to design and implement such strategies. This gap can be perceived as an obstacle to attracting international students and scholars. The absence of a communication strategy was visible in HEIs websites, which often provided insufficient information, were lacking information in English, or there was no strategy to recruit international students.

After analyzing 19 of the HEIs that developed an internationalization strategy during the IEMU project, all these HEIs have the same strategy they developed in 2014/2015, but some of the institutions made a few updates. The same recent analysis revealed that 13 out of 19 universities mentioned in their internationalization strategy that they want to raise the visibility of their educational offer or to develop a marketing strategy. Out of these 19 HEIs involved in the IEMU, 17 have a website in English with information for international students, and 18 of them have a dedicated page for international students with at least basic information, such as admission process and educational offer. At the same time, a recent analysis of the 47 public HEIs in

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[2]FDI—The Institutional Development Fund, given by the Ministry of Education.

Romania, reveals that 37 HEIs have a website in English that is at least 80% translated and includes information for international students.

In the context of a more competitive higher education area in terms of attracting students, with a focus on international students, new trends have developed in the education sector, "what some have called global marketization". "The term "marketization" refers to the fact that as the HE market has become progressively more competitive, many HE institutions (HEI) have started to engage in strategic marketing and design marketing activities with the aim of increasing the number of applicants to their universities (Fernando Angulo-Ruiz 2016)". In terms of mechanisms to promote their educational offer or to communicate with enrolled and prospective students, 46 out of the 47 public HEIs analyzed have a Facebook page on which universities communicate, but not always in English or a foreign language. In terms of an Instagram account, 35 HEIs out of 47 have an account, but this does not necessarily mean that they have an active account (*active account means sharing at least once a week).

Following a questionnaire developed by the Ministry of Education in 2016 that was meant to help the Ministry better understand HEIs priorities on internationalization, out of 92 HEIs, 52 universities submitted their answers, 43 public HEIs, 9 private institutions and 5 having a military profile. The questionnaire findings revealed 5 top internationalization priorities, namely increasing partnerships with international universities, increasing students and academic staff mobility, promoting the university at an international level (including increasing the visibility of the educational offer or actions related to university branding and marketing), attracting international degree students, internationalization of the curricula and priorities regarding research (partnerships development or involvement in research networks).

In terms of attracting international students, the priority areas were the following: EU member states, EU (Non-member states), DCI Asia, South-Mediterranean (ENI SOUTH), Eastern Partnership (ENI EAST).

3 Case Study—Analysis of Romanian Higher Education Institutions

3.1 Details About the Case Study Universities

Types of Universities

To understand if there is a link between the internationalization strategies and institutional development plan of HEIs in Romania, I have chosen three case study universities (which will remain anonymous) for which I have analysed their strategies and looked for similarities between objectives and targets. To these three case study institutions, I have also applied a questionnaire. These HEIs were chosen based on the number of students (small or big), their geographical position (covering most areas in Romania), the type of institution (public or private), and the institution's mission,

comprehensive or technical. The main reason for considering all these indicators while choosing the case study universities was to best cover the types of higher education institutions that exist in Romania. To continue, in order to keep the anonymity of the HEIs that completed the questionnaire, they will be defined as:

- University 1 (U1), big public university, in the technical field, situated in North-East Romania
- University 2 (U2), big public university, with a comprehensive mission, situated in the West part of Romania and
- University 3 (U3), small private university, comprehensive mission, situated in South Romania.

All case study universities have developed their most recent internationalization of education strategy during 2014/2015 in the IEMU project. Most of the HEIs made an update of the previous strategies but in a few areas.

3.1.1 Analysis of the Internationalization Strategies

Even though there is a variety between the analyzed strategies, the goals for internationalization covered the following areas (first four areas are priority areas as stated by the universities):

Mobility—All case study universities want to enhance incoming and outgoing mobility of students, academic or administrative staff. Main goals refer to increasing numbers, but the private university mentioned increasing mobility opportunities for academic staff and highlighting the qualitative aspect of mobility, such as its impact on institutional development. It is worth mentioning that all case study universities set at least one measurable target referred to increasing mobility for students or academic staff.

Internationalization at Home—The most common goals focused on the internationalization of the curriculum, increasing the number of programs taught in foreign languages, especially English, increasing language skills (mostly English) of the academic, auxiliary and administrative staff; creating an international and friendly environment through extracurricular activities and attracting international speakers/teachers. One university also mentioned focus on developing double degree programs. Moreover, universities mentioned creating a buddy system dedicated to international students. None of the universities proposed to introduce international competences (such as intercultural competences, language skills for both teachers and students, "skills, values and behaviours that prepare young people to thrive in a more diverse and interconnected world" Savvy 2019) into the curriculum (Jones 2013; Leask 2009), showing that the concept of Internationalization at Home is not well understood.

Marketing and promotion—All institutions formulated goals related to marketing and promotion. The main common goal was to increase the international visibility of the university and to design a dedicated marketing strategy or have defined mar-

keting elements. The private university stated as an objective to become involved in new international associations or networks.

Partnerships—The private comprehensive university and the public technical institution mentioned goals to develop a network of relevant partners, increase the percentage of non-EU partners, increasing bilateral partnerships or focus more on developing strategic partnerships with international networks. Worth mentioning is the fact that institutions did not seem to pay attention to strategically choosing and prioritizing partnerships, resulting in a focus on the quantity rather than the quality of the partnerships. Focusing on quantity could, in many cases, lead to inactive partnerships.

Research—All HEIs expressed interest in this area, especially in developing more international research partnerships, creating a framework for academic scientific research in order to build a competitive academic and research environment, thus attracting new funding opportunities and international researchers. The private comprehensive university mentioned developing interdisciplinary research programs focusing on international relevant topics and finding a more strategic way of choosing partnerships.

Services for international students—The public technical institution and the private comprehensive one have objectives to improve services for international students, but none addressed services for international staff.

Internal organization matters—The public technical and the private comprehensive institutions proposed goals that address internal organizational issues, mainly focusing on digitization of various processes, such as recruiting, admission process and adapting to modern communication instruments.

Quality of educational provision—Two HEIs, both public universities, want to improve the level of internationalization of the curriculum, meaning to adapt to scientific and technological evolution and as well to have high-quality programs, this being a pre-condition to increase institutional branding and to attract international students.

3.1.2 Priority Areas for Internationalization

In the questionnaire developed for this study, one of the questions referred to priority areas for which institutions set targets and objectives and all institutions have chosen four main areas, out of nine, which are: mobility, internationalization at home, marketing and promotion, and partnerships. As data shows, from the internationalization strategy analysis, even though 3 out of 3 HEIs mentioned increasing their education offer visibility or developing a marketing strategy, in the end, the public technical institution has an actual marketing strategy in place.

3.1.3 Internationalization Strategy Versus HEIs Strategic Plan Analysis

While analyzing the internationalization strategies and the Institutional Development Strategy for each institution, the current study developed the following matrix. First, the study looks if there are any common dimensions between those two documents and then attempts to identify the same key words in the strategies searching for similarities (Fig. 1).

Please see below the matrix and results.

As a general conclusion, all institutions had comprehensive institutional documents. As J. Knight and de Wit say "comprehensive internationalization does not reflect widespread reality, however: for most institutions around the world, internationalization is still characterized by a collection of fragmented and unrelated activities" (Knigh and de Wit 2018). Looking at the internationalization dimensions that were defined in the internationalization strategies versus main areas defined in the institutional strategies, one can conclude that there is a certain link between those two strategic documents developed by the case study institutions, but it is not clear if there is a real connection between the strategic approach and the actions. Analyzing from the perspective of institutional strategy, for each dimension defined in the document, we could find a common denominator in the internationalization strategy. The main six areas that were common for all three universities are: Internationalization, Branding and International Communication, Partnership with Students and Student Services, University Management and Quality Assurance and the last dimension was Entrepreneurship and Bridge with Economic Stakeholders. It is important to keep in mind that "the presence of a strategy does not necessarily align with a strategic approach to internationalization if there are no activities to implement it and support structures in place, if the strategy is not monitored, and if progress is not evaluated" (Marinoni and de Wit 2019).

Internationalization—as it can be seen in the "Strategy Matrix", in the institutional strategy there were specific goals related to quality of education provision (e.g. goals for increasing the internationalization of the curriculum), goals related

Quality of educational provision	Research	Mobility	Services for international students	Internal organization matters	Internationalization at home	Marketing	Partnerships	
3	3	3			3	3	3	Internationalization
		3				3		Branding and international communication/mkt
			3					Partnership with students and Student servicees
	3							Research and Innovation
3				3	3			University management and Quality Assurance
							3	Entrepreneurship & bridge with economic stakeholders/market place

Fig. 1 Strategy Matrix—Links between Institutional internationalization strategies and HEIs Institutional Strategies

to research (e.g. developing strategic partnerships to increase research and innovation), goals for mobility (most of them related to increasing both incoming and outgoing mobility for all stakeholders), internationalization at home (e.g. more visiting/international professors or international conferences), marketing (goals related to increasing universities' visibility at international level, developing marketing strategies to attract more students and international students), partnerships (increasing strategic partnerships with priority countries or networks).

Branding and International Communication—Universities had objectives related to mobility (such as international marketing in order to promote the HEI internationally or boosting university's scientific performances and increasing the national and international visibility of the research results) and marketing (setting specific goals related to marketing indicators and promotion).

Partnership with Students and Student Services—Institutions developed objectives related to student services, both national and international. The public comprehensive university stated the aim to create a study package for international students (that should incentive prospective international students and include teaching materials, information materials, accommodation, scholarships). Similarly, the private comprehensive university mentioned "Increasing students motivations through the use of a diversified study scholarship system". The same private university mentioned objectives in terms of streamlining the communication process with students through secretariats or the virtual environment.

Research and Innovation—All institutions had objectives related to research, such as developing new international research partnerships, increasing collaboration with international researchers, or receiving national or international accreditation for the research centres created at institutional level.

University Management and Quality Assurance—All institutions had objectives related to the quality of education provision (aims to increase the quality of the programs and adapt to international standards), internal organization matters and matters regarding internationalization at home.

Entrepreneurship and Making Connections with Economic Stakeholders–This dimension was not present in the internationalization strategies, but it was important to state its presence since all universities had different objectives related to ways to better connect higher education with the labour market.

To conclude, there is a link between the internationalization strategies and the strategic plans for institutional development, since there are similarities between focus areas and objectives. On paper, everything seems to connect well, but the question remains if the institutional strategies and the implemented actions correlate. This will be discussed, later in the paper.

3.2 Questionnaire Analysis—Collecting HEIs Answers

To better understand if there are correlations between the institutional strategies, the internationalization strategies and the actions implemented by institutions, I have

developed a questionnaire. The role of the questionnaire was to see the main activities performed by HEIs to promote their educational offer. Moreover, the questionnaire reveals what mechanisms institutions use to promote their institution and attract international students and which of these are perceived as most efficient in completing their objective to attract international students. The following questionnaire designed especially for this study contains 25 questions. Some of the questions were related to a better understanding of the main internationalization priority dimensions, priority areas of interest in terms of attracting international students, information about marketing objectives, such as goals to attract international students, or budget allocated for promotion. Other questions were related to indicators that institutions collect for a better understanding of the evolution of their actions and efficiency, in terms of mechanisms HEIs use to attract students. There were also questions related to perception, namely if and how HEIs perceive the impact of internationalization on the quality of education.

The role of the questionnaire was to conclude my first research question (if there are any correlations between the institutional strategies and the main activities performed to promote their educational offer) and respond to my last two research questions.

First, I will analyze HEIs perception regarding the link between strategies and actions, as well as the impact of internationalization on the quality of higher education. I will then move forward to analyze what mechanisms institutions use to attract international degree-seeking students.

3.3 HEIs Perceptions: Link Between Strategy Versus Actions and the Impact Internationalization Has on the Quality of Higher Education

Two universities (U1 public, technical and U3 private, comprehensive) consider that there is a very high correlation (80–100%) between the internationalization strategy and the actions they implement. The public comprehensive institution (U2) stated that there is a relative correlation (around 20% to 40%) between the implemented activities and the objectives from the internationalization strategy.

In terms of HEIs perception regarding the impact of internationalization of higher education on the quality of education in the university, public universities consider that actions related to internationalization of higher education have a very high or high impact on the quality of education within the university. The private institution perceives actions related to internationalization with relative impact (20–40%) on the quality of education in the institution.

Despite the last response, the private university (U3) considers that the existence of an internationalized curricula has a very high impact on the quality of the program, while the public universities perceive that the existence of an internationalized curricula has a high impact (U1) and a relative impact on the quality of the program.

Public universities perceive the curricula of their study programs, internationalized in a relative way, while on the other hand, the private university finds the curricula of their study programs internationalized at a very high level.

3.4   Priority Countries to Attract International Students

According to a self-study report completed by all case study universities, in 2014, most of the HEIs did not have priority countries or regions. At that time, most institutions did not have the concept of "prioritizing countries". Most international degree-seeking students in 2014 were from the Eastern Partnership (ENI EAST)—from The Republic of Moldova, Europe (Member states) and South-Mediterranean (ENI SOUTH)—mostly Israel, Morocco. There were also some students from Turkey (Europe—non-member states).

In 2017/2018, according to CNFIS data, the top three regions for international degree-seeking students were the Eastern Partnership (ENI EAST)—most of the students were from Republic of Moldova, Romanian ethnics, South-Mediterranean (ENI SOUTH)—Israel, Tunisia, Morocco or Palestine and Western Balkans IPA—Serbia, Albania. We can see that the focus changed from European countries (member states) to South-Mediterranean (ENI SOUTH) or Western Balkans IPA.

In 2019, when universities were asked to complete their priority areas for attracting international degree students, there were three main areas that were chosen by the public universities as the main priority:

1. South-Mediterranean (ENI South), this includes the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia
2. DCI Asia, this includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam and
3. Region 9 with Iran, Iraq, Yemen

There is a shift between past priority areas and present ones, and a shift from a non-priority type of recruitment to a more aware and prioritized one. South-Mediterranean (ENI South) remained a priority, but two other new areas were added: DCI Asia and Region 9. HEIs are following international trends that highlight, according to the Institute of International Education, the top 10 countries (Institute of International Education 2019) of origin of the degree-seeking students in the USA are mostly from DCI Asia. An interesting difference between the universities was the fact that the private university mentioned one area as a priority for incoming degree-seeking students, DCI Central Asia, while the public universities mentioned four and five regions as priority areas, out of which three regions were stated the same for the public institutions.

In order to find if there is any correlation between objectives (in this case the stated priority countries) and the actions (in this case the participation at International Education Fairs), I have asked which are the international fairs universities took part in

over the past four years. The analysis indicates a weak correlation between objectives and implemented actions. If we compare the responses by labelling institutions as comprehensive and technical, we note that both comprehensive institutions participated in 14 educational fairs over the last four years, with two to four participations in targeted countries, according to their stated priorities. The technical university participated in 10 fairs, with only two in line with the objectives. All other participations in international fairs could be perceived as actions that were aimed at attracting international credit mobility students.

The small number of participations at targeted promotional events indicates a partial correlation (10–30%) with HEIs' strategic objectives. It is worth mentioning that starting with 2018, all universities increased their participation at international education fairs, including the EAIE Conference (both 2018 and 2019), which constitutes both a learning experience for the university representatives (in terms of internationalization) and a good opportunity for networking and establishing new partnerships.

3.5   Marketing Strategy and Promotion

The comprehensive institutions stated that they do not have a marketing strategy per se, but they have defined objectives and actions. The technical institution (U1) confirmed that they had developed a marketing strategy. In terms of promotion budget to attract international students, all institutions, no matter their category, said they have an allocated budget of more than 10,000 Euro per year. A hypothesis is that most of the allocated budget is used for international education fairs.

3.6   Indicators Considered by Institutions When Analyzing the Impact of the Internationalization Strategy (Promotion) to Attract International Students

The International Relations Department monitors the internationalization strategy and/or marketing plan, according to all institutions. The four indicators that all universities consider when monitoring the impact of their actions with regards to attracting international students are the number of international degree students, the number of incoming credit mobility students, the number of participations at International Education Fairs and the number of active partnerships with international universities. U1, a public technical university that has a marketing strategy and U3, a private comprehensive university, stated that they analyze the increase or decrease of active partnerships with international universities, due to International Education Fairs participation; on the other hand, the comprehensive HEIs look at the number of international students applying for degree mobility (U2, public university and

the U3, private institution). The technical public university (U1) and the comprehensive private institution (U3) consider both, eight indicators (not the same) out of 16 indicators presented in the questionnaire when analyzing the impact of the internationalization strategy.

3.7 Mechanisms HEIs Use to Promote Their Educational Offer

Promoting the educational offer is not easy considering the large number of competitors worldwide, the budget or the strategy that top countries/ institutions have.

All case study institutions stated that the used mechanisms to attract international degree-seeking students are their English website, HEI presentation video in various languages circulation, participation at International Education Fairs, promotion via the national portal www.studyinromania.gov.ro, promotion via other platforms and through word of mouth (through teachers, students or existing partnerships). The other platforms public HEIs use to promote their education offer are keystoneacademic.com, studyportals.com, masterstudies.com and educations.com.

Two universities (U1, public, technical HEI and U3, private, comprehensive HEI) stated they use specialized companies for promoting and recruiting international students. In terms of promotion via their Facebook page, both comprehensive institutions, U3 private HEI and U2 public HEI stated they use this mechanism. The private university stated that they are currently using e-mailing campaigns.

By comparison, the private university uses 10 mechanisms out of the 16 presented in the questionnaire to promote their educational offer, while the public institutions use 8 mechanisms. Promotion through Facebook paid campaigns, via Instagram, through Instagram paid campaigns, via HEI YouTube Channel or other conferences to attract international students are not mechanisms of interest to universities.

3.8 Perceived Most Important Mechanisms and Most Efficient in Attracting International Degree-Seeking Students

All universities perceive "highly important" and "important" mechanisms to attract international degree students the following: English website, word of mouth (through teachers, students or existing partnerships), participation at International Education Fairs, promotion via other platforms/portals, HEI presentation video in various languages, promotion via studyinRomania.gov.ro portal. The other mechanisms are considered relatively important, less important or not important at all. Those that are stated as less and not important at all are promotion via HEI YouTube Channel, conferences to promote and attract international students, promotion through Facebook paid campaigns, promotion via Instagram page and promotion through Instagram paid campaigns (Fig. 2).

What do you think is the importance of the mechanisms currently used by your institution to promote the educational offer and to attract foreign students for a full cycle (degree mobility)? U1, U2, U3

Mechanism	Value
Promotion though Instagram paid campaigns	5
Promotion via Instagram page	5
Promotion though Facebook paid campaigns	5
Conferences to promote and attract international...	6
Promotion via HEI YouTube Channel	6
Promotion via Facebook page	10
Partnersips with international HEIs	11
Specialized companies for promoting and recruit international students	11
E-mailing campaign	11
Promotion via studyinRomania.gov.ro portal	13
HEI presentation video in in languages of international circulation	13
Promotion via other platforms/portals to attract intl students:	14
Participation at International Education Fairs	14
Word of mouth – through teachers, students or existing partnerships	15
English website	15

12.What do you think is the importance of the mechanisms currently used by your institution to promote the educational offer and to attract foreign students for a full cycle (degree mobility)? U1, U2, U3

Fig. 2 Most important mechanism currently used to attract international degree-seeking students

When asked about the most efficient mechanisms to attract international degree students, universities stated as highly efficient or efficient the same five mechanisms mentioned above as most important, skipping the promotion via study in Romania.gov.ro portal, and instead adding partnerships with international HEIs.

3.9 Correlation of Targets for International Degree-Seeking Students From the Internationalization Strategy

From the case study universities only, the comprehensive ones stated an actual target for attracting international students. In their internationalization strategies, both comprehensive universities aim for an increased number of international students, with 25% for the public institution and 20% for the private one.

Data shows that the number of international degree students increased by 10% for the public institution and 17% for the private one, compared with 2015/2016, the year when universities started implementing their new internationalization strategies. All three universities increased the overall number of international students but did not meet the target.

4 Conclusions

When looking at the correlation between the institutional internationalization strategy, the strategic plan for institutional development and the main activities performed to promote their educational offer, the analysis shows that there is a relative correlation. As stated before, there are various correlations between objectives from both institutional documents (for each case study), but there is also a rift between objectives and actual actions.

Even though the institutions stated they want a marketing strategy to increase the university's visibility internationally, only one higher education institution has managed to develop such a document. Nevertheless, despite the lack of a marketing strategy, institutions had several actions that were meant to increase the HEI's visibility or to attract more international students.

In terms of prioritizing countries, the private university seems to be more focused, choosing one priority area for attracting international degree-seeking students. This type of prioritization could be more efficient in terms of managing the available internationalization budget and have proven results. But, as we could see from the analysis, if we look at the surveyed institutions, participation at international educational fairs is only partially correlated (around 10–30%) with stated priority countries. From this point of view, we can conclude that institutions fail to correlate their actions with the stated objectives. At the same time, when we look at the perception between internationalization strategies versus actions, most universities perceive there is a high correlation (80–100%) between the internationalization strategy and the actions they implement.

How do universities promote their educational offer and what mechanisms do they use to attract international students?
Even though the surveyed universities have internationalization strategies, most of them lack a marketing strategy (as a standalone document or as a part of the overall internationalization strategy) to attract international students or to promote their educational offer. This shows that institutions do not have clear marketing objectives, targets, priorities and well-defined mechanisms that could help build their brand. Institutions promote themselves through the English website, presentation video, participation at International Education Fairs, promotion via the national portal www.studyinromania.gov.ro, promotion via other platforms and word of mouth (through teachers, students or existing partnerships). Even though these mechanisms are used, universities do not monitor relevant indicators in order to see the actual efficiency or to have a better understanding of where and why they should use a specific mechanism. Institutions use these mechanisms to attract international students in an ad-hoc way and are not in line with trends in international education marketing or with the new generation, the so-called the Generation C (the connected generation).

Even though studies (Research Center Pew 2018) show that the new generation is mostly active on social media, the most frequently used social media platforms for the 18–24 age group being YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, institutions do not

yet perceive social media as an essential mechanism to advertise their educational offer or to attract international students.

Most of the surveyed universities use specialized companies for promoting activities and recruiting international students. Using professionalized help can be a good option when institutions do not have specialized resources to attract international students or since specialized companies have direct contact with the prospective students.

When analyzing the impact of the internationalization strategy, universities fail to consider indicators that could show them relevant data and could give their actions a more focused approach on the objectives, such as the HEI website traffic (international users). This could help institutions understand from which countries originate most of their prospective students, which can then lead to prioritizing all or most educational marketing and promotion actions in certain or dedicated countries. It could be a great opportunity to analyze which webpages from the university website are most accessed to introduce more relevant information.

Private or public, technical or comprehensive, universities seem to use 8–10 mechanisms to promote their educational offer. In a context where universities understand and know very well their target audience, there would be no need to have many mechanisms to promote their educational offer. Less, but more targeted mechanisms can certainly lead to more results. However, there is no certainty that universities are aware of their target audience with its specifics and their main selling points.

Which mechanisms are most efficient in attracting international students?
Most efficient mechanisms to attract international degree students stated by universities were the English website, word of mouth, participation at International Education Fairs, promotion via other portals, HEI presentation video and partnerships with international HEIs. It is interesting how institutions perceive some mechanism highly efficient or efficient without having an actual indicator that can clearly measure or show data in this sense. The English version of their website is seen very effective, but when measuring the impact of the strategy or mechanisms used, none of the HEIs monitor HEI website traffic (international users).

The same happens with word of mouth, because it is a very powerful mechanism, although it also lacks indicators to measure its efficiency. This is the case for almost all other mechanisms, including the much-emphasized participation at International Education Fairs, institutional promotion clips or partnerships.

The perception questions reveal a limited understanding of the concepts of comprehensive internationalization, communication, branding and promotion. While public universities consider that internationalization has a very high or high impact on the quality of education in the university, at the opposite pole there is the private university that perceives internationalization with relative impact (20–40%) on the quality of education in the institution.

When universities were asked if they consider that the existence of an internationalized curricula has impact on the quality of the program, interestingly enough the private university perceives that an internationalized curriculum has a very high impact on the quality of the program even though the same institution considers

that internationalization has a relative impact on the quality of education. At the same time, the private university considers that the curriculum of their study programs is internationalized at a very high level, while public universities perceive the curriculum of their study programs internationalized in a relative way. As well, public universities perceive that the existence of internationalized curricula has a high impact on the quality of the program (U1), while the U2 considers the impact in a relative way.

5 Recommendations for Institutional Level

For better results, when creating a brand, increasing visibility at international level and attracting international degree students, the following recommendations can be made based on the analysis presented above:

- Universities should pay closer attention to the correlation between objectives and actions; otherwise, they will most likely fail to achieve the stated goals. There is still work when it comes to focusing actions on the stated objectives, and better planning should be put in place in order to use the budget in a more strategic way rather than spending it on actions that are not in accordance with the declared objectives and do not help in achieving anything. For example, in the future, universities could focus more on participating in international fairs that are in the prioritized area countries in order to achieve the desired results or fulfil the strategy objectives.
- For universities to have a realistic perception regarding the correlation between actions and strategy, at the end of each year, I would recommend an exhaustive analysis of all the actions in relations with the stated objectives. This will help them better monitor the process and the results and could make them change or adapt their strategy.
- Universities should develop a marketing strategy, with a mandatory focus on the Why, What and Where, together with an allocated budget.
- In terms of prioritizing countries, institutions should have a realistic approach when defining their target countries that is why I would recommend an in-depth analysis on which countries they should focus and all actions to be in accordance with the chosen objectives.
- Institutions should have clear objectives when presenting their programs, in terms of defining why and what makes the program different and what competencies students will acquire. As well, in order to have a much more focused communication strategy, HEIs should understand what information about the university or the program is relevant for the targeted audience.
- Universities should define Unique Selling Points, which can help prospective students make more accurate choices based on concise points that differentiate universities. Eventually, this can help attract more international students.

- Universities should consider developing a department or hire specialized human resource representatives in education marketing, to work closely with specialized personnel in recruiting and attracting international students.
- Universities should dedicate more time and resources in creating their own academic brand.

Even though the number of international students increases or may increase, it is important to understand which were the most efficient mechanisms that made international students chose their university, understand where international students seek information, and what type of information they need.

- When monitoring the efficiency of the most frequently used mechanisms, universities should consider new indicators that could help them in the future, focusing their energy or budget better.
- For institutions to be sure that the stated mechanisms[3] are the most efficient to attract international students, I would recommend a better monitoring of these mechanisms and analyze the data in order to have a certainty whether these are efficient or not.
- To achieve their internationalization strategy objectives, HEIs should pay more attention to developing their educational marketing strategies to enhance mobility further and attract international students.
- The most used social media platforms for the 18-24 group are YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. Therefore, universities should adapt more to these types of platforms, by communicating and promoting their educational offer, as well as branding themselves on these platforms.
- Since 2017, the most populated academic programs with foreign students were taught in French, and in Romania there are only 95 programs in French; therefore, universities should develop more Bachelor programs taught in French.

To sum up, institutions miss several aspects to connect their internationalization strategies with actions. For them to achieve their goals, they should have an action plan that follows each objective.

Even though studies show that prospective students spend a highly ample time on social media, from where they take their information, Romanian institutions seem to ignore this aspect and do not concentrate their efforts in better communicating on social media.

To conclude, it seems universities still do not understand what comprehensive internationalization is, since they perceive the impact of internationalization on the quality of education or the impact of an internationalized curricula in slightly different way.

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[3]Universities perceive English/the bilingual website, word of mouth (through teachers, students or existing partnerships), participation in International Education Fairs, promotion via other platforms/portals, HEI presentation video in various languages, promotion via studyinRomania.gov.ro portal mechanisms as "highly important", "important" and most efficient mechanisms to attract international degree students.

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Addressing Career Services' Internationalisation Challenges Through Transnational Consortia

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1 Introduction

Providing optimal support on employability for students and graduates has become an integral part of the role of HEIs. In the US, international students tend to seek job opportunities, which is probably why universities such as the University of Southern California and New York University 'provide resources and professional development workshops on job search processes and strategies' (Nara et al. 2019) as a way to improve demand and supply. In the case of Europe, the Bologna Process led to an increase in the implementation of career services at European HEIs to strengthen the employability of their institutions' graduates (cf. eg. Sultana 2017).

In fact, in the 2014–2016 period, internships abroad have shown an upward trend (European Commission 2018a). Universities have developed strategies to internationalise their structures and to favour international mobility. In particular, the number of students involved in international internships grew by 14%, from 73,338 students (and recent graduates) in the first year of the Erasmus + programme implementation to 84,190 students in 2016 (European Commission 2015; European Commission 2018a).

The provision of student services has become a key topic among academics and various stakeholders due to the growing numbers of mobile students (Perez-Encinas 2017). The high quality provision of support services can attract and retain interna-

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tional students and satisfy their expectations. Moreover, providing them with superior structures and opportunities locally and internationally can enhance their general experience (ACE 2016). In this respect, this paper explores how work and internship mobility, as well as career services, operate at an international and national level. Two central questions are answered by means of an exploratory method. Firstly, are European career services equipped to adapt to the increasingly international dimension of their work, such as integrating international students into the labour market or helping them to find internships abroad? Secondly, how could international career service consortia support HEIs' global ambitions?

2 International Internships and the Benefits of Studying Abroad

The increasing number of internationally mobile students reflects the expansion of tertiary education systems worldwide (OECD 2013). Consequently, it is claimed that a more comprehensive approach to the internationalisation of higher education (Hudzik 2014) will increase the awareness that HEIs have to become more inclusive and less elitist by not focusing predominantly on physical mobility but more on the curriculum and learning outcomes (European Parliament 2015). In 2014, the ERASMUS + programme was launched as the successor to the ERASMUS programme, into which mobility schemes were integrated that were previously separate, thus promoting the mobility of an increased number of students under more typologies than was previously possible. The EU's programme, with a budget of €14.7 billion, provides opportunities for more than 4 million Europeans to study, train, gain experience and volunteer abroad. In particular, its aim is to tackle high levels of (youth) unemployment and reduce poverty by promoting education system modernisation. It also encourages the cooperation and partnership of higher education providers, aside from serving as a vehicle for social inclusion, intercultural comprehension and networking (European Commission 2018a). In addition to this strategy, the European Commission has launched a new virtual mobility action called the Erasmus +Virtual Exchange, taking advantage of today 's digital learning tools to complement the physical mobility programme in Europe. Social skills and a sense of initiative could be two learning outcomes, among others, that virtual mobility could enhance (Vinagre 2016).

Students who participate in international mobility face new challenges and unfamiliar situations that might enable them to develop autonomy and self-confidence. According to the Erasmus Impact Study (2014), students participating in internships abroad were able to interact and work with people from other backgrounds and cultures. Moreover, they adapted to new situations and, at the end of their internships, they were more interculturally competent. They had also gained foreign languages skills and a broader knowledge of the host country's culture, society and economy.

Erasmus+ promotes the acquisition of knowledge and competences that might not be taught at home but are demanded by employers to satisfy today's business needs (European Commission 2015; European Commission 2018b). In this sense, working abroad is a valuable opportunity for students to improve their CVs (European Commission 2014), for instance by stressing newly developed skills, such as mastering a foreign language, or acquiring new understandings and developing personal attributes (Yorke 2006, p. 8). In fact, Van Mol (2017) found that international education was particularly valued when employers needed graduates with good foreign language and decision-making skills.

In the European context, the international dimension of higher education started to be managed less by incidental and individual initiatives than in the past. It began to be increasingly structured into organised activities, projects and programmes based on political rationale. It also became increasingly driven by national governments rather than by HEIs (De Wit and Merkx 2012). The internationalisation of higher education also influenced the organisation of support services. Erasmus' support for traineeship has gradually grown in importance since Erasmus+ was launched. In the three years since implementation, about 235,000 students have gone abroad on traineeships, with 20,500 of them being recent graduates (European Commission 2018b).

In particular, career services play an important role in supporting students in their school-to-work transition and in the acquisition or improvement of crucial skills and competences to gain initial employment (e.g. problem- solving skills, multi-cultural environments, networking and socialising, initiative and entrepreneurship), according to Altmann and Ebersberger(2012). The traditional way of providing career services is changing in response to current trends and new pressures. Do Céu and De Nazaré (2014) argue that career services could provide students with seminars, workshops, career counselling and information to support the school-to-work transition. Moreover, career services can also assist students by making them aware of the existence of mobility study programmes or internships abroad that could enable them to enhance their employability in the global context. Knight and Yorke (2003) suggested that employability might be improved through work experience, entrepreneurship modules, a portfolio of achievements and (good quality) career advisers. However, the delivery of support services varies significantly across European HEIs, with students getting information and support from a variety of sources instead of a central and unified structure. For instance, international students might have to ask for information, advice or support from offices which were originally created to support only exchange students or mobile student enrolment (Kelo and Rogers 2010). Additionally, especially in European institutions, there seems to be a lack of research literature around the internationalisation of career services that is not written from an Anglo-American perspective and which provides in-depth knowledge about heterogenic developments (cf. for American universities, e.g., Kenyon and Rowar-Kenyon 2014). The importance of a broader view was highlighted a decade ago by Kelo and Roger s (2010) following an innovative study conducted in six European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and UK). In line with this study, Mikulás and Jitka (2019) explored acculturation experiences by analysing a

database containing the questionnaire responses of international students studying abroad (France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal). One of the findings was that the cultural impact of mobility was positive and most favourable in Germany.

However, many European HEIs still find it difficult to satisfy international students' needs, because in many cases support services differentiate between domestic and international students, and the domestic services are not in all cases adapted to tackle the needs of international students or those willing to go abroad. Taveira (2017) argued, for example, that career services have to adopt a more holistic approach and introduce psychological and guidance services for students.

3   Method

This paper is exploratory in nature; the aim is thus not to generalise or to evaluate with statistical certainty. As a first step, we conducted desk research and combined and interpreted known statistics and surveys about career services, mainly in Europe, under a new research interest. Based on the presentation of the current state of career services, a case study approach was adopted with a view to exploring the benefits of a career service consortium model. We conducted an exploratory holistic single case analysis (cf. Yin 2018; see also Ridder 2016). Since the 1980s, case studies have been a popular research method in a wide range of disciplines, from the social sciences to health, with a variety of perspectives and approaches being utilised to understand complex realities. In education, the pioneers were Stake (1995), Merriam (1998) and Simons (2009). According to Stake (1995, p. xi) 'a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case'. Consequently, even a single explanatory case study would be sufficient to extrapolate results (Yin 2009). The particular case was chosen because the authors were involved with career consortium implementation, which afforded us in-depth insights into the unit of analysis. While the authors' close involvement in the study might have resulted in bias, this was limited since the purpose of the study was to develop propositions for further research and not to judge or assess the overall impact or quality of the work conducted. The data was gathered mainly during evaluation sessions, in which the project participants discussed the progress made during the project, and through evaluation surveys to assess the various activities of the consortium. Additionally, we had access to funding proposals, internal documentation and project outputs. We worked through the material 'from the ground up' (Yin 2018, p. 169–170) and analysed it using a hermeneutical approach similar to Yin's logic models (cf. Yin 2018).

How Prepared Are Career Services to Facilitate Global Student Work Mobility in Europe?

As indicated previously, there are still many grey areas when assessing and comparing the role of career services internationally, especially when it comes to something as specific as their internationalisation. The structural situation of career services

in Germany and their internationalisation efforts are, however, relatively well documented. In the following section, we will, therefore, examine the case of Germany in detail and contextualise it with findings from other countries (Netherlands, Sweden, Canada, Romania, Spain, Italy, France, the UK and the USA). Whilst this procedure does not offer sufficient knowledge to provide a quantitative global answer to the above question, it helps to outline where further research is needed and what the focus should be. Moreover, it supports the initial argument that more intra- and inter-institutional cooperation is needed.

In 2014, the German Rector's Conference (HRK) conducted a survey amongst German career services and international offices, asking about their internationalisation efforts (Böhm and Brandl 204). In 2015, the same stakeholders, that is, the German Rectors' Conference and the Career Service Network Deutschland e. V., published a general report on the structural situation of career services in Germany (CSND 2015). Additional data to compare the German case with the international scenario was derived from the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration's (ECGFIM) study 'Train and Retain. Career Support for International Students in Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden' (2015). Data published by the Qareer-project (2017), which conducted a cross-national study with a special focus on Italy, Romania, Spain and Poland, was also sourced. The main findings provide a good indication of the current state of affairs and highlight the urgent need for more reliable academic research.

The HRK survey (Böhm and Brandl 204) results show that German HEIs have started to internationalise their career services. More than 78% of the answering institutions stated that they provided activities to internationalise their services (e.g. trainings, projects, specific classes), which shows that these institutions recognise to a certain extent that facilitating support for the international dimension of careers is one of their responsibilities.

When asked about their main target group, about 61% of the institutions identified international students trying to integrate into the German labour market, whilst 39% stated that the focus of their internationalisation activities was on local graduates.

The responsibility for the integration of international students into the German labour market is largely assigned to career services (57%), which in Germany are usually central departments at higher education institutions (78.9%). This is also reflected in the career services' budgets, in which activities aimed at international students receive the largest budget share (compared to activities specifically for men, women, doctoral students, disabled students and dropouts) (CSND 2015).

The main challenges are that the foreign student body might not be accustomed to the specifics of the German labour market. These students might also experience workplace discrimination and be hampered by language barriers. Consequently, most career services aim to minimise the effects of these 'disadvantages', typically via workshops on the job application process, individual coaching for international students, and language and intercultural training (Böhm and Brandl 204). This is true for most countries, according to the 'Train and retain' report (ECGFIM 2015). German HEIs, similarly to Swedish universities, focus their services mainly on students who are about to graduate, whilst Canadian and Dutch HEIs tend to start early after enrol-

ment and offer support throughout the study cycle (ECGFIM 2015). Even though German institutions score highly compared to Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands in terms of targeting their services at international graduates, it is only in the Netherlands that the strategic integration of international alumni in the job market is a popular activity of career service work (ECGFIM 2015).

Unfortunately, there is insufficient data to directly assess the extent of these measures and their impact, which is a recognised issue, when assessing the impact of career service work (Eimer 2014). While it is assumed that career services provide a useful service, the extent to which students benefit from them is unclear.

From an organisational perspective, communication restrictions are an issue when trying to reach students. However, even more severe is the resource question, which makes a continuous need-focused, ready-on-demand service delivery rather unlikely. Thanks to the 'Train to retain' report (ECGFIM 2015) and the HRK survey (CSND 2015), one has a rough idea of the student-to-staff ratios in career services (Canada: 2,922:1; Germany: 7,283:1; The Netherlands 8,765:1; Sweden: 4,999:1). Though these numbers differ quite a bit from institution to institution, it is fair to say that it is close to impossible to imagine that all students could benefit from individual attention and counselling. Considering that the student-to-staff ratios at international offices (Canada: 2,770:1; Germany: 2,082:1; The Netherlands 2,445:1; Sweden: 1,941:1) are rather low, it seems that organisational priorities (expressed in funding and resource allocation) do not favour career departments. The answers to the survey questions about the sustainability of internationalised services clearly indicate a lack of resources (Böhm and Brandl 204).

As the authors of the 'Train to retain' study write: 'Despite international students' need for more systematic and coordinated job entry support at the local level, most of them encounter a poorly coordinated patchwork of occasional career fairs, job application training and chance acquaintances with service staff or company representatives who may or may not be able to help them' (ECGFIM 2015, p. 4).

The countries in the abovementioned study are among the rather well-off countries. Moreover, while in Germany, for example, most career services were established only 10 years ago, countries such as Romania started even later with the establishment of university career services on a larger scale (Cojocariu and Puiu 2014). The uneven development of career services in Europe is also one of the reasons for which there are no commonly shared international standards of career service work (Qareer 2017), which further begs the question of how career services professionals are trained. Whilst the UK is leading in offering qualifications related to career guidance as fully recognised study programs on a university level in the European context, such a high degree of professionalisation is the exception rather than the rule in Europe (cf. Qareer 2017).

After having looked at the inbound perspective related to the integration of international students, let us have a look at the outbound perspective. How are career services helping their students to find work abroad?

There is a lot of financial support in the EU for students to support mobility. Students can apply for ERASMUS+ internship funds and/or government funding (e.g. BAFöG) for some financial help when they go abroad (in 2013/2014 the

National Agency that manages ERASMUS funds in Germany alone allocated about €10,000,000 for 6, 500 students to do internships abroad and additional funding schemes are available).

According to the HRK's survey (Böhm and Brandl 204), about 39% of career services identified home students as the main target of their internationalisation activities. Organising workshops that aim to enable students to find work abroad and/or intercultural training aiming to prepare graduates for a global work environment are the most popular services offered. Survey responses suggest, however, that institutions quite often do not possess the necessary knowledge internally and have to rely on external coaches to conduct workshops, which means they might be not able to satisfy information needs when in actual demand but only at specific times. About 29% provide job boards, on which international job advertisements are also published. It is unclear how many students are able to benefit from the workshops or how well-connected career services are internationally. European universities rarely provide structured schemes to place students with companies abroad, in contrast to many North-American universities (cf. Kenyon and Rowan-Kenyon 2014).

To sum up, if all the aspects outlined above are considered, a patchwork impression prevails. Though one finds admirable efforts at institutions and there has never been a time when more has been done to support international work mobility, there still is a great deal of work to be done to improve services to support global work mobility. Hudzik's (2014) call for comprehensive internationalisation also needs to be answered in career service work. Currently, we find a multitude of activities which are somewhat related to in- or outbound mobility and labour market integration, but only limited discussion about what internationalisation should mean in the context of career service work and how institutions can address the problem of a lack of resources, networks and knowledge to adapt to the demand of preparing a truly global workforce.

3.1 Case Study: Benefitting From Inner- and Intra-institutional Cooperation

As indicated above, two of the main challenges for career centres in HEIs in terms of their endeavour to support their students are scarce resources and a lack of prioritisation. It is a costly endeavour to build knowledge of foreign labour markets, to produce target group-specific activities and resources for international students to integrate into the local economy and to build worldwide company collaborations. The necessary institutional resources are seldom in place to implement a systematic strategy and aligned effective operations.

One possible solution could be participation in career service consortia. Considering the amount of HEIs worldwide, there is enormous potential to connect and collaborate in order to improve students' career mobility, that is, student migration flows, with the aim of working (internship or entry- level) abroad. Rooted in the con-

text provided so far, we present in this part the lessons learnt from an ERASMUS+ strategic partnership project that aimed to address many of the challenges outlined above and to improve the service offer in the institutions involved in a transnational career service consortium operating under the name 'European Centre for Career Development and Entrepreneurship' (ECCE).

The ECCE consortium was established between Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Regent's University London, the Paris School of Business and EBC Hochschule. The preparation phase started in 2014, and in 2015, the initiative received funding through the ERASMUS+ Key Action 2-strategic partnerships.

The project partners aimed to create a small consortium that should, at its core, work like a second- level support system for career officers and support those officers directly on an operational level, meaning helping them to advise and place their students abroad. This involved colleagues from different countries collectively developing and sharing materials, training each other on labour market standards in their respective countries, regularly liaising with each other and responding to specific questions from their student-facing colleagues. The aim of this approach was to (a) improve the availability of international know-how at all times and not only when external coaches were present; (b) extend the institutional reach (that is, sharing company networks rather than trying to develop your own); and (c) push inner- and intra-institutional cooperation through the involvement of a diverse set of stakeholders. Besides the traditional career service responsibilities, the partners decided to add entrepreneurship education to their consortium portfolio in order to enhance cooperation within their own institutions and between institutions. The latter decision enabled project-based summer schools on *Entrepreneurship in Europe* to train students. The basic assumption was that the core of entrepreneurship education was to foster problem-solving skills and initiative because both traits are beneficial for students aiming for a corporate career; hence, there was a clear link to career service work (ECCE 2015).

The summer school curriculum was developed by involving academics and project managers from all institutions, and the summer school delivery also involved all institutions. Doing so allowed the career service officers to expand their workshop offers, reach out and collaborate with colleagues from international offices. Most importantly, it also involved academics and entrepreneurs, which again brought their entrepreneurship knowledge and networks to the table. It furthermore enabled them to gain international teaching experience and provided them with the opportunity to cooperate with like-minded academics from the partner institutions (ECCE 2017a).

The heart of this network is a platform on which the partners share resources, such as job-boards and application guides, and offer the possibility to match academics, students and other stakeholders who have an interest in entrepreneurship in terms of research or actual start-up cooperation. This has been accompanied by staff training weeks for career service members and summer schools to foster entrepreneurial skills amongst students in order to develop internationally-aware staff and students. The aim remains to keep the network small and foster deep relations between the career officers involved so that they truly benefit from their enlarged network in their day-

to-day operations. At the same time, ECCE promotes the model and its experiences since it wants other institutions to copy the model.

3.2 The ECCE Model

Two central questions were addressed, namely: are European career services equipped to adapt to the increasing international dimension of their work (e.g. integrating international students in local labour markets or supporting their students to find work abroad) and how could international career service consortia support HEIs' global ambitions? Figure 1 answers these questions by proposing the ECCE model built by the authors, in which four main elements should be taken into account: a joint platform and guides, joint training, joint networks and joint entrepreneurship summer schools. In this model, it is important to involve and connect with stakeholders in each country: students, administration (e.g. career services, IOs), academics, companies and other organisations.

The long-term impact of the initiative remains to be seen, but preliminary feedback indicates that pursuing such a model (as represented in Table 1) could be worthwhile in relation to career services, summer schools and collaborations between institutions. As noted by Larrance (2002, p. 9), 'the commitment to the long term must be present in order to succeed, and success in leveraging resources will follow if these areas are recognised and thoroughly explored'.

In the abovementioned concept paper, the ECCE team stresses the following as critical for those considering implementing a similar structure:

'The main challenge for a consortium is not so much the creation of technical resources and tools to share, but to foster a team spirit across universities and coun-
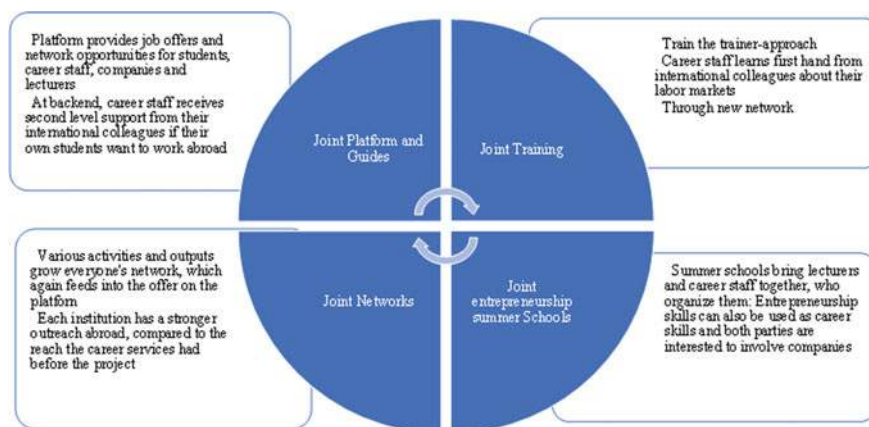

Fig. 1 ECCE model

Table 1 Results of the ECCE model

Career service	Officers who participated in the training expressed high satisfaction with it, felt better prepared to advise their students and appreciated the exchange with their international colleagues. They also indicated that the training led to increased overall work satisfaction because they had better target-specific materials at hand to advise both inbound and outbound students. International job offers overall had increased, although language remained a major obstacle to mobility.
Summer Schools	The participants in the summer schools expressed extremely high satisfaction with the learning outcomes and the execution of the training; appreciated the enlargement of their international networks and oftentimes stayed in contact with their peers, leading to valuable ongoing collaboration; several participants went on to put their learning into practice by funding their own businesses, which led to spin-off projects.
Collaboration	The collaboration between the universities led to increased international academic cooperation and to a larger network of entrepreneurs, academics, administrators and students supporting each other with advice and contacts. From initially five project managers, there are now more than 50 staff (academics and administration) contributing to the success of the project from across institutions and institutional levels, as well as external stakeholders.
Institutions	Currently, each institution has nominated a liaison career officer, which helped to transform the initiative from a project phase into institutionalisation. Other institutions outside the network can benefit from the ECCE experiences in terms of utilising several outputs which have been produced by the project team, such as a European career advisor curriculum, which synthesises the learnings of the staff weeks, the ECCE-concept paper, which documents the project and key lessons, parts of the platform to enlarge the entrepreneurship community, and/or a career guide for the involved partner countries, specifically written with international students in mind (ECCE 2017a).

tries, and to keep this spirit alive over time and personnel turnover. The advantage of small consortia compared to larger associations is that the colleagues know each other faster and better' (ECCE 2017b).

4 Conclusions

From a global perspective, institutional engagement has made it possible to develop career services to afford students a better chance of insertion into the job market. Those universities that have specialised support services in that direction are more likely to attract students. In this paper, we dealt with the new challenges that European career services have to face due to internationalisation and how consortiums could support such a demanding task. Given the challenges of extremely hetero-

genic economies and career service landscapes internationally, smooth global work mobility facilitated by HEIs will remain a long-term goal.

The power of consortia is based on the fact that they enable both large and small, private and public institutions, and like-minded people to come together to try to solve the problems facing higher education and create services that satisfy the needs of all users. The ECCE results indicate that a lot of small, actively cooperating networks could have a larger impact and offer more helpful student-centred support than large associations would be able to, though they would not necessarily need to compete, but could complement each other. Personal relations will be key if we want career officers to not only broaden their perspectives but also obtain the tools necessary to assist students on a larger scale.

These transnational models have a lot of potential to add a new dimension to already existing EU-wide university networks. The challenge going forwards is to find sustainable funding models and to scale the operations for a larger input.

At an individual level or through alliances, international collaboration should be at the core of HEIs in order to govern resources and provide the infrastructures needed to enable students to face new and future challenges Our case study highlights how networks of engaged professionals from differing institutions were able to establish a quick and transparent communication system to organise a series of actions involving academics, entrepreneurs, students and career services staff. This professional integration has generated better networking, providing students with a clearer perception of the European labour market than was previously possible. However, all those benefits need to be channelled by administrations to continue in the long run and not remain a project-funded case study.

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Internationalization of Higher Education in Romania and Portugal—Strategies and Transitions at the (Semi-)Periphery

Ligia Deca

1 Introduction

The internationalization of higher education is, without a doubt, one of the undeniable trends that continues to (re)define governmental and university level strategies alike. In a world where knowledge is the key asset, brain circulation becomes one of the essential indicators of just how much countries and higher education institutions are willing to rethink their future moves in order to attract international students and researchers. In 2017, there were over 5.3 million international students, up from 2 million in 2000.[1] The five most successful countries in attracting foreign students (in absolute numbers) were: The United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, France and Germany. Anglo-Saxon countries dominate this ranking, but economic development is also a powerful indicator for attractiveness. Despite the strong position of the top tier countries, some European nations, in light of the challenges posed by demography and migration, have become aware of the opportunities presented by internationalization, with a focus on attracting degree-seeking mobile students (Sin et al. 2019; Deca 2015; Mosneaga and Agergaard 2012). In fact, student mobility—both degree and credit—remains a priority as well as the most frequent activity within the internationalization agenda of European higher education institutions (Sursock 2015; EUA 2013).

This paper compares the recent history of higher education internationalization in two countries situated simultaneously at the periphery of the European Economic Area and at the semi-periphery of internationalization efforts in the university sector.

These two case studies share a recent history of transition from totalitarian regimes to functional democracy, in a wider context of accession to the European Union and the European Higher Education Area. This transition does start from different ideological standpoints (communism for Romania and fascism for Portugal) and at different points in time (1989 for Romania and 1974 for Portugal). The author will examine the internal and external drivers for internationalization of higher education

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[1] http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=172.

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in these two national contexts, as well as how and whether their socio-economic and historical specificity influenced the way in which dominant models of internationalization have been translated at the national and institutional level.

The conclusion will include policy lessons for decision-makers and explore whether and how potential misalignments between national and institutional endeavors can pose obstacles in fulfilling strategic objectives at either level.

2   Methodological and Conceptual Considerations

The current article uses the empirical work done for the author's PhD thesis regarding the Romanian higher education system, defended in 2016 at the University of Luxembourg, as well as the interviews and research conducted in Portugal as a post-doctoral fellow at the New Europe College, in Bucharest. It is conceived as a qualitative analysis, using semi-structured interviews conducted in 2013–2015 and 2018 in both Romania and Portugal, with representative decision-makers on higher education, mainly at the national level.

The concept of periphery used in this paper is based on the Sin et al. (2019) translation of the Immanuel Wallerstein' theory of the "world system" (Wallerstein 1974), which divides countries based on the structure of their economy in: core, semi-periphery and periphery. This taxonomy was then modeled on the more niche economy of international higher education, taking as a proxy inbound/outbound mobility flows. For the purpose of this article, core countries are those that are considered net "importers" of degree-seeking students (e.g. the United States, the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands etc.). Semi-peripheral are those countries with more balanced mobility flows, such as Poland or Portugal. And finally, those countries that are mainly "exporters" of mobile students are considered as peripheric (Romania, Bulgaria etc.).

The working assumption for this article is that peripheral and semi-peripheral countries (should) use internationalization policies that are different from those of the core countries, in light of their different circumstances, capacities and challenges (Urbanovic et al. 2016). Additionally, some of these countries, such as those situated in Central and Eastern Europe, can be considered as a 'privileged site for understanding the processes of Europeanization and internationalization' (Dakowska and Harmsen 2015: 5), using regional and international models to develop their higher education sector. Despite there being no universal model for internationalization, "a correlation exists between the standing of the higher education system in the global arena and the influence of its internationalization model worldwide." (Deca 2016: 15). In general, systems with a de facto low standing such as those in periphery or semi-periphery become net borrowers of policy practices in the realm of internationalization.

As such, countries from the periphery or semi-periphery become pertinent models in analyzing the suitability of transposing established models of internationalization to regions with different circumstances. Also, the observations made in the com-

parison can help identify how the internationalization of higher education could be pursued without reinforcing the status-quo, namely the divisions between higher education systems worldwide (Teichler 1999), which makes more powerful actors its primary beneficiaries. De Wit et al. (2019) underline that countries with developing economies (and sometimes democracies) tend to adopt Western models of internationalization, focusing on incoming mobility, branding and prestige while also suffering from political instability. They also underline that, in such cases, other dimensions of internationalization might be more helpful in reaching the overall objectives of the higher education system (e.g. internationalization at home for enhancing overall higher education quality etc.).

3   Romania—the Resurrection of the Internationalization of Higher Education Agenda After Three Decades of Transition

Following its 1989 anti-communist regime Revolution, Romanian higher education and its policy framework changed according to perceived international and European trends but was also shaped by the internal imperatives of democratic transition. According to Deca (2015), each of the three decades following 1990 has constituted a distinct phase of policy change. The 1990s, for example, were a time of massification and witnessed a search for external models in order to redefine higher education in the new democratic setting. The first decade of the new millennium constituted the Europeanisation phase, heavily influenced by the Bologna Process and Romania's new EU membership. Lastly, the past decade was one in which the internationalization discourse dominated, with various highlights—rankings, international cooperation and the fight to maintain institutional capacity by attracting foreign students.

Higher education was always seen as a sign of social status in Romania. In light of its previous elitist character, the first wave of change (1990s) was linked to massification and happened in a time when other HE sectors in the world were going through similar changes. The previous technical colleges were transformed in universities and a flurry of private providers started to offset the increasing demand for a higher education degree (Damian 2011: 59). This rapid expansion of the capacity of the higher education sector came with a challenge to maintain the quality of provision, which is perhaps why Romania was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to establish a governmental agency for quality control in this sector, in 1993—the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEEA), following a UNESCO-CEPES study with support from Japan.

There was some resistance to this push for modernization, with some actors trying to revert to the model of the pre-communist academic community. In this sense, Romania has a strong academic heritage based on the centralized Napoleonic model, combined with a second wave of centralism in higher education governance during communism (Dobbins and Knill 2009; Dobbins 2011).

The European Union, together with the World Bank, also played an active role in redesigning the Romanian higher education landscape, which brought international trends close to those taking policy decision. A long-standing higher education expert in Romania pointed out that 'the 1990s were the decade of Euro-Atlantic influence in the Romanian higher education system. The influence of Anglo-Saxon excellence models was predominant, especially in relation to university research reform' (Interview 2).

This so-called 'Euro-Atlantic'[2] influence included, for example, the introduction of moderate tuition fees and an increasing focus on research outputs inspired by the US higher education system model, as well as the adoption of British inspired models of lump sum funding (Dobbins and Knill 2009, 416). This was coupled with the introduction of EU and Bologna Process inspired recognition instruments, such as ECTS, qualification frameworks and Diploma Supplement.

At the government level, the prevailing discourse seemed to be heavily influenced at the time by the World Bank (Interview 2), whose influence started to manifest itself around 1991/1992, potentially due to its status as the main external funding source for higher education reform in this transition period (Cîrstocea 2014, 130).

The OECD also undertook a 'Review of National Policies for Education' for Romania (OECD 2000), which became highly influential amongst Romanian policy makers (Interview 1). The focus of the OECD with regard to higher education was on the system governance and structural reforms, enhancing teacher training, as well as on fostering links between universities and the labor market.

As this first phase of transition closed, international norms were largely used by the government as a form of leverage for reform in conjunction with the strong presence of international organizations on the ground, while opponents of reform did not seek to move beyond a defense of the national status quo.

In the second phase (2000–2008), there seems to be an instrumentalization of the Bologna Process by the government in the context of the EU accession process, mostly looking at the structure of the higher education system and mainly using a negative legitimation strategy (i.e. invoking the perils of choosing a different path for the upcoming accession of Romania to the EU). In this phase, the government had the perhaps surprising help of one of the student national federations (ANOSR), which used the Bologna Process in a positive way, as a resource to establish itself and to promote student interests.

In the third phase (2008–2019), the government promoted a policy shift based on the need to increase Romania's international competitiveness in the discussions surrounding the National Law on Education (Law 1/2011), but other actors in higher education diversified their counter-arguments by including international references (such as the use of the Bologna Process for arguing in favor of maintaining a collegial system of higher education by students and academic staff representatives). In this

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[2] Euro-Atlantic is a term used to capture the desire of the Romanian policy makers to become compatible with both EU and US norms, broadly seen as 'Western' influences. The Romanian efforts towards both EU and NATO integration at the time is also an influencing factor in this regard.

timeframe, Romania also assumed the Secretariat of the Bologna Process (2010–2012) and organized the EHEA Ministerial Conference and Bologna Policy Forum in 2012. As an EHEA Vice-Chairing country, Romania was an influential player in the drafting of the EHEA Bucharest Communique.

Over these three successive moments, there is a clear evolution of the use of international norms by Romanian higher education actors. During the 1990s, the system and its actors were in search of relevant models and still heavily centralized. In the second 'Bologna' phase, we can already see two interesting instances of strategic use of international norms. On the one hand, the government used the Bologna Process both as a resource for its reform and as a constraint to limit opposition. In the third phase, we witness the government using international processes to legitimize national reforms but also starting to 'upload' national policy priorities within the areas where it played a significant role, such as the EHEA. Also, at this moment, actors displayed a diversified use of internationally inspired arguments for their policy positions, notably in the defense of the principle of stakeholder consultation itself.

In the Romanian case, according to Deca (2016: 130), "internationalization was initially a wider concept, including mediation by the Government of international policy processes in support for domestic reform, but also a way to ensure 'belonging' in the European community. In recent years, internationalization evolved towards an independent policy area, in connection with the desire to increase economic competitiveness in a knowledge-based society."

At the same time, internationalization of higher education as a policy process has resurfaced in the past decade as a central concern for universities, after a relative lack of attention in the 1990–2010 timeframe. In the 1980s, Romania was among the top 15 countries worldwide in terms of attracting foreign students (10% of the total student number) due to the strategies employed by the communist government, which included special student support services, lowering tuition fees, providing government scholarships for priority countries etc (Pricopie and Nicolescu 2011).

In light of the decreasing number of foreign students starting with the late 1980s and continuing towards year 2000, Romania decided to increase its competitiveness and align its higher education system structure with the perceived "European model", which meant adopting the Bologna Process structures (three cycles, ECTS, Diploma Supplement, QF) between 2004–2007 (Deca et al. 2015). Following the adoption of Law 1/2011, a growing concern for internationalization as a distinct policy endeavor was evident at both national and institutional level, perhaps augmented by the rankings shock.

As previously noted, international organizations were key actors in promoting internationalization either via technical/ financial assistance or through thematic reports. Also, the support of specialized agencies was essential. One such example is the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), who developed and implemented the 'Internationalization, equity and university management for quality higher education in Romania' (IEMU) project, in 2014–2015, in partnership with the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA). This project produced a strategic framework for interna-

tionalization, helped twenty Romanian universities to develop their own strategic plans for internationalization and created the "Study in Romania" portal. Another valuable deliverable was a Blueprint for developing a structure for the promotion of Romanian higher education abroad. However, these documents never translated into a nationally endorsed policy. One obstacle for internationalization policies to overcome their current ad-hoc and fragmented status is the legal and political instability. The fast-paced change in ministers poses real challenges to designing a coherent national policy for higher education in general and for internationalization of higher education in particular. Also, the lack of national investment in internationalization could not be fully offset by European programs, even though some European calls prompted the Education Ministry to provide matching funding (e.g. the European Universities Initiative call).

Despite the discursive prioritization of internationalization of higher education (Government of Romania 2019), the internationalization of higher education as a distinct policy never reached policy formulation phase. The relative lack of alignment between general higher education (and general education) policy, internationalization and other policy areas (immigration, foreign policy, economic policy) also impinges on materialising a national approach. It is clear that without a clearly formulated national policy, which would include responsibilities, priorities, targets and financial allocations, no significant progress can be made or measured in areas such as mobility, cross-border higher education provision or even internationalization at home. (Deca 2016)

4   Portugal—How a Former Empire Strikes Below Its Weight

The Portuguese higher education system has its roots in the Middle Ages, with the first higher education institution being set up in Lisbon, later moving to the city of Coimbra—University of Coimbra (1290). Its evolution was later influenced by the needs of the Portuguese Empire, with engineering and medical higher education institutions being set up in various colonies (South-America, Asia etc.), in order to support the needs of those societies. The links between the former Portuguese Empire territories and the Portuguese universities are very relevant still when looking at how internationalization of higher education is conceptualized in national and university level strategic documents. The establishment of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa—CPLP) in 1996 was an added driver to the existing intense academic links with these territories.

Mobility statistics prove that Portugal welcomes more than 60% of its international students from its former territories: Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea Bissau and East Timor. All countries except Brazil and East Timor gained their independence in the 1970s, almost at the same time with the Carnation Revolution, which makes Portugal a particular case of a transitioning

country, as the country retained close and multi-faceted links with a number of emerging new states. The Portuguese government materialized its interest in maintaining its influence in these territories by offering scholarships to prospective students from CPLP countries (Veiga et al. 2006). In addition, there was another driver to increased mobility from these countries—the lack of capacity of higher education systems in these countries—which became a real push factor for students to seek tertiary education in Portugal (França et al. 2018).

With the incentive of the increased demand for higher education, in the 1980s and 1990s, a flurry of private higher education institutions tried to offset the two trends—the democratization of higher education in Portugal and the intake from former colonies. At the same time, culturally and historically, CPLP students were not seen as "foreign", even in the legal sense, since universities could not impose extra fees and with special quotas allotted for their enrolment in Portuguese universities.

In this context, Law 62/2007 which addressed the Juridical Regime of Higher Education acted on two fronts—enacted new provisions related to quality assurance and provided the opportunity for higher education institutions to change their legal regime in order to become autonomous foundations, with an increased level of institutional autonomy. Interestingly, only three higher education institutions opted for this possibility at the time—the University of Porto (the largest institution in Portugal by number of students at the time), ISCTE Lisbon and the University of Aveiro. Other higher education institutions later chose the same path—University of Minho, Nova University etc.

The financial crisis in 2008/2009 hit in a dramatic way the Portuguese economy, with drastic cuts to the higher education sector (Teixeira 2012). In addition, this prompted increased levels of labor migration, coupled with declining demographic trends. In this context, Portuguese universities were desperate to find ways to increase their revenues (Sin et al. 2016) and attracting foreign students was seen as one such avenue.

In February 2014, the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry for Regional Development joined forces in order to develop a strategy for the internationalization of Portuguese higher education (MADR/MEC 2014). In July 2015, the Portuguese Government adopted this strategy (Council of Ministers Resolution 47/2015). This document provided guidance and political priorities in what was an area of interest for most, if not all, higher education institutions in Portugal. The strategy included provisions for the promotion of the national higher education system and its institutions (universities and polytechnics) abroad. It also designated priority regions for further cooperation, going beyond EU and CPLP countries. It aimed to improve the provision of information for prospective international students and to remove some of the red tape associated with visas, residence, financial operations, etc. This was partially achieved by creating the 'via verde'—a fast way—for the admission of international candidates in Portuguese higher education institutions and for their settling in the country. Lastly, the strategy aimed to augment the number of higher education programmes offered in English.

Responding to a similar demand for clarifying the national framework for internationalization of higher education, in the same year— 2014, the Statute of the Interna-

tional Student (Decree-Law 36/2014) was adopted. This piece of legislation defines international students as those originating from other countries than the EU/EEA members. The main objective of the law is to define a new admission regime for students that can be treated differently compared to national students, according to EU law. More autonomy was thus given to higher education institutions in setting admission practices for international students, as well as for establishing tuition fees that reflect the actual costs of higher education. As an exception, students from CPLP countries could benefit from a special scholarship, in order to maintain the links with former Portuguese Empire territories (with the exception of Brazil). However, this last provision is not yet implemented (França et al. 2018).

If prior to the 2014 Student Statute, students coming from Portuguese speaking countries were not differentiated from national or EU/ EEA students when it came to tuition fees, the change in strategy has incentivized public higher education institutions to be interested in attracting more international students, similarly to private universities, especially in light of the dwindling numbers of national candidates (Sin et al. 2016: 185–186). Mainardes et al. (2012) point to an increasing tendency to look at internationalization of higher education in Portugal with a market logic, which is also signaled by the internationalization commission of the representative body of Portuguese public universities (CRUP): 'There is a mentality to change and an idea to bear in mind: higher education is exportable' (Assunção 2017: 7).

In this light, several initiatives were put in motion: one coordinated by CRUP—'Universities Portugal'—with the support of the Government, the Camões Institute, the Portuguese Agency for Foreign Investment and Trade, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. (Assunção 2017); another one planned by polytechnic institutions for joint promotion abroad (Mourato 2016) and a very recent one in 2019— study-research.pt. The latter is in line with the 2016 Decree which emphasized the link between higher education and research for further internationalization efforts and encompassed the previous "Study in Portugal" portal. A clear focus of the Portuguese Government was attracting Portuguese researchers back to Portugal by offering 50% tax deductions to those deciding to relocate back in the country. Finally, in 2019, 2500 more places for international students were awarded by the Portuguese Government to higher education institutions, in order to enhance their capacity to attract fee-paying students.

However, despite efforts made in the past decade to raise the profile of Portuguese higher education institutions, the OECD was critical of the strategic endeavors in its Review of Portuguese Higher Education report (OECD 2019). Even if separate initiatives exist, there is little coherence between them, as well as between higher education, research and innovation policies. In terms of percentages of the overall student body in Portugal, foreign students represented around 6%, with 4% of all bachelor students being international, as well as 8% of all Master students and 27% of PhD students.[3]

Similar to other countries, the strategy for the internationalization of higher education (and research, to some extent) in Portugal is linked with the country's foreign

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[3]https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2019_CN_PRT.pdf.

policy interests. In this case, it attempts to consolidate the role of Portugal as an education and science hub for Portuguese speaking communities across the world, while relying on the brain gain phenomenon that might be boosted by the country's EU membership. Indeed, Portugal frequently refers to itself as a gateway to Europe (Almeida 2008). A special interest is seen in relation to the Chinese market of potential degree-seeking students, as Portuguese is the language of several African and Asian countries in which China currently shows clear economic and strategic interest (e.g. Angola, Macao etc.). One prominent former Portuguese expert underlined the win-win strategy that Portugal and Chinese authorities pursue in this respect—China sends students to Portugal in order to have a European higher education degree and to learn Portuguese and then deploys these graduates in Portuguese speaking countries, in order to make sure it has the human resource to further its interests there; Portugal, in turn, gains both fee-paying students and well-placed graduates that speak Portuguese (Interview 3).

Portugal's internationalization efforts are declaratively in line with its main foreign policy goals. However, the oversized focus on attracting degree-seeking students and its lack of continuity in following its strategic policy documents (mainly due to political and economic changes) makes this former empire strike well below its weight in terms of higher education internationalization (Interview 4). Despite its strengths, it displays a similar tendency to imitate models of internationalization characteristic to economically developed countries, while not fully taking advantage of its unique strengths in the global setting.

5   Comparative Analysis and Conclusive Remarks

Portugal and Romania navigated a historically recent transition from totalitarian regimes to democracy (from the Salazar and Ceausescu regimes respectively). They are both EU members and have been heavily influenced by efforts to harmonize higher education systems in Europe. And they have definitely been impacted by worldwide transformations, such as the 2008/2009 financial crisis or the post-2010 rankings shock. As such, internationalization of higher education has definitely been, in the case of Romania and Portugal, a "driver for policy change" (Enders 2004).

In general terms, in the Romanian case, internationalization did not yet reach the stage of policy formulation at the national level, despite commendable efforts made in the IEMU project, where a strategic framework for internationalization was developed, together with the "Study in Romania" portal and with 20 university strategies for internationalization. Portugal is ahead in terms of national level policy formulation, with a framework developed and adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2015 and subsequently adapted and developed. However, political instability affected a concrete translation of this strategy in a monitored work-plan, especially since no targeted funding was provided for its implementation.

A similar push for internationalization in the two countries was generated by internal structural drivers: rural/urban (Romania) versus coastal/inland (Portugal) divides,

resource scarcity due to decreasing public investment and demographic downturn, as well as a noticeable impact generated by the 2009/2009 financial crisis. However, different academic traditions and history may have had an impact on the potential for internationalization at the institutional level. The oldest university in Portugal, the University of Coimbra was founded in 1290, while the oldest university in Romania, the University of Iasi was set-up in 1860. Since those moments, the development of the two countries in terms of geographical spread, political influence and economic prowess influenced the ability to attract and retain both national and foreign students. Both countries have a large number of their foreign students coming from territories in which Portuguese and Romanian are spoken, which has something to say about the influence of foreign policy and of language proficiency of the academia over internationalization policies. Also, in the early 2000s, both countries were heavily influenced by the structural changes of the Bologna Process and the EU policies (modernization of higher education agenda, Erasmus and Erasmus+, research cooperation etc.).

Despite their different historical evolution, many traits are common to the two countries, which share their relative peripheric position in the global internationalization of higher education arena. Firstly, both systems retain numerous obstacles related to administrative red tape, foreign language barriers (especially at the level of administrative and teaching staff), financial support for internationalization, internal resistance. Importantly, the non-alignment of discourse and action is very present in the perception of the university leadership (e.g. in terms of immigration procedures—despite a formal focus on attracting international students, the number of student visa requests being refused is still high in areas declared as important recruitment markets).

A key role of individual policy entrepreneurs can be observed in both cases, especially when talking about the actors who pushed the internationalization agenda ahead. They were generally educated abroad via programs such as Fulbright, socialized in European structures and have changed multiple hats, from rectors to decision-makers and from NGO leaders to ministers. Historical links remain of great significance for the two countries, with clear national policies favoring academic links and inward mobility related with territories in which the same language is spoken or that were in the same political alliance at some point in time (Moldova and east of the Iron Curtain for Romania and the CPLP countries for Portugal).

Despite their different trajectory and the diverse points in time when the transition from autocratic regimes to democracy began, as well as despite the different availability of EU funds for higher education projects (due to different EU accession years), Romania and Portugal share similar selling points when marketing HEIs or the entire national higher education system abroad. These include EU membership, safety, quality of life, low cost of living, tourist attractions/ lifestyle, with the extra language highlight for Portugal. This can be interpreted as a sign of the emergence of a European brand for higher education marketing, despite modest pan-European efforts in this sense.

There is an interesting comparison to be made regarding the way in which the diffusion of international norms happens in the context of transitions from differ-

ent ideological totalitarian regimes. A neo-liberal and marketization logic is quite common in the way in which internationalization of higher education is perceived and even mainstreamed in various higher education systems. Romania and Portugal are no exception, and the race for more international, fee-paying students and for a better place in international rankings is a clear indication. This shows that there is less current ideological underpinning of internationalization efforts than it could have been expected, in light of the distinct history of the two countries.

However, there is a discussion to be had regarding the usefulness of using "big player" tactics when a higher education system is in fact more suited for a "niche" strategy for internationalization. Trying to attract as many international degree-seeking students as possible in order to boost your international standing and to offset the depleted university budget is perhaps not the best strategy, especially if the overall goal of the higher education system is to help in reducing regional divides or to offset shortages in key sectors such as health. Furthermore, in terms of higher education marketing, it is clear that not all countries can or should successfully target China or South-East Asia since strong links between higher education systems are hard to build and promising when they already exist.

To sum up, both Romania and Portugal have been making recent efforts to boost the international profile of their higher education systems and institutions. State and university efforts seem to converge, and the drivers that push the internationalization agenda are less different than what could have been expected from the experience of countries with a more visible profile in the global higher education market. With this in mind, more attention could be paid to what constitutes a national internationalization strategy and whether all types of higher education systems actually need a coordinated internationalization effort in order to support university efforts.

Interviews

Interview 1: Ministry official in Romania 1998–2000, conducted on 29.03.2013.

Interview 2: Ministry official 1991–1992 in Romania, member of the Presidential Commission on Education and Romanian BFUG representative, conducted on 03.04.2013

Interview 3: Quality assurance agency official in Portugal, conducted on 14.06.2019

Interview 4: Adviser to the President on Education and Research in Portugal, conducted on 12.06.2019.

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Regional Mobility in Europe: The Importance of CEEPUS Based on Hungarian Evidence

Peter Holicza

1 Introduction

The CEEPUS program is currently in its third phase since it was launched in 1993. The program was initiated in Austria, and the founding contract was signed in Hungary. At that time, there were only 6 countries participating: Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Today, 16 countries participate in CEEPUS as beneficiaries of institutional networking, professional projects and inter-institutional mobility, joint research and degree programs (CEEPUS 2019). The program is based on networks established by faculties or departments of higher education institutions. The network has one coordinator, and the other institutions are partners. Several institutions from one country can participate in the same cooperation—but at least three institutions from three countries are required to form a network. These networks are thematic collaborations focusing on a specific professional topic of their choice—for example, a discipline-focused or interdisciplinary approach, joint training, joint research, publications (Scheck et al. 2015). In the first phase (1995 to 2004), the focus was on cooperation and recognition contributing to the formation of the European Higher Education Area, while the next two phases (2005 to 2010 and 2011 to 2019—present) aimed to focus on content development beyond partnerships. In the academic year 2005/2006, the program supported 35 professional networks and that number increased to 80 by 2019/2020. Of the number of coordinated networks that were selected for support over the last 15 years, Austria (174), Poland (113) and Romania (109) are having the most. Hungary ranks 5th in this list with a total of 90 coordinated projects. With regard to mobility, until the current academic year, 24,940 student mobilities have been completed (Schuch 2019). However, there are notable differences among countries by the sending and receiving rates. Austria and Slovenia tend to be receiving countries, while Serbia, Croatia and Poland tend to send most of the students and professors abroad. In the Hungarian case, the ratio is nearly balanced (TPF 2019a).

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In addition to student mobility, the CEEPUS also supports study visits for 20,010 during the same period. In addition, there are 6,500 so-called free-movers, i.e. mobilities between higher education institutions in CEEPUS countries, independently of their networks (TPF 2019a).

Beyond mobility numbers, the program places a strong emphasis on quality and long-term achievements as well. The CEEPUS Ministers' Prize was established in 2001 to recognize the best performing networks. It has been awarded annually since 2002—Hungary won 8 times, Austria 4, Romania 3, Poland 2, Slovakia and Slovenia 1 time—based on their excellency, being operational for at least 3 years, utilization rate and well-allocated resources (Schuch 2019).

2 CEEPUS in Hungary

The program was coordinated by the Ministry of Education until 1997 when the Hungarian CEEPUS Office was established within the Tempus Public Foundation. As a partner, the Ministry of Education provides the financial support for the program each year. According to Hungarian CEEPUS Office data, the utilization of the incoming quotas (the program finances the incomers and the amount of support is defined by mobility months) draws a positive and progressing picture. Assuming the rates of Fig. 1 below, the CEEPUS program is very efficient in utilizing the available domestic funds, with minimal residual funds. There is little difference between the available and the used quotas: the lowest utilization rate was 88% 10 years ago compared to 96% in recent years (TPF 2019a).

An important feature of the program is that the scholarship for incoming participants is provided by the host country. Its amount varies from country to country, Hungary is among the highest contributors (4th) for Bachelor, Master and PhD students. Pro-
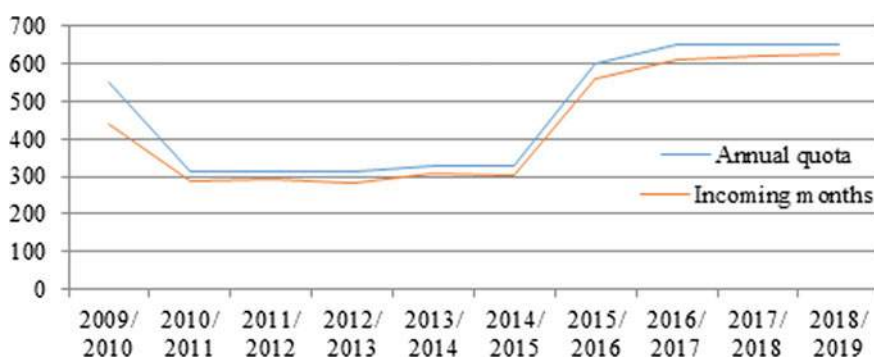

Fig. 1 Utilization of Hungarian CEEPUS quotas (months) *Source* Hungarian CEEPUS Office data

fessors are usually given higher grants; Hungary is in the middle position on this scale (8th place).

In terms of the number of networks, a constant increase can be observed. Hungarian participation is relatively high, though not constant—between 53 and 62 in recent years. In contrast, the number of Hungarian-led networks is not increasing—apart from a few years when it reached 9. There are currently 4–5 Hungarian-coordinated networks. In other words, Hungarians are more likely to be partners in a network (Uszkai and Dános 2014).

Including free-mover mobilities, 26 (approx. 40%) of the Hungarian higher education institutions (HEI) are involved, this number has not increased significantly in recent years. In contrast, the vast majority is active in the Erasmus+ program: 45–50 institutions apply for mobility grants each year. Considering the number of faculties and departments participating in CEEPUS, the growth is more evident as it increased from 24 (in 2005–2006) to 120 that it currently counts (TPF 2019a).

2.1 Incoming Mobility

Based on the data provided by the Hungarian CEEPUS Office, during the last 10 years (2009/10 to 2018/19), most of the students came from Romania, Poland and Slovakia—Erasmus+ Program Countries—followed by Serbia as Partner Country (since 2019, Serbia is Program Country as well). Focusing on the Partner Countries, a significant increase is visible mostly on the arrivals from Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia (TPF 2019a).

The number of participants increased evidently in 2015 when the quota almost doubled compared to the previous year. The number of incoming professors and the number of funded short-term student mobility months increased, while the length of long-term student mobilities did not increase significantly. In other words, one of the attractive features of the CEEPUS program is the flexibility in terms of duration: it is not mandatory to spend a full semester at the partner university, shorter study periods are an option as well. The average length of stay is nearly the same for the short-term students and teaching staff—nearly 1 month, while the long-term student mobility varies between 4–5 months. The trend of teaching staff mobility to Hungary is in line with the program level, where the involvement of professors and senior researchers is increasing, approaching the student mobility numbers (Schuch 2019).

2.2 Outgoing Mobility

There are fewer statistics available on outgoing mobility, as in the CEEPUS program, the host country finances the stay. Therefore, the number of students and professors can be indicative instead of the financed months spent abroad. Similarly

to the incoming mobility, there has been a shift towards teaching staff mobility over the last 10 years with fewer students travelling for long term mobilities.

The target countries of students and professors are significantly different. While a quarter of professors chose Romanian institutions, more than a third of students travelled to Austria. The second most popular teaching destination is Slovakia, where 20% of the professors travel to. As for the students, Poland is the second favourite option. Looking at the institutions, most of the students target the University of Vienna, the Babes-Bolyai University and the University of Ljubljana; while most of the professors tend to visit Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Babes-Bolyai University and thirdly the Technical University of Kosice (TPF 2019a).

Comparing the numbers, it is evident that Austria is a very popular destination for Hungarian students (675), but only a small part (89) of Austrian students went to Hungary. This ratio is balanced with Poland, where the Polish student participants account for (279), and the Hungarians for 300.

Most of the visiting professors arrive from Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Poland. The Western-Balkan States show relatively low, but increasing statistics. The CEE-PUS participation did not suffer any decrease in mobility numbers when these countries became Erasmus+ Partner Countries (TPF 2019a).

3   The Effects of CEEPUS in Hungary

Below, the survey and focus groups interview results are presented and elaborated on. As part of this evaluation study, a survey has been designed and delivered to 114 Hungarian network coordinators in September, 2019. Besides the demographic variables, it included 18 multiple-choice, 5-point Likert-scale and open-end questions overall to better understand the effects of the program, future implications and possibilities for improvement. Out of the total sample, 41 responds are considered complete and are included in the analysis. This sample represents 22 different universities and colleges, where the respondents have at least 5 to 10 years of experience as coordinators, and the vast majority is highly experienced with up to 20 years in the program.

The results show that there are similar reasons for participants' motivation for student and professor mobility, regardless of the destination country. The number one factor of participation in CEEPUS is the shorter mobility options, second is the interest in the (professional) topic of the particular network, and thirdly the destination country. These features make the program the most attractive for participants (over other ones that do not have such features and do not provide such opportunities).

As a result of mobility, students' skills are enhanced equally towards expanded professional knowledge, improved language skills, intercultural competences and new relations. Professors mention firstly new relations thanks to CEEPUS participation, then getting to know the higher education system and good practices of other countries. Thirdly, they value the development of professional skills and intercultural

competences. These results are in line with the international literature of CEEPUS mobility (Javorova 2013; Scheck et al. 2015; Welzer et al. 2017).

On Liker-scales, respondents evaluated the outcomes of CEEPUS, where the internationalization of Hungarian higher education was rated the most important contribution of the program. Secondly, its regional aspect is rather an advantage than disadvantage, as the program significantly contributes to international recognition of the Hungarian scientific sphere (publications, materials, references etc.) and facilitates professional collaboration among neighbouring countries and other member states in the CEE region. Considering the related achievements, first of all, the participants built trust, organized and realized short-term mobilities; and thirdly, begun to operate inter-institutional networks successfully.

The development, modernization of curricula, the creation of joint study materials and the issuance of joint diplomas received the least points on this scale. Administrative obstacles are likely to play a role in these low grades as well, however, it is important to mention that in half of the cases, the cooperation failed to contribute to significant achievements on the particular focus area. There is a lot to improve in the dissemination practices as well. Other than inner reports and summaries on the university webpages, the achievements do not get notable or significant visibility.

As the Central CEEPUS Office tries to analyze in-depth the possibilities of furthering the program to other education and research & development areas (Horizon2020, Marie Curie, COST, Erasmus+), a related question was addressed in this survey as well. The answers were in line with the preliminary assumption that the above-mentioned programs, with the exception of Erasmus+, do not provide significant opportunities for Hungarian CEEPUS network members to further develop their results. Only three institutions indicated that the results are part of Horizon2020 projects, Marie Curie program was not referred by any institution, the COST program was cited once. The Visegrád Fund came up at three institutions, while domestic projects seem to be more relevant for sixteen of them. The results of the networks remained primarily within the institution which may also be influenced by the fact that the number of people working on the network from the Hungarian side was "less than five persons" (28). Six respondents indicated that they are working alone on the network at home, and only seven indicated a larger option with 6–10 people. This implies limitations and more difficult situation to step up from a small group size. These answers are in line with the official data of the National Agency, as most of the Hungarian networks have 6–10 partners.

For the program features to be improved, only two proposals received clear support from respondents: more dynamically growing monthly quotas (23) and providing further shorter mobility opportunities (23). No additional options were claimed by respondents even if the alignment with the focus area is not complete (see above). The definition of a new focus area is not supported (39). Similarly, the focus on innovation was rejected (36), involvement of new target groups is not supported either (25). It is notable that the focus group interview led to opposite results in some cases, such as inclusivity—the involvement of new target groups and the introduction of longer-term mobility opportunities.

Without the continuation of the CEEPUS program (after 2025), most of the networks could keep working only partly (17), but 13 not at all, according to the survey. Only one institution could manage the same routines and practices without the program, while 10 (25%) could not answer the question. The vast majority (30 of them) could not continue the short-term student mobilities, especially with the Balkan States—that is one of the most appreciated opportunities that CEEPUS provides. This puts in question the sustainability of the networks without CEEPUS support.

3.1 Focus Group Interview Results—SWOT Analysis

Based on the questionnaire, a focus group interview was conducted with the network and institutional coordinators of the participating universities. It focused on three main topics: preparing a SWOT analysis of the CEEPUS program, identifying the most popular characteristics—the unique selling point of the program (OPERA method employed), and finally collecting the good practices and added value of program participation on institutional or faculty level. As the participants overlapped with the questionnaire respondents, focus group discussions serve to refine, rather than to validate the results. Accordingly, the analysis led to the following observations.

The strengths of the CEEPUS program are:

– the variety of mobility and professional opportunities combined with flexible periods;
– its members having a common or similar historical and cultural background, therefore they understand each other easily;
– the regional character and geographical proximity, strengthening Central European linguistic relations;
– a diverse range of partners beyond EU countries;
– the free-mover option;
– the possibility to involve many partners, even external industrial ones (as Silent Partners);
– joint activities such as PhD co-supervision and training;
– the ease of application and administration: clear deadlines, easy cooperation with the office and the network.

Despite the special opportunities and positive experiences, several weaknesses have been mentioned:

– Coordinators dislike the annual requirement for application, which makes longer-term planning difficult and there is dissatisfaction in terms of the scholarship rates. In many countries, it is too low but often requires high administrative burdens. These administrative practices and rules vary from country to country—which are usually cumbersome and bureaucratic.

- Payments are often delayed. In addition, the new system (new Traffic Sheet) makes it difficult to use.
- The application deadlines and administrative obligations are not well aligned with the typical schedule of higher education system (exam periods, breaks, summer break).
- There is no support for administrative tasks, therefore some of the coordinators are trying to "save money" elsewhere, unable to travel to meetings.
- Quota: network growth demand versus available quota. For larger and more effective networks, monthly quotas per institution are too low. If there is more than one partner from one country in a network, they will become competitors in some way.
- Compared to other programs: they are better known (e.g. Erasmus+) due to better promotion, higher scholarship rates and, in some cases, simpler administrative procedures.
- Some minimum quality requirements are missing: in the case of rejection of mobility applications, there is no explanation provided in some countries. The same network and action plan can be rejected in one year, while it received support in previous years.

The listed opportunities start with travel expenses provided, the introduction of staff mobility as a new target group, better branding, and making better use of the CEEPUS brand. In line with the missing feature above, a budget for organizational/administrative costs would be an uptake not only on the Hungarian but on international level as well (Schuch 2019).

Threats mentioned are different administrative requirements from country to country, dissatisfaction with the use of the new Traffic Sheet, bureaucratic burdens that originated from the annual application, more competitive rival programs such as Erasmus+ Credit Mobility and Campus Mundi.

4 Summary

Concluding the program features and experience of network coordinators, CEEPUS offers more and different kinds of opportunities for professional cooperation in the CEE and Western-Balkan Region than the Erasmus+ Program. The program is a good and more flexible starting point for a less experienced faculty, department, coordinator or student. It supports the internationalization of higher education institutions, in particular those not yet participating in Erasmus+ or Partner Countries. The thematic networks come from bottom-up initiatives and work on specific topics that they define and are specialized on. CEEPUS allows easier and more informal collaboration even with external partners such as industrial actors (Javorova 2013), which is unique among mobility programs. Networks are not necessarily linked to current national or international education policy priorities (e.g. innovation, STEM areas), but they highly contribute to the preservation of historical, cultural and linguistic heritage (Welzer et al. 2017), not to mention some of the shared principles with the

Danube Strategy or the Visegrád Group (Vesković 2012; Zotti 2017). The regional aspect is mentioned several times on different platforms as a definite advantage of the program, especially for the non-EU countries where less international funds and scholarships are available.

For students, the "risk" of participating in CEEPUS is low—the shorter mobility periods are available and attractive on entry level or to the ones who are discouraged from staying abroad for a whole semester (at first). Credit recognition, administration problems and disadvantages in the home studies during the mobility are not common. The incoming mobility to Hungary is growing, the available quota was utilized at 96% in the last academic year. Most of the foreign students come from Romania and Poland; among Hungarian students, Austria is the most favourable, followed by Poland. Important to note that participation from the Western-Balkan States is increasing as well, the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility did not affect it negatively (as pull factor) (Jovanovska et al. 2018; Schuch 2019).

Most of the Hungarian networks would suffer significant loss without CEEPUS in the future; only one institution would be ready to continue its network operations the same way. It is in line with the Croatian research results, where ca. 30% of the coordinators would not be able to continue their current CEEPUS activities through other mobility programs or projects after 2025. Approx. 60% of them stated that only to a smaller extent or partly they could keep up their related activities. Due to these facts and the Hungarian achievements in the program, it is inevitable that CEEPUS is a change-maker in the region (TPF 2019b).

5   Recommendations

Along this 25 years of operation, the programme expanded and achieved a lot, but to keep it potential and attractive in the future, several improvements are needed. First of all, visibility and recognition to its special features that make it different from other mobility schemes (Jovanovska et al. 2018), especially the Erasmus+. Highlight and communicate the outstanding multilateral cooperation opportunities and relatively easy availability of non-EU state partnerships and mobilities. It is in line with the suggestions of the international impact study conducted by Scheck et al. (2015).

There is a strong demand for new, modern and user-friendly online platforms that begin with the main webpage of the program. Similarly to the Erasmus+, creative and attractive infographics would prove and promote the effects of CEEPUS mobility, especially in relation to those member states where the "big brother" is less present (yet).

As the coordinators suggest, financial support for administration as well as the involvement of staff mobility would be necessary and, at the same time, it would attract those institutions that are not participating in the programme. More inclusive strategy and targeted approach would enable the programme to keep up with high utilization of national quotas even when the competition is increasing with other mobility programs. The competitiveness would increase if the impressive participa-

tion rates were supported with new (minimum) quality standards for more sustainable projects and effective program management.

As this research shows, in line with the international literature review (Scheck et al. 2019), the key of success is the flexibility and short-term mobility option, opportunities to organize and participate in summer universities, joint trainings, etc. that other programs do not support. In order to keep these strong pull-factors, the administrative burdens should not make any barriers in the host countries, where no common practices and program management standards are adopted. The number of monthly scholarships should be revised as well; participants aspire for higher rates—especially in the Balkan States, where it is the lowest currently. Considering the EU enlargement policy, it would be of great importance to increase their activities and involvement in the European higher education practices (Bošnjović and Trivun 2013; TPF 2019b). Concluding the role of CEEPUS, it is not an alternative program to Erasmus+ but complementary that allows for additional and different opportunities for regional collaboration.

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Drivers for Internationalization in Georgian Higher Education

Pusa Nastase

This research investigates the main drivers for the integration of international elements in the Georgian higher education. The internationalization of higher education in many regions of the world has been widely documented in the past three decades. As often noted, internationalization is somewhat of a one-size-fits-all term used to describe diverse processes and programs including: "[student and faculty] mobility, mutual influence of higher education systems, and internationalization of the substance of teaching and learning to institutional strategies, knowledge transfer, cooperation and competition, and national and supranational policies" (Kehm and Teichler 2007). More recently, internationalization has been defined as "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (de Wit et al. 2015).

In Europe, internationalization has been incrementally adopted for a few decades now, starting in the 1980s. At macro level, internationalization programs served both economic and political purposes. For instance, student mobilities helped the EU economy by preparing European students to work in other member countries and make the EU economy more global competitive. Other initiatives (such as TEMPUS) achieved the political goals of diminishing the gap between the new candidate countries and older Member States.[1] The expansion led by internationalization started to be questioned once the unintended consequences of this process became obvious: the commercialization of research, diploma and accreditation mills and the impact of international rankings on institutions (Knight 2003). Confirming the predictions of the earlier warning signs, Altbach and de Wit (2018) reflected more recently that "the unlimited growth of internationalization of all kinds—including massive global student mobility, the expansion of branch campuses, franchised and joint degrees, the use of English as a language for teaching and research worldwide, and many

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[1] http://internacional.ipvc.pt/sites/default/files/Tempus%4020%20-%20A%20Retrospective%20of%20the%20Tempus%20Programme%20over%20the%20Past%2020%20Years.pdf.

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other elements—appears to have come to a rather abrupt end, especially in Europe and North America" (p. 2).

Outside the EU, Georgia has also placed internalization high on the national higher education agenda. While for other EU members internationalization has arguably a financial component (due to the considerable EU funding available for research in particular) this is less so in the case of Georgia, which has limited access to EU funding. This study explores the main drivers of internationalization in Georgian higher education with a view of finding out why it is a national priority at the same time when many other countries experience a reverse of internationalization policies.

1 Internationalization in Georgian Higher Education

The internationalization agenda in Georgia has been promoted for the past several years as an effort to align with Western higher education and to overcome the challenges from the past. Some of these challenges were related to the Soviet time when universities did not train students to be civic-minded but to work in the planned economy (Sharvashidze 2005), with the interrupted tradition of teaching social sciences and the different organization of doctoral studies cycle (Kovács 2014). Some other challenges have to do with the economic difficulties of the 1990s when the severe underfunding of universities resulted in an underperforming higher education sector that had difficulties attracting good faculty and lacked the facilities needed for students. The so-called Rose Revolution of 2003 reversed this course. President Saakashvili declared that higher education needed change and described efforts to stem corruption and increase the transparency of the sector from admission exams to faculty appointments (2006). Just like in the case of Armenia (Matei et al. 2013) the *rapprochement* to the EU was viewed as a priority for the country, and higher education was considered as a tool to achieve this goal.

A major step that confirmed the "European" trajectory and the Saakashvili government's educational reform initiatives (Jawad 2005) was made in 2005 when the enlargement of EHEA towards the East (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) took place. In the beginning, the motivation of European Partnership countries for joining the Bologna Process was used either to increase EU integration or to benefit from the financial advantages in the field of higher education (Toderas and Stavaru 2018). As noted by Dobbins and Khachatryan in the case of Eastern Partnership countries, the Bologna Process is a mechanism which has a convergence-promoting force (2015).

In later years though, Georgia, in particular, has expressed the intention to join EU and made efforts to further bridge the gap in higher education. In June 2019, the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) Committee concluded that the Georgian National Center for Education Quality NCEQE complies substantially with the ESG as a whole and approved the application for inclusion on the Register valid until 2024. Georgia becomes one of the two Eastern Partnership countries (after

Armenia) to join EQAR, the rest of the agencies from Eastern Partnership countries are only affiliated.

Another tool to bridge the gap with the EU countries has been through the use of mobilities. The official statistics of the European Commission show a significant raise in the number of Erasmus mobilities: Georgian students and staff moving to Europe between 2015 and 2018 totalled 3613, increasing steadily between 695 in 2015 to 1109 in 2018. The total number of students and staff moving to Georgia on an Erasmus mobility was of 1973 for the same period, with a significant increase from 2015 (190) to 2019 (699)—data from the official statistics of the European Commission. Overall Georgia has attracted 24% of the total budget for international credit mobilities available for Eastern Partnership countries, more than their regional neighbours Azerbaijan (8%) and Armenia (12%) combined.[2]

With regard to the foreign students pursuing degrees in Georgia, data provided by the Ministry shows in 2019 a number of 12945 foreign students (an increase from 9439 in 2017)[3] with the majority of them coming from India (6820 in 2019, an increase from 2895 recorded in 2017), followed by Azerbaijan (1475), Iran (546), Iraq (544), Israel (532) and Nigeria (523).

Georgian students have also pursued degrees abroad funded by using their own resources and through state scholarships. In 2014, the International Education Center was set up with the purpose of supporting young Georgian in studying abroad. The Center has awarded over 500 scholarships to study in 26 countries, with the most students opting for the U.S.A. (88 fellows), the U.K. (75 fellows), Hungary (75 fellows) and France (40 fellows)[4] under the understanding that scholarship recipients will return to work in Georgia after graduating. Interestingly, even before this funding scheme produced graduates, it was shown that Georgians studying abroad were returning in high numbers. A comparative study on the Georgian and Moldovan alumni of foreign universities (Campbell 2016) estimated that 80–90% of Georgians return to live and work in their home country (almost double than in Moldova) which increases the pool of candidates for faculty positions and further bridge the gap with their Western counterparts. Alumni are incentivized to return also by programs designed to support their re-integration such as the one run by the German development agency GIZ; the local GIZ office in Georgia helps graduates of German universities to identify suitable jobs and tops up their wages for 2 years if they choose to work in the public or non-profit sectors.

Academic positions for returnees can be found not only in state universities but also in private ones which have more flexibility to offer better salaries. One of the new institutions, which is perhaps symbolic for the drive to internationalize, is the establishment in 2014 of the Tbilisi campus of San Diego State University, offer-

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[2]https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/country-factsheet-georgia_en, consulted January 20, 2020.

[3]According to official data obtained for this study from the Ministry of Education—actualized for November 2019.

[4]http://iec.gov.ge/en-us/About-us/Statistics Consulted January 10, 2020.

ing undergraduate degrees in several engineering fields to Georgian and foreigner students with support from the US-funded Millennium Fund.

However, while the pace and achievements are incontestable, there are also voices drawing attention to the fact that the Bologna-inspired reforms were introduced in order to gain international recognition but have triggered in fact only a symbolic system-change without deep transformation. Building on institutionalism theories (Mayer and Rowan 1977) Jibladze (2017) -herself one of the alumni returning to Georgia with foreign degrees, has noted that the changes of the higher education system were, in fact, less transformative and that they instead created decoupled institutions. She describes institutions having the appearance of their Western counterparts while holding onto a path- dependent core, similar to impressions collected in other former communist countries (see Nastase 2015).

To sum up, significant reforms were adopted in Georgian higher education, leading to increased transparency, less corruption and diversification of higher education sector. While certain voices have raised warnings about some of these changes being rather cosmetic than systemic, there are undeniable changes in the Georgian education landscape. In this context, the next sections will focus on what drives internationalization and how is it linked to the changes so far and with Georgia's aspirations as a country. research (Campbell and Gorgodze 2016) found that[5] the three main engines driving internationalization efforts in the country were percived to be (1) western influences, (2) national university accreditation processes, and (3) faculty and students returning from abroad. In this study I try to see whether the political will and the funding allocated changed this perception and to bring additional perspectives on internationalisation in universities outside the capital.

2   Research Design

Following Knight (2004) suggestion to investigate internationalization looking both at the top process (national and institutional) and the bottom (institutional and individual), interviews were conducted with 19 higher education professionals including a former Deputy Minister, the Rector of Georgia's largest university from the capital, the Deputy Rector from one of the largest universities outside the capital (in the Adjara region), a high ranking leader from San Diego University Georgia, a Head of Department from the Ministry of Education, a high ranking official from the International Education Center (the state agency in charge with managing hundreds of scholarships for Georgian students studying abroad), two senior staff members from International Offices in two separate universities, an official from the GIZ-Georgia (the German agency for international development) and ten faculty at all levels of seniority in four of the largest universities. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2018 and 2019, in English, in person (9/19) and by Skype (10/19). The

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[5]According to 18 respondents from Georgian universities and governmental agencies (instructors, administrators, and managers of programs related to internationalization).

transcripts of interviews were sent to the interviewees for their approval. The interviewees were asked what drives the internationalization of Georgian education in their opinion, and what evidence is there to support their view. Most of the participants at institutional level offered both the institutional perspective on internationalization and their personal one—either as staff member or as faculty.

Additionally, Ministry of Education documents and relevant websites were reviewed, among them the *Study in Georgia* program website and universities' webpages to gather and corroborate information.

3   Key Findings

The interviewees were asked to reflect on the drivers for internationalization and to estimate their importance and urgency as seen from their own perspective as policy-makers, faculty or officials. They were also asked to provide as much as possible evidence substantiating their views. The picture they provided was relatively uniform with most of them agreeing on a limited number of drivers as outlined below.

Higher Education as a Tool for Political Agenda

Most participants indicated as the main driver for internationalization the political will for alignment with Western nations and particularly with the European Union. The former Minister of Education noted *that internationalization of education is seen as a gateway to EU. For this reason the current Minister of Education*[6] *has made the statement in a meeting with EU Commissioner Navracsics that Georgia aims at becoming Erasmus Program Country in the future and not just Erasmus Partner Country as it is now. At this stage the experts from both parts (Georgia -EU) are working on a timetable and conditions to be met for this to happen.* Other interviewees noted that the desire to get closer to the EU is only logical *because this is where we belong* (International office staff member) and *what else is there for us, this is the logical path* (faculty member)?

Part of this national narrative is the lack of academic ties with Russia, the former colleagues and partners for many years, whose language many Georgian academics still speak (although this is no longer the case with younger generations). The political factor was invariably quoted as the main reason for the lack of formal ties with Russian institutions. Both faculty and staff agreed that beyond the political stance the Georgian society has a lack of trust in Russia due to the occupation of some Georgian territories, and initiating formal relations with Russian partners might create tensions in society and reflect poorly on universities. One staff member noted that *collaboration exists in multi-lateral formats but not bilateral because bilateral relations need to be both ways: for Georgians is difficult to go to Russia (due to Russian visa) and they do not feel that good there.* Additionally, a faculty member noted that *social*

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[6]In November 10, 2019.

sciences are much politicized in Russia and it makes sense to engage with partners that are serious about real research.

Nevertheless, Georgia's desire to increase ties with the EU affects its internationalization efforts due to conflicting restrictions from areas other than higher education: for instance, in order to align with EU standards in the field of immigration and border control, many university applicants from countries like Libya, Nigeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia experienced visa problems, and a high number was not able to attend the university because their visa application was turned down. As the representative from the San Diego State University (SDSU) in Georgia noted: *many families in countries like Nigeria or Libya are looking for a safe country with affordable education to send their children too and Georgia has a lot to offer and it is very attractive for them. But the visa requirements also depend on Georgia's EU aspirations and the criteria they need to meet in this regard, so they walk a tight line that does not depend entirely on them.*

Moreover, the immigration-related requirements imposed by EU might affect Georgia's aspiration to become a regional hub. The former Deputy Minister noted that *we not only want to be close to EU, but to maintain good relations with the regional neighbours and to become a regional hub for higher education but not only. We cultivate relations with countries further afield in Asia and Africa with the same intentions of attracting them as higher education clients and partners in other fields.*

3.1   Higher Education as an Export Product

Another driver given by many participants as being very important is the financial aspect. This has two major components: the desire to attract EU funding for projects and mobilities and the income brought by foreign students paying high fees.

First, all participants to the study (with one exception) mentioned the severe underfunding from the not so distant past, and the effects it had on the universities. The SDSU official noted that *Georgian universities were hit very hard by the underfunding from the past, particularly in STEM fields where investment is needed to keep up. Their laboratories and facilities mandatory for science disciplines were hit the hardest.* A faculty member also noted that going to *conferences abroad or accessing journals was very difficult, and it still is for some universities that are smaller and less financially stable.* Another faculty member reflected that *we absolutely need to be part of EU projects, especially large ones that expose us to good partners because funding for research is still very limited in Georgia.* Yet another faculty member noted that *being part of the EU projects allows us to have conditions similar to those in EU countries, so it bridges the gap in terms of research quality … at our department getting EU funded projects is a priority. Very often they come with enormous bureaucracy but they are still worth it because we would not be able to cover many activities from own sources.*

The rector I interviewed noted that for his comprehensive university the income from international students does not make a big impact, but *in medical schools they*

pay more than 3 times higher tuition fees than local students (7000+ Lari vs. 2250 Lari for domestic students). The same view was shared by the official from the SDSU who noted that foreign students pay fees that are also used to subsidize Georgian students' studies. One faculty member noted that *we are way cheaper than many Western universities, but still the income foreign students bring can have an impact. This is why we need to increase the quality not only of what happens in the classroom but also of facilities.* The Rector also indicated that his institution *is currently building dormitories with pools, sport facilities and all technology expected. They expected that by attracting international students the tuition fee will help pay for the facilities in the longer term.*

The recruitment of foreign students has been made a priority in 2004 through a governmental program titled *Study in Georgia.* The website lists (9 November 2019) 109 English language programs (55 undergraduate, 43 Masters and 11 doctoral programs) and 7 Russian language programs at institutions throughout Georgia but no opportunities for scholarships (although institutions like International School of Economics have available a limited number of merit- based scholarships). The program was launched with great expectations, but it seems to have achieved less than initially planned, partially because of the unfit strategy for recruitment and partially due to limited coordination between Ministry and universities. The official from International Education Center noted that *some 20 coordinators were sent around the world to recruit students, but this strategy did not pay off. They could try helping universities to recruit rather than have external agents recruit on behalf of universities.*

Despite challenges, the rector interviewed mentioned *that the number of international students are currently as high as 13000 and increasing despite challenges which forces Georgia to invest in education to stay competitive because this is a market that rewards good universities with good reputations and international recognition.*

3.2 Quality Enhancement Benefitting Local Students

A third driver seems to be the desire to offer degrees recognized for quality education for Georgian students, for them to be competitive and adaptable. The vice-rector from the capital stressed that the increase in quality is a governmental priority because *quality pays for itself; when you offer quality, everybody wants to be partner with you, and students come to you.* The rector also stressed that *internationalization is not a purpose in itself, in a vacuum, it is really a tool to increase quality through EU funding and academic exchange.* He also mentioned that *quality needs to be recognized, and this is why Georgia got into EQAR and is making everything possible to achieve recognition.* He mentioned multiple efforts made by his and other universities to invite colleagues in Georgia, to increase the visibility of Georgian education and to be on the map of quality education, such as the next meeting of the International Association of University Presidents, which will take place in Georgia.

For quality to be recognized, the Georgian universities are also taking other steps: two programs at Tbilisi State University received the visit of an accreditation team from the United States in November 2019. The university also prepares to invite the European University Association (EUA) for an institutional visit. The Medical University made efforts to be part of the World Federation of Medical Education (linked with WHO) and achieved a good step towards increasing reputation and recognition of the Georgian medical degrees.

All participants (with two exceptions) mentioned internationalization as a key development towards going up in international university rankings. The former Deputy Minister noted that *a sign of the internationalization of Georgian higher education is the presence of Georgian universities in rankings (THE and Shanghai) while other universities from Caucasus countries were absent*. To increase their research output and prepare their students for research, one faculty member stated that in her university the majority of faculty desires to be part of internationalization and *they voted that doctoral students need to have publications in English in good journals even if this rule is tough for the professors too (the university will try to help them in identifying journals and translating)*.

3.3   Restauration of Past Traditions

A fourth driver mentioned by all participants was Georgia's pre-Soviet tradition of having an elite educated abroad. Most participants view the current drive for internationalization as a way of returning to the traditional cosmopolitan nature of Georgian academics as set up by the founding fathers of local universities. *The founder of our school was educated abroad both in Russia and Germany, and many previous scholars were educated in both Russia and Europe (France, Germany). Not only university professors but Georgian cultural elite were always educated abroad and skilled in [foreign] languages. For instance, in 1918 when the first university was established* [now Tbilisi State University], *all the professors invited to teach were educated in European universities. After the sovietization, all professors with foreign education were not really well accepted, and this is where the tradition broke*. Other interviewees mentioned that as soon as it was possible, in the 1980s actually, the universities started to send faculty abroad: *re-internationalization in Georgia started in 1988 mostly through students going to study abroad when the first scholarships were offered to students from Georgia* (IEC official). A faculty member from a social science department also recounted that: *In the late 70s it became again possible to send some students abroad but in limited numbers*. From their department, they could send students in the 80s in universities from the socialist camp and other non-Western parts. In the 80s, the first ethnographer was sent to India. Then they were allowed to go to Poland, and other socialist states. But even those countries were limited in terms of what they could offer because they were not at the forefront of disciplinary development.

3.4 Professional Development of Faculty

A fifth driver refers to the desire of faculty to catch up with the trends in their fields, particularly in social sciences which have been politicized or, in some cases (psychology, sociology), even removed from the curriculum. The same senior faculty member describing the early scholarships available in the 1980s reflected that *because in the soviet past many things were interrupted, the methodological and content development in social sciences, it is important to catch up. I have been trying constantly to catch up because the time we lost was tragic; there are so many new developments, new methods, we have to constantly try to catch up and keep up.*

A more junior faculty member noted that *I know there was a gap in us being part of the larger academic world, but I think it has been bridged significantly. I personally feel that I am part of the larger academic world and have the duty to keep up, not to lag behind, and I can do that best through partnerships.*

3.5 Sense of Duty Towards Students

A sixth driver mentioned by several senior faculty was the duty to offer opportunities they had in the 1990s and 2000s to the students. *The state could not fund us 15 years ago, but there were scholars exchange program (ISET/RESET)* offered by *Open Society Foundation which then supported the creation of new networks: a project called Building Anthropology in Eurasia created a network that still continues and is very useful to this day. These projects changed the world for scholars...they were important for internationalization because it gave Georgian scholars access to top experts in their field. In one project, Harvard University was involved and really top scholars in the field...were involved. These contacts and meetings are very valuable to this day. I experienced that and want my students to experience this opening, but today these programs no longer exist so we need to use the opportunities through EU programs and other international programs* (faculty member*).*

To further illustrate the pressing need to help students, she stated that *when I started to develop my career there were not so many students interested in going abroad. There was less competition. Now the Caucasus is not anymore so interesting and this is a limitation for our students. They are more ready because they speak languages, but there is more competition, so we need to help them as others helped us.*

3.6 Support for Research

Several interviewees both at faculty and university leaders' levels mentioned that internationalization is essential in developing research and in supporting the move

from faculties dedicated mostly to teaching to those where research plays a major role. The Vice-Rector from the university outside Tbilisi noted that *you have to understand that research is very expensive, but it puts you on the map. So far, my university was very good at teaching, but now research has become a priority.* The rector from Tbilisi also stressed that *without research we cannot go up in rankings, and for research we need to be part of transnational networks. Rankings and research are important to my university, and we need internationalization to boost them, and particularly EU funded projects.* A faculty member also noted that *to keep the pace with the global academic community is very hard and costly: travelling to conferences, registration fees even if you present papers, publishing, all require funding and through international projects, we can secure this funding.*

3.7 Other Drivers

Additional drivers for internationalization were mentioned, including institutional and personal ones. The Head of Department from the Ministry of Education indicated that the decrease in population affects Georgian universities, and internationalization is a mean to filling the places that cannot be filled internally. Two faculty members were of the opinion that internationalization is the only way of rooting out faculty without relevant knowledge while other two mentioned the need to open the minds of the society at large by cultural exchanges. The Vice-Rector from the university outside Tbilisi mentioned internationalization as a tool to stand out, to gain visibility which is difficult to attain for a small university outside the capital. In her words *maybe countries that give up internationalization have become tired of being famous, but my university, away from the capital, still needs to survive in the big globalized world, and internationalization helps with survival.*

To sum up, at policy level, internationalization seems to be driven mainly by the political will to get closer to the EU, with education being one of the tools to achieve a *rapprochement*. At institutional level, the reasons are several: the aim for quality enhancement through international exchanges, to prepare students for their professional lives in Georgia and abroad and the financial motivation, particularly in medical schools. At a personal level, faculty seems motivated by the desire to catch up professionally—made even more acute in certain disciplines like social sciences (which have been previously marginalized and even prohibited) and engineering (where lack of funding affected the level of technology endowment). Additionally, most faculty mentioned a sense of duty toward students. Some professors work to create for their students travel and research opportunities similar to those they had themselves while others are driven by the belief (supported by research) that students need internationalization to be competitive and to get good jobs.

4   Challenges to Internationalization

Several challenges to internationalization were recurrent in the interviews. Among them are the rigid salary scales at public universities, and the low salaries available for junior professors make it difficult to hire talented graduates of foreign universities, who have better chances for getting a high income in the private universities or outside academia. Also, the limited incentive systems for faculty available for university leaders was often quoted as a major challenge to attracting faculty with foreign degrees and speaking foreign languages, much needed for foreign language programs and for conducting internationally visible research. And the English language competencies are limited among senior Georgian faculty who never studied the language in school, therefore the new hires are essential to internationalization.

Additionally, as the senior leader from San Diego University mentioned, *many professors are of retirement age but cannot afford to retire due to the low pension available. Sadly, they are forced to hang on to their positions, cling to their former reputation, and prevent younger colleagues from joining or advancing in the university*. This shows that policies such as the pension system, which are not in any way influenced or controlled by universities, have nevertheless an impact on internationalization.

The lack of reform of state university administration was also quoted as an impediment to internationalization, mostly linked to the low salaries available for administrators and their lack of appeal for competent people. Additionally, the vice-rector from the Adjara region noted that they badly need administrators speaking languages because *there is a lot of administration in European funded projects, much of it in English…and with students and faculty we can see results of language training but for administrators it is harder*.

Several sources also mentioned an overall need for better coordination between ministries dealing with internationalization in addition to a visa system that prevents students from certain countries to attend university. Additionally, the vice-rector from the university outside Tbilisi noted that *we do get a lot of support from the local authorities of the region but almost none from the Ministry, not even with visa support. They should spread the word more, try to involve those that are not in Tbilisi more, but I do not see that happening.*

The challenges to internationalization reflect national conditions not dissimilar to those in other Central and Eastern European countries (among them Slovakia, Hungary and Romania) where universities are granted limited staffing autonomy.[7] They also highlight the effect of policies from fields unrelated to education (immigration policy, pension system, the organization of central and local administration) on the activity of university and the push for internationalization. These findings point to the multitude of conditions needed for internationalizing the higher education in countries newer to this trend and the political will required to reform and align policies outside the education system to the internationalization effort.

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[7]See https://www.university-autonomy.eu/dimensions/staffing/, Consulted January 15, 2020.

5   Concluding Remarks

Internationalization in Georgian higher education is driven unsurprisingly by multiple factors among which the political will is a very important one. Not unlike Saakashvili's statements in 2005, the present policy-makers state their desire to be part of the Western sphere and view internationalization of education as an important tool. Georgia is not alone in using higher education to support a new national identity and narrative (Matei et al. 2013 discuss the case of Armenia). Some interviewees linked the need to internationalize with recapturing the spirit of Georgian intelligentsia from pre-Soviet times, a return to a state of normalcy. Others reflect on Georgia being a small country with limited resources to compete in a globalized world.

From official documents and interviews, the general impression is that internationalization is a policy priority, and Georgia is open for relations not just with EU or the US but with countries in the region and beyond. Nevertheless, the sense gathered from the interviews point rather to a *selected, targeted internationalization* where engaging with their neighbor (and political enemy) Russian Federation is not desired. My research echoes the findings of earlier studies (Toderas and Stavaru 2018, Dobbins and Khachatryan, 2015) and confirms that not much has changed in the academic relations between Georgia and Russia and that this separation continues to be part of the national narrative.

Another finding is the strong support for adhering to European Standards and Guidelines with the view of accessing EU grants needed to finance academic research and exchanges. Internationalization and particularly academic engagement with the EU is seen almost across the board at all levels as a tool to increase quality through EU funding and academic exchange. For this reason, Georgia has been active in EU funded research programs, ranking number 10 in terms of activity among all non-EU countries. Most interviewees noted that Georgia is to a large extent forced to internationalize because the national budget is insufficient to independently support the desired development of the higher education sector. The *power of EU's purse* (Bathory and Lindstrom 2011) provides, therefore, a strong incentive for Georgia to open up in order to attract funding. Building on resources dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) we could advance the conclusion that EU resources are vital to Georgian research, and therefore internationalization is as much a choice as it is a need.

Increasing research output is also needed to improve the standing in rankings, where Georgia is doing better than the rest of the Caucasus neighbours but equally struggling as most of Eastern European countries for the same reasons (Boyadjieva 2017): a history of universities as teaching places and academies of sciences as research places, limited funding to higher education, language limitations and the added burden of a turbulent recent past.

As pointed out by a faculty member and an administrator, the internationalization of higher education seems to be also externally driven or *supported or even desired by external partners*: the US has supported the Millennium Challenge which financed

the establishment of the Tbilisi campus of San Diego University as a way to support STEM education in Georgia. The American university partnered with three Georgian universities, Georgian Technical University (GTU), Ilia State University (ISU), and Tbilisi State University (TSU) to offer internationally recognized undergraduate degrees. Additionally, other initiatives like the one funded by the German government through GIZ support internationalization through funding academic exchange programs.

To conclude, Georgia's reasons for internationalization are very much part of the effort of enforcing a pro-European and pro-Western national identity and educating citizens in this spirit. The main arguments against internationalization that led to a reversal of policy in parts of Europe are not present in Georgia: the state funding is used primarily to cover the costs incurred by national students, the foreign students rarely remain to work in the country, and students from certain countries cannot even enter the educational system; therefore the argument of foreigners taking local jobs or abusing local resources is not present. The only drawback to internationalization mentioned by four out of 17 interviews is the loss of Georgian language as an academic language if internationalization continues, but universities try to address this concern by including solely readings in Georgian at undergraduate level and making efforts to translate into Georgian key research articles published in English. In brief, Georgian academics and policy-makers see that the benefits brought by internationalization far outweigh the potential disadvantages.

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Does Erasmus Mobility Increase Employability? Using Register Data to Investigate the Labour Market Outcomes of University Graduates

Daniela Crăciun, Kata Orosz, and Viorel Proteasa

1 Introduction

International student mobility is not a new phenomenon (Altbach 2005; Guruz 2008). However, there has been a significant growth in scale in the last few decades. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that the number of international students across the world has increased from 0.6 million in 1975 to 2.4 million in 2004 (OECD 2006) and a staggering 4.6 million in 2015 (OECD 2017). In Europe, international student mobility is regarded as one of the most important drivers for synchronizing the continent's disparate higher education systems to the same heartbeat.

In this context, the Erasmus program is considered the "flagship of European cooperation" (Barblan 2002) in higher education. Approximately 4.4 million higher education students have participated in the Erasmus+ program in the three decades since the program was set up in 1987, and the program continues to steadily increase in popularity (European Commission 2017). This year, the European Commission has pledged "to triple the Erasmus+ budget (going beyond the Junker Commission's proposal to almost double the envelope)" (Rubio 2019, (1) for the 2021–2027 programming period. The policy decisions at the European level are mirrored by national and institutional trends of students' participation in Erasmus outgoing mobilities (see Fig. 1):

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% OUTGOING ERASMUS STUDENT MOBILITY
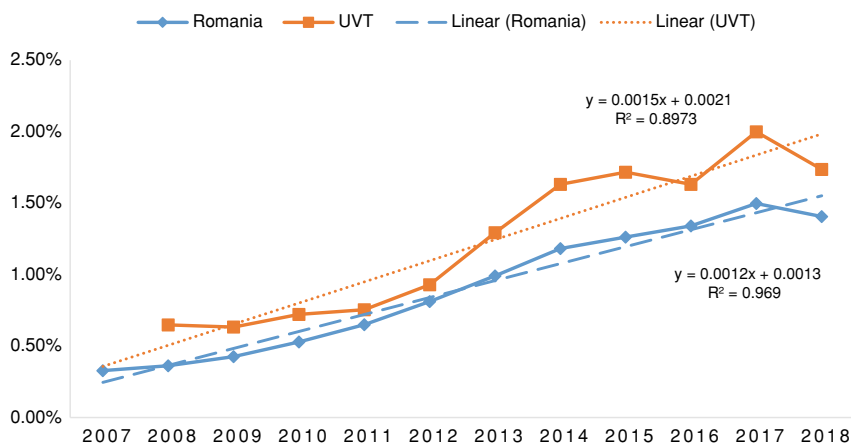
Fig. 1 Participation in Erasmus outgoing mobilities: national trends for Romania and institutional trends for the West University of Timisoara Source: Compiled by authors from data from The National Agency for Community Programmes in the Field of Education and Vocational Training (ANPCDEFP)—Erasmus programme data, The National Council for Financing Higher Education (CNFIS)—student cohorts country level data, The West University of Timisoara—student cohorts institutional data

Notwithstanding the increasing popularity of and investment in international student mobility, the actual labour market benefits for individuals are still widely debated (Di Pietro 2019). One of the major claims has been that individuals who study abroad enjoy better labour market outcomes than their non-mobile peers (Wiers-Jenssen and Try 2005, Wiers-Jenssen 2008, 2011). Specifically, both credit and degree mobility are said to lead to a better insertion into the labour market (and thus to decreased unemployment), above-average earnings, a more prestigious occupation, and a higher likelihood that graduates will work outside their country of permanent residence/citizenship.

However, the actual impact of student mobility on labour market outcomes is less clear, as research is scarce, the evidence used is often "qualitative and anecdotal" or is prone to bias (Di Pietro 2019). Traditionally, the effect of mobility on employability has been measured using interview or survey data collected from (1) students who participated in mobility programs, (2) university administrators in charge of study abroad programs, and (3) employers (Di Pietro 2015, 2019). While these types of studies provide important insights about the benefits associated with international student mobility they can be affected by social desirability bias (Bowman and Hill 2011) and they rarely account for causality.[1] Thus, linking mobility and employability

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[1] The net effect of student mobility on top of other predictors that are associated with both propensity to be internationally mobile as a student and employable as a graduate, e.g. individual ability (Kucel and Vilalta-Bufi 2016 Mallik and Shankar 2016) or family background (Akhmedjonov 2011 Kucel and Vilalta-Bufi 2016 Mourifie, Henry, and Meango 2018).

in a causal relationship is challenging due to selection and self-selection effects, i.e. "[s]tudents who study abroad may differ from students who do not in unobserved characteristics that are likely to affect labor market outcomes" (Di Pietro 2019), and omitted variable bias which can lead to over-estimating or under-estimating the impact of international mobility on employability.

Various econometric techniques can be used to mitigate the selection problems inherent to observational data, including the use of fixed effects, instrumental variables, various propensity score matching techniques, and regression discontinuity designs (Schneider et al. 2007). While such techniques are invaluable in reducing bias that results from omitted variables and various forms of selection, no analytic technique can provide valid estimates if the data on which the analysis is performed is of questionable quality. Obtaining high-quality data by means of surveys is highly resource-intensive. In this chapter, we take an alternative approach, that of using register data to answer questions about the benefits of international student credit mobility.

According to Andersson and Nilsson (2016, 4), in national (or institutional) contexts in which "there is access to national registers that cover the entire population", register data on income, occupation, unemployment (Nilsson 2017, 79) enable more "penetrating" (Andersson and Nilsson 2016, 4) and more cost-efficient analyses. Using register data offers the possibility to use already existing population-level data and compare the actual employment outcomes of mobile and non-mobile students. In this chapter, we present an analysis based on register data from university records and national employment and baccalaureate exam records of 8 cohorts of graduates between 2007 and 2014 from the West University of Timisoara (UVT), a leading comprehensive university in Romania. By demonstrating the utility of pre-existing data sources in answering policy-relevant research questions through the case of this single institution, we want to send a broader message to ministers of education and higher education leaders: to release existing register data to the research community. In this way, the linkages between education and labour market outcomes can be rigorously and efficiently tested, descriptions of population parameters from which samples are drawn can be more robust, and policy-makers and institutional leaders can have access to the evidence needed to make informed decisions.

In order to illustrate the utility of combining data from pre-existing registers, the chapter analyses the impact of credit mobility on labour market outcomes using institutional- and national-level data. In our analyses, we sought to answer the following question: Does credit mobility have a positive impact on graduate employability? To answer this overarching question, we establish the predictors of international student mobility and test whether credit mobility is significantly positively associated with labour market insertion, income levels and occupational prestige. Specifically, we address the following research questions: (1) What are the predictors of participation in Erasmus mobility among the specific population of graduates we analyse? (2) Does participation in the Erasmus student mobility program predict insertion on the labour market within that population? Among those graduates who had an active work contract, is participation in the Erasmus student mobility program predictive of (3) an above-average salary or (4) having a more prestigious occupational category?

To answer these questions, the chapter proceeds as follows. First, an overview of existing studies exploring the relationship between international student mobility and employment outcomes is provided. Second, the methodology employed and the analytic sample are described. Third, the results of the data analysis are presented and discussed. Finally, the concluding section highlights avenues for further research and makes an argument for the benefits of using existing register data to test theoretical claims in higher education research.

2   Literature Review

There is a plethora of theoretical arguments linking international student mobility with individual benefits that are expected to translate into better employment outcomes for graduates, but relatively few empirical studies have tested these causal claims (Di Pietro 2015, 2019; Wiers-Jenssen and Try 2005). This section explores the theoretical expectations and empirical evidence brought forward by previous research on the relationship between study abroad and labour market outcomes.

The theoretical expectation linking mobility and employability is that individuals who study abroad will accrue non-economic benefits (i.e., skills, mobility capital) that will ultimately transform into economic benefits (i.e., favourable labour market outcomes such as domestic or international employment, higher wages, higher occupational prestige) (Crăciun and Orosz 2018). This is expected on the premise that the skills acquired by individuals through studying abroad are marketable (i.e., valued by employers) (Di Pietro 2015) and because mobility widens the job search area of graduates beyond the domestic labour market (i.e., more and better employment opportunities) (Di Pietro 2019).

International student mobility is perceived and expected by participants, university administrators, and employers to have a positive effect on all aspects of a worker's skill set. First, mobility has been shown to have a positive impact on individuals' cognitive skills, particularly foreign language proficiency (Canto et al. 2013; Llanes et al. 2016), problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Bikson et al. 2003). Second, studying abroad exposes students to foreign cultures which is expected by employers to have a positive impact on their non-cognitive skills, especially inter-personal and inter-cultural skills, confidence and self-reliance (Bikson et al. 2003; Bracht et al. 2006; King et al. 2010; Matherly 2005). Third, mobility can improve job-specific skills for jobs that have an international component or give students the skills and experience to pursue an international career (Di Pietro 2019).

Cognitive, non-cognitive and job-specific skills are all valued in the workplace, so the expectation is that they will be rewarded by employers through hiring, higher wages and more prestigious jobs. Table 1 provides an overview of research findings from existing studies on the relationship between mobility and these employability indicators.

Several studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between mobility and various labour market outcomes (European Commission 2014, 2016; Di Pietro

Table 1 The relationship between international student mobility and labour market outcomes

Indicator	Benefits for internationally mobile students
Labour market insertion	(+) Less likely to face long term unemployment (European Commission 2014, 2016) (+) Lower unemployment rates 3 to 10 years after graduation (European Commission 2014, 2016; Di Pietro 2019; Schnepf and Hombres 2018) (+) Mobility useful in securing (first) job (Bracht et al. 2006; King et al. 2010; Teichler and Janson 2007) (+) Mobility experience contributes to making job interviews more successful (King et al. 2010) (=) No difference in unemployment rates of mobile individuals compared to non-mobile individuals immediately after graduation (Wiers-Jenssen 2011) (=) No difference in probability of employment 1 month after graduation (Koda and Yuki 2013) (=) No difference in holding a graduate level job (Koda and Yuki 2013) (-) Takes a longer time to find a job (Rodrigues 2013)
Earnings	(+) Higher wages (Rodrigues 2013; Varghese 2008) (=) No difference in (starting) wages compared to non-mobile individuals (Koda and Yuki 2013; Messer and Wolter 2007; Wiers-Jenssen 2011)
Occupational category	(+) Likely to have jobs with high professional responsibility (Bracht et al. 2006) (+) More likely to occupy managerial positions 6 months after graduation (Schnepf and Hombres 2018) (+) More likely to hold a management position 5 to 10 years after graduation (European Commission 2016)
International career	(+) More likely to work abroad after graduation (Parey and Waldinger 2011; Di Pietro 2012; Rodrigues 2013; Teichler and Janson 2007; Varghese 2008) (=) No difference in likelihood to have an international job compared to non-mobile individuals (Wiers-Jenssen 2011)

Source Compiled by authors

2019; Schnepf and D'Hombres 2018) "though they provide mixed results about the magnitude of this effect" (Di Pietro 2013, 6). Others find no difference between mobile and non-mobile students in terms of employment outcomes (Koda and Yuki 2013; Messer and Wolter 2007;Wiers-Jenssen 2011).

3 Data and Methodology

In order to test whether there is a statistically significant relationship between international credit mobility and employment outcomes, the chapter relies on an original dataset constructed from institutional and national register data. We linked three sources of register data to create the analytic data set: (1) university register data of individuals who completed a bachelor's and/or master's degree at UVT, and national register data on (2) baccalaureate exam scores and (3) labour market outcomes. The data comes from an institutional, ICT intensive, tracer study (Proteasa et al. 2018).

The initial dataset was based on university register data of individuals who completed a bachelor's and/or master's degree at UVT. This data set contains, among other things, information on UVT graduates' age, gender, the start year of their bachelor's and/or master's degree, the field of study, whether they received social and/or merit-based scholarships during their studies, and whether they participated in Erasmus mobility during their time at UVT. This dataset was then matched with publicly available data on the graduates' baccalaureate exam scores launched in 2004 (Ministerul Educatiei Nationale 2019) and with information about UVT graduates' labour market outcomes. Information about UVT graduates' labour market outcomes was requested and received from ReviSal, a mandatory national register for all employees in Romania that was launched in 2011 (Guvernul României 2011).

Matching ReviSal data with university records allowed us to capture information on whether UVT graduates had an active working contract with an employer operating in Romania, as well as information on the highest salary and highest occupational category associated with each individual's working contract(s) during the period 2011–2018. This meant that we were able to test whether mobile students actually enjoyed better insertion into the labour market, above-average earnings and/or a more prestigious occupation as compared to non-mobile students.

The raw dataset included information on individuals who completed at least a bachelor's degree at UVT (n = 20,707). From this dataset, a number of observations were excluded for various theoretical and practical reasons that are discussed next. First, UVT graduates who could not be matched with ReviSal data were excluded from the analytic dataset, as a lack of match to ReviSal records meant that no conclusions could be drawn about their labour market outcomes. Second, UVT graduates who started their bachelor's degree program in or before 2007 were also excluded from analysis, as the UVT Erasmus mobility records we had access to only start from the academic year 2007/2008. Third, UVT graduates who started their bachelor's degree program in or after 2015 were also excluded from analysis, because they could not have completed their studies by January 2018, the date when the ReviSal export was received. Finally, UVT graduates whose baccalaureate exam score was missing were also excluded from the analysis, as we used their performance on this national exam as a proxy for academic ability. As a result of delimitating the raw dataset in this way, we ended up with an analytic dataset of n = 16,565, which includes information on the labour market outcomes of both mobile (n = 719) and non-mobile (n = 15,846) UVT graduates.

Table 2 provides summary statistics for the variables used in our data analysis. The majority of the individuals (88.5)[2] in our analytic sample were born between 1988 and 1995. They started their bachelor's degree program at UVT between 2007 and 2014. The average baccalaureate score among UVT graduates who participated in Erasmus credit mobility was 8.95, which is statistically significantly higher (t = −8.7507; p = 0.000) than the average baccalaureate score of UVT graduates who did not participate in Erasmus credit mobility (8.63). Moreover, the average

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[2]According to the birth year analysis, some people in the analytic sample who started their BA in 2007 or later were born as early as 1947.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of UVT graduates in the analytic sample

	All UVT graduates (n = 16,565), %	Mobile UVT graduates (n = 719), %	Non-mobile UVT graduates (n = 15,846), %	Pearson χ^2 (p)
Gender	**100**	**100**	**100**	**16.1**
Women	71.7	78.4	71.4	(0.000)
Men	28.3	21.6	28.6	
Baccalaureate exam performance	**100**	**100**	**100**	**111.1**
Lowest quartile	25.2	16.0	25.7	(0.000)
Low-middle quartile	24.9	17.9	25.2	
High-middle quartile	25.0	25.9	25.0	
Highest quartile	24.9	40.2	24.2	
Field of study (BA)	**100**	**100**	**100**	**186.6**
Social sciences	61.3	44.5	62.0	(0.000)
Humanities and arts	22.0	42.1	21.1	
Math, natural sci., biology & biomed	13.1	12.1	13.1	
Physical education and sport	3.7	1.3	3.8	
Receipt of merit-based scholarship[a]	**100**	**100**	**100**	**378.5**
Did not receive	59.0	24.1	60.6	(0.000)
Received	41.0	75.9	39.5	
Receipt of social scholarship	**100**	**100**	**100**	**8.1**
Did not receive	89.9	86.8	90.1	(0.004)
Received	10.1	13.2	9.9	
Master degree status[b]	**100**	**100**	**100**	**124.8**
Never enrolled in a master program	40.4	21.1	41.3	(0.000)
Enrolled but didn't graduate	17.3	18.9	17.2	
Completed a master program	42.4	59.9	41.6	
Labour market insertion in Romania	**100**	**100**	**100**	**4.3**
Had a working contract[c]	76.2	73.0	76.4	(0.038)
No record of a working contract[d]	23.8	27.0	23.6	
Occupational category	**100**	**100**	**100**	**32.8**
Managers	3.9	2.5	4.0	(0.000)
Professionals	34.3	39.9	34.1	
Technicians & associate professionals	15.0	15.2	15.0	
Clerical support, service & sales workers	20.5	13.6	20.8	
Elementary occupations	2.6	1.8	2.6	
Missing	23.8	27.0	23.6	
Income relative to average salary[e]	**100**	**100**	**100**	**49.4**
Below-average salary	46.0	35.7	46.4	(0.000)

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	All UVT graduates (n = 16,565), %	Mobile UVT graduates (n = 719), %	Non-mobile UVT graduates (n = 15,846), %	Pearson χ^2 (p)
Similar to average salary	8.4	6.7	8.5	
Above-average salary	21.9	30.6	21.5	
Missing	23.8	27.0	23.6	

Source Calculated by authors

[a] The receipt of social scholarship is based on financial need.

[b] The analytic sample for the analyses on insertion and occupational category was smaller than the analytic sample for labour market insertion since all observations that did not have an active work contract had to be excluded. We also excluded all observations that had missing data on income and occupational category. Thus, the analytic sample size in these analyses is n = 11,540. The proportion of mobile UVT graduates is 3.9% (n = 451), which is higher than the 1.8% average credit mobility rate of graduates from Romanian universities (European Commission 2018a). To compare, the average EU credit mobility rate of university graduates is 8% (European Commission 2018a).

[c] Only refers to enrollment at UVT graduates in the analytic sample who have a bachelor degree from UVT may have enrolled in master degree program at other universities in Romania, or abroad.

[d] Some UVT graduates had no record of a working contract in ReviSal for the period 2011–2017. This could happen either because these graduates were inactive, unemployed, self-employed or working in a so-called "liberal profession" (e.g., lawyers), or employed outside of Romania in the entire period of 2011–2017. Those who participate in Erasmus credit mobility may be more likely to work abroad after graduation (see Wiers-Jenssen 2011), and those who work abroad would not show up in the ReviSal database.

[e] Refers to having at least one working contract recorded in ReviSal for the period 2011–2017.

age at which UVT graduates completed their bachelor's degree was 22.7, which is statistically significantly lower (t = 4.4199, p = 0.000) than the average age at which UVT graduates who did not participate in Erasmus credit mobility completed their bachelor's degree (23.4).

To test what predicts labour market outcomes, the log odds of (1) having an active contract in Romania in the period 2011–2017 (insertion), (2) having an active contract that is associated with an above-average salary (earnings), and (3) having an active contract that is associated with a managerial or professional job (occupational category) were modelled as a function of UVT graduates' gender, field of BA study, year in which they started their BA, their age at graduation from BA (22 or below versus above 22), their performance in the baccalaureate exam (in quartiles), their receipt of a merit-based scholarship or social scholarship during their BA, whether they enrolled in or completed an MA degree at UVT, and whether they participated in Erasmus mobility during their studies at UVT.[3]

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[3] We calculated relative income by comparing all working contracts to the average basic gross salary of the year in which they ended. Income information associated with working contracts still active in December 2017 were compared to the 2017 average basic gross salary. The average gross salary for each year was calculated based on data from national statistics.

For more robust results, we also estimated the relationship between Erasmus credit mobility, labour market insertion, earnings and occupational category with the help of propensity score matching[4] models, using the same set of co-variates as the logistic regression models discussed above. Detailed results from the logistic and propensity-score matched models are discussed in the next section, and the regression tables are available from the authors upon request.

4 Data Analysis and Results

(1) What Are the Predictors of Participation in Erasmus Mobility Among UVT Graduates?

Comparing mobile and non-mobile students,[5] the profile of Erasmus participants becomes apparent. Even though 78% of the mobile students are women, all other things being equal, gender is not predictive of participation in Erasmus mobility among the UVT graduates in our analytic sample. Over the years, higher mobility rates in the Erasmus program have been observed for women, at around 60% (Brooks and Waters 2011; Souto-Otero 2008; Teichler et al. 2011). Previous research has shown that for Romania, the gender gap is even bigger, with females representing 70% of mobile students at the national level (Souto-Otero and McCoshan 2006, 4). However, "[t]he feminisation of higher education is apparent at all levels of study" in national student populations (Orr et al. 2011, 59). Therefore, the tilted balance towards higher female participation rates can be in part accounted for by the general structure of national student populations.

Notwithstanding, other factors are predictive of participation in mobility. First, the year in which students began their BA studies is a positive predictor of mobility: with each year, the likelihood of participating in the Erasmus program was 12% higher. This finding is consistent with the growth in popularity, accessibility and funding of the Erasmus program over the years (European Commission 2017, 2018b), and reflected in the national and institutional trends—*see* Fig. 1 *in the introductory section.*

Second, age at the time of BA graduation is a significant negative predictor of credit mobility: each additional year in age is associated with a 28% lower likelihood

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[4]"When subjects are not randomly assigned to treatment and non-treatment groups, as is the case with observational studies, other methods are needed to avoid the possibility of selection bias. Bias can arise when apparent differences in outcome between treatment and non-treatment groups can be attributed to characteristics that affected whether a subject received a given treatment rather than simply to the effect of the treatment itself. Propensity score matching adjusts for such potential bias by creating a sample group of subjects who received the treatment that is comparable on all observed characteristics to a sample of subjects that did not receive the treatment" (Di Pietro 2019).

[5]The log odds of participating in Erasmus mobility was modelled as a function of the UVT graduates' gender, the field of BA study, the year in which they started their BA, their age at graduation from BA, their performance in the baccalaureate exam (in quartiles), their receipt of a merit-based scholarship or social scholarship during their BA, and whether they enrolled in or completed an MA at UVT.

of participating in the Erasmus program. This finding is in line with the predictions of empirical studies on migration which "overwhelmingly conclude that the relation with age is negative, i.e., that the likelihood of migration decreases with age" (Zaiceva 2014, 4).

Third, academic ability is a predictor of Erasmus mobility. Students' performance at the baccalaureate exam (our proxy for academic ability) is a significant positive predictor of mobility. A one-unit increase in the baccalaureate exam score is associated with a 47% higher likelihood of participating in the Erasmus program. The receipt of a merit-based scholarship is also significantly positively related to mobility. Those students who received a merit-based scholarship were 3.2 times more likely to participate in Erasmus than those who did not receive such a scholarship. The fact that Erasmus grants are awarded on academic merit and that "Erasmus appears to be much more selective in Eastern Europe (where 20% of applicants are rejected)"[6] (European Commission 2016) could explain the magnitude of the relationship. There is no evidence of a link between the receipt of a social (i.e., need-based) scholarship and credit mobility in the analytic sample.

Fourth, degree level is significantly positively associated with Erasmus mobility. Compared to those who never enrolled in a master degree program at UVT, those who enrolled but did not complete were 91% more likely to participate in mobility, while those who completed a master degree were 97% more likely to participate in mobility. This makes intuitive sense, as those who remain affiliated with a higher education institution longer have more opportunities to apply for an Erasmus scholarship. All in all, the typical Erasmus mobility participant at UVT is young, academically able and more likely to pursue graduate education.

(2) Does participation in Erasmus mobility predict insertion into the labour market?

Participation in Erasmus mobility is significantly negatively associated with insertion in the domestic (i.e., Romanian) labour market in our analytic sample.[7] Graduates who were mobile during their studies at UVT (either during bachelor or master degree programs) were 40% less likely to have an active work contract with an employer operating in Romania, compared to non-mobile graduates. Rather than implying that mobile graduates are less likely to be employed, this finding is consistent with the body of evidence that suggests that mobile students are more likely to work abroad after graduating (Parey and Waldinger 2011; Di Pietro 2012; Rodrigues 2013; Teichler and Janson 2007; Varghese 2008) and, thus, less likely to appear in the national

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[6]By way of comparison, the rates of Erasmus application rejection in other European regions are: 19% for Southern Europe, 9% for Western Europe and 7% for Northern Europe (European Commission 2016).

[7]The negative association between Erasmus participation and labor market insertion is significant in the logistic regression model and in propensity score matching (PSM) model. The association is negative but not significant in the PSM model if standard errors are clustered by bachelor cohorts. The inconsistency in results may be due to measurement error on our labour market insertion variable.

employment database with an active contract. As migration research has shown, people with a migratory experience have an increased propensity for re-taking this step. "Once someone has migrated, therefore he or she is very likely to migrate again, and the odds of taking an additional trip rise with the number of trips already taken" (Massey et al. 1993, 453). Through the experience of mobility, students acquire 'mobility capital' and are likely to look for and take up jobs outside the domestic labour market (Rodrigues 2013; Wiers-Jenssen 2008).

All other things being equal, gender, baccalaureate exam results, the year when the bachelor degree program started, and the receipt of social scholarship (our proxy for socio-economic status) were not predictive of labour market insertion in our analytic sample of UVT graduates. As previous studies have also shown, field of study is predictive of employment status in our analytic sample. Compared to social scientists, humanities and arts graduates and physical education and sports graduates are significantly less likely to have an active work contract, while graduates from natural sciences, mathematics, biology and biomedicine are significantly more likely to have an active work contract. Also, having a master degree is significantly positively associated with labour market insertion. Compared to those who never enrolled in a master degree program, master graduates are twice as likely to have an active work contract in our analytic sample. This finding is in line with human capital theory predictions.

(3) Among those who have an active work contract, does participation in Erasmus mobility predict an above-average salary?

Erasmus mobility is significantly positively associated with earnings. All other things being equal, those who participated in Erasmus mobility during their studies at UVT were 75% more likely to have a higher-than-average monthly salary[8] associated with their active work contract. Results from the propensity score matching model (with the same specification as the logistic regression model discussed above) also suggest that participation in Erasmus mobility is positively associated with an above-average monthly salary among those UVT graduates who had an active contract.

Comparing mobile UVT graduates, the duration of study abroad is not predictive of differences in earnings. In other words, there was no statistically significant difference in the likelihood of having an above-average salary, regardless of whether the mobile student experienced a short-term mobility period (operationalized as 5 months or less), or a long-term Erasmus mobility period (operationalized as more than 5 months). The year in which students participated in Erasmus credit mobility is predictive of earning differences. The year of mobility is negatively associated with earnings, that is, among mobile UVT graduates, the likelihood of having an above-average salary decreases with every academic year. This finding is consistent with the expectation that, over time, as Erasmus mobility became more and more common, it became less valuable in accessing higher-paid positions. Alternatively, the negative relationship could be explained by the fact that students who went on

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[8]Please refer to Table 2 for details on how we operationalized higher-than-average monthly salary.

Erasmus earlier have had more time on the labour market, and their longer work experience explains their higher likelihood of having higher-paid positions.

(4) Among those who have an active working contract, does participation in Erasmus mobility predict having a managerial or professional occupation?

Prior research found that "five to ten years after graduation, significantly more Erasmus alumni (64%) than non-mobile alumni (55%) hold a management position. The difference is especially large in Eastern Europe (70% compared to 41%)" (European Commission 2016). Contrary to the expectation of higher occupational prestige, in our analytic sample, Erasmus mobility is not predictive of a more prestigious occupational category. All other things being equal, those who participated in Erasmus mobility during their studies at UVT were not more likely to have an active work contract with a managerial or professional occupation. The results from the propensity score matching model (with the same specification as the logistic regression model discussed above) also suggest that participation in Erasmus mobility is not associated with managerial or professional occupations among UVT graduates with an active work contract. Our result might be explained by the fact that higher education attainment in Romania is the lowest in the European Union and, as such, having a tertiary degree per se is highly valued by employers when they are looking to fill managerial or professional positions. Nevertheless, the mechanisms of obtaining a higher status job may be underspecified in our model. Further research should look into the micro-causalities at play on the local labour market as they might provide an explanation for these findings.

Within the sub-group of mobile UVT graduates, the duration of study abroad is not predictive of occupational category either. In other words, both short- and long-term Erasmus mobility periods are associated with a similar likelihood of holding a managerial or professional job. The year of mobility is not associated with the occupational category either: the likelihood to have a managerial or professional position is the same irrespective of the academic year in which the Erasmus mobility took place.

5   Conclusion: Benefits and Limitations of Register Data

In this chapter, we analysed a unique dataset from Romania to illustrate how register data can be used to answer questions about the benefits of Erasmus credit mobility. We found that the typical UVT graduate who participated in Erasmus mobility and then got employed in Romania after graduation is a woman who has a bachelor degree in social sciences or in humanities, who did not receive a social scholarship but received a merit-based scholarship, who enrolled at one point in time in a master degree program at UVT, and who has a managerial or professional occupation.

In terms of labour market outcomes, our analyses indicate that, all else being equal, participation in Erasmus mobility is (1) significantly negatively associated with insertion in the domestic labour market; (2) significantly positively associated

with above-average income among those who do work for an employer operating in Romania, and (3) not predictive of a managerial or professional occupational category.

Working with register data is resource-efficient, but it has its own limitations. Findings presented in this chapter are limited to graduates of a single university in Romania, as a spin-off from an institutional, ITC intensive, tracer study (Proteasa et al. 2018). The limitations of the Romanian employee register are reflected into our findings: as the national registry includes only labour contracts, the results may be less relevant for fields in which self-employment is common, such as law, psychology and even computer sciences. A further limitation of using data from a single national register is that we had no employment information about graduates who were employed outside of Romania. The tracer study used interval measures of graduates' salaries (Proteasa et al. 2018), which makes the measurement of our earnings data less precise. And while working with data from ReviSal allowed us to observe the labour market outcomes of more UVT graduates than would have been possible with the use of an alumni survey, our analytic dataset still misses information about theoretically important characteristics of the UVT graduates, such as their marital status, number of children, and the educational background of their parents.

Nevertheless, register data shows promising avenues for research and encourages the efficient use of resources by using data that is already collected for administrative purposes both at the national and institutional level. The availability of register data enables researchers to test linkages between higher education and a wide range of individual institutional and societal outcomes. At the very least, register data can provide researchers with good descriptive population parameters from which samples can be drawn for further research. Ministries and higher education institutions should consider these benefits when evaluating requests for data release for research purposes.

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Integration Policy for Syrian Refugees' Access to Turkish Higher Education: Inclusive Enough?

Hakan Ergin and Hans de Wit

1 Introduction

Forced displacement has been a "tragic destiny" of humanity (Ergin 2016). Even the first human beings, Adam and Eve, experienced it when they ate the "forbidden fruit", according to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions. Since then it has repeated itself on the Earth in the forms of individual and mass movements from a place to another, such as the cases of early sophists in Ancient Greece, European tribes in the Migration Period and German Jewish scholars in Nazi Germany.

History is repeating itself at the moment, and the world is witnessing a historic case of forced displacement. As the recent statistics of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) indicate, 37,000 people a day are forced to displace from a place to another due to persecution and conflicts in their home countries (UNHCR 2019). This number is a result of the ongoing conflicts around the world, such as the fight between the government and opposition forces in South Sudan, everlasting internal instability in Afghanistan since the U.S. intervention in 2001 and economic crisis in Venezuela.

Beyond any doubt, the global displacement crisis has become more "catastrophic" with the recent conflict in Syria which has led to "the largest displacement crisis in the world", recorded since World War II (UNHCR 2018:3). Due to this, the world has witnessed the murder of more than half a million people, internal and external displacement of over thirteen million, dead bodies of babies by the Aegean Sea, who were trying to arrive in Europe with the hope for "a better life" with their families, and endless political discussions about how to manage the huge refugee crisis until the conflict comes to an end (Ergin 2019a; Human Rights Watch 2019; Ibrahim 2018).

Much attention has been given to the challenges of developed countries in receiving refugees from developing countries, as in the Syrian case, where the refugees

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who have been able to enter countries like Germany were closely followed by media reports. But it is a fact that the large majority of refugees are not only coming from the developing world, but also are hosted in the developing world, in particular neighboring countries (UNHCR 2019). The same, as a result, applies to the challenges of refugees to access higher education in these countries (Unangst et al. 2020). Developing countries are still in the process of massification with a higher demand than supply for local students, and, as a result, refugee students have more difficulty to enter higher education and face resistance from local students and communities, fearing that they take their places and decrease quality. Their harsh struggle for getting the right to higher education in developing regions mostly remains far from the center of attention.

As most forced displacement cases do, the conflict in Syria "poses an unprecedented challenge for neighboring countries" (Balsari et al. 2015: 942). Being one of the neighboring countries, Turkey has become a destination for 3.6 million Syrians, which has made it host to the largest group of refugees (UNHCR 2020). With a welcoming open-door policy, Turkey has provided the Syrian refugees with humanitarian aid, the right to education, residence and work permits (Ergin 2016). It was recently reported that government spending on the Syrians in Turkey has already exceeded USD 40 billion (Euronews 2019).

The unceasing war in Syria and long stay of the "unexpected" Syrian guests "forced" Turkish government to make academic and financial reforms to enhance their access to Turkish higher education, which is introduced as 'forced internationalization of higher education' in the literature (Ergin et al. 2019). These reforms included establishing Arabic-taught programs, providing scholarships and developing facilitative admission processes special to the Syrians in order to foster their access. The reforms enabled over 27.034 Syrians to enroll in a study program at Turkish universities as of the end of 2019 (Council of Higher Education [CoHE], 2020). This has made Turkey host to one of the largest groups of refugee students in the world (Ergin and de Wit 2019).

Turkey's long-lasting humanitarian efforts for enhancing Syrian refugees' access to higher education is undoubtedly admirable and a good model for other countries. It is promising that there is an increasing local and international research interest in this. Nevertheless, it is disappointing to state that most of the available research lacks a systemic questioning to what extent this long-lasting government policy of enhancing Syrian refugees' access to higher education in Turkey is inclusive. In this respect, taking a critical perspective, this study will examine who has been granted access to higher education and who has been left behind by this policy. Using official statistics, it will discuss the distribution of the Syrian university students in Turkey by gender, associate degree/undergraduate/graduate level, public/private university type, geographical region of the university, type of sponsoring for their higher education and higher education attainment of their parents. Following this discussion, the study will end up with recommendations for making this eight-year-old policy more inclusive, equitable and non-discriminative.

2 The Syrian Conflict and Its Impact on Turkey

In 2001, a pro-democracy group started protests against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. The group asked him to stop his authoritarian practices and move to a more democratic regime, which they missed since 1971 when the Assad family came to power. Bashar Al-Assad regarded these demonstrations as a real threat. He suppressed them by military, paramilitary and police forces. The resistance of the anti-regime demonstrators increased with the extensive use of power by security forces. This led the small-scale demonstrations to turn into a civil war between the two parties (Encyclopedia Britannica 2019; Cousins 2015). However, due to external interventions of other countries, such as the U.S., Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations, it is considered as a real conflict, no more a civil fight between local forces (Ghaddar 2016).

However named, the conflict in Syria caused an ongoing tragedy which includes the death of over 400,000 people (Council on Foreign Relations 2019) and internal displacement of almost seven million (UNHCR 2019). More than 13 million people in Syria are now in need of humanitarian aid, and over half of the public institutions, including hospitals, have been destroyed or they function partially (UN News 2019). The conflict has not only caused chaos inside Syria but also across the region. Up to now, it has forced over 5.6 million Syrians to move to another country, mostly a neighboring one. Accepting 3.6 million Syrians, Turkey has become a host to the largest group of refugees across the world (UNHCR 2020).

It is possible to observe three stages in Turkey's integration policy for Syrian refugees. In the first stage, between 2011–15, the Turkish Government established tent cities in the south of Turkey and provided Syrian refugees with humanitarian aid. In the *Temporary Protection Regulation* issued in 2014, Syrians in Turkey were identified as "guests under temporary status". This reveals Turkish Government's assumption that Syrian refugees' stay in Turkey would not be a long one. The second stage started in 2015 when the refugee influx from Turkey into Europe started. The European Union (EU) asked Turkey to make a deal in order to prevent the refugee flow into European countries. *A Joint Action Plan* was signed by the two parties in November 2015. Accordingly, both parties agreed on the need for more collaboration in order to prevent irregular migration. The second stage proved that European countries were not and would not be willing to share the burden of hosting Syrian refugees, and Turkey would remain to be a final or permanent destination for refugees. In the third stage beginning from 2016 and continuing up to now, the Turkish Government has been working hard to help Syrian refugees integrate into Turkey by enhancing their employment, access to education and even providing some of them with citizenship. (Erdoğan and Erdoğan 2018; Ergin 2016; Ergin and de Wit 2019; İçduygu and Şimşek 2016).

3 Integrating Syrian Students into Turkish Higher Education

The stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey and the conflict in Syria lasted longer than expected. This forced the Turkish Government to meet Syrian refugees' needs in the long run. Thus, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), a government body which plans and coordinates higher education in Turkey, has taken an action to enhance Syrian refugees' access to universities.

In order to enhance potential Syrian students' access to universities, CoHE has made several academic and financial reforms. The first academic reform in 2012 enabled Syrian refugees to get into seven universities in Turkey as a special student. The universities were specially chosen amongst the ones in the south of Turkey, where the refugee population was the highest. The second reform in 2013 allowed Syrian refugees with proof of former academic qualifications to apply for a program at any universities in the country. The quota for the Syrian refugees was restricted to ten per cent of that of Turkish students. The third reform in 2015 allowed eight universities to establish Arabic-taught programs (CoHE 2012, 2015; The Official Gazette 2013; Ergin and de Wit 2019).

Academic reforms for Syrian refugees' access to universities were supported by financial reforms. In 2014, with a decision of the cabinet, Syrian university students were exempted from paying a tuition fee, which was expected to be paid by international students in Turkey. In addition, as of 2016, Syrian university students have been provided with government scholarships (Ergin and de Wit 2019; The Official Gazette 2014).

It is obvious that the Turkish Government worked hard to enhance Syrian refugees' access to higher education. Figure 1 shows the effect of this effort on the change in the number of Syrian students in Turkish higher education from the beginning of the Syrian conflict to date.
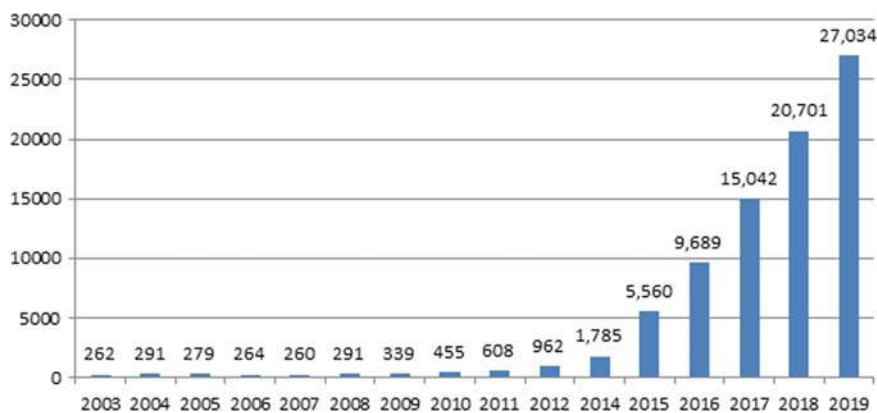

Fig. 1 Change in the Number of Syrian University Students in Turkey* *Source* CoHE (2020)

As Fig. 1 illustrates, the number of Syrian university students in Turkey has increased significantly since the conflict started in 2011. Until that time, this number had not exceeded 608. It reached 5,560 in 2015, 15,042 in 2017 and reached 27,034 in 2019. This reveals that the government reforms discussed above enhanced Syrian refugees' access to universities.

4 A Closer Look at Syrian Students in Turkish Higher Education

Beyond any doubt, Turkey has made significant efforts and sacrifices for the sake of enhancing the Syrian refugees' access to universities in Turkey. This policy enabled a group of Syrian students to integrate into the largest higher education system in the European Higher Education Area. This rare case of forced internationalization (Ergin et al. 2019) should be sustainable and more inclusive to help more refugees access universities. Thus, it is vital to take a critical perspective to discuss its inclusivity. For this reason, a closer look at Syrian refugees who are already in the system is required.

First of all, the distribution of Syrian students at Turkish universities by genders will be presented to have a better understanding of to what extent individuals of either gender can access universities. Out of 27,034 Syrian university students in Turkey, 63% are male, and 37% are female. This shows that there is no equal distribution of them by gender, which will be discussed more in the next section.

To understand the integration policy better, revealing the distribution of Syrian students by level of study programs is noteworthy. 75% of Syrian university students in Turkey are enrolled in an undergraduate program. This is followed by the ones in associate degree, master's and doctoral degree programs at respectively 17, 6.5 and 1.5%.

Currently, there are 207 universities in Turkey (CoHE 2020). 129 of them are public, and 78 are private foundation universities. The number of Syrian students in public and private universities can give us an idea about to what extent the integration policy has extended beyond both types of higher education institutions in the country. While 86.4% of Syrian students are enrolled in a public university, 13.6% of them study in a private one. This reveals that the government-led integration policy has not been adopted equally by public and private universities.

Turkey is comprised of seven geographical regions. As 240 thousand out of 3.8 million Syrian refugees only live in the government-run refugee camps, a vast majority of Syrian refugees are in urban areas in these geographical regions (UNHCR 2020). Not only the overall Syrian population unequally spreads over the country, but also Syrian university students. The highest ratio of Syrian students is in Marmara Region at 27.2%, followed by South East Anatolia Region and Mediterranean Region, respectively at 25 and 14.6%. In other words, 66.8% of them study in a university in either Marmara Region, the most developed part of the country, or the

other two, which are in the south. More capacity at universities and job opportunities for the Syrians in the developed region, on the one hand, and the proximity of the southern regions to Syria, on the other hand, are the main reasons for this unbalanced distribution.

There are no available country-wide data about the financial status of Syrian students in Turkey. However, Erdoğan and Erdoğan's (2018) survey with 395 Syrian students in Turkish universities gives an idea about it. Out of them, 18% receive a scholarship, 24.93% work, and 57.65%'s education expense is sponsored by their families. This reveals that the number of Syrian students who take a scholarship is quite low. It complies with another source which notes that the ratio of Syrian students in Turkey who take a government scholarship is 5.7% only (Mülteciler Derneği 2019).

Lastly, knowing higher education attainment of Syrian students' parents can give an idea about who can provide their children with higher education under refugee status. No nation-wide social, economic, demographic or educational data are available about Syrian university students' parents. However, findings about higher education attainment of 379 Syrian students' parents can give us a clue about the profile of parents (Erdoğan and Erdoğan 2018). A vast majority of this group of Syrian students' parents attained higher education. Accordingly, both parents of 21.37% attained higher education, only father of 30.87% and only mother of 7.65% attained it. Neither parent of 40.11%, on the other hand, attained higher education.

5   Discussion on the Inclusivity of the Policy

As its very current definition underlines, internationalization of higher education aims to "make a meaningful contribution to society" (de Wit and Hunter 2015:3). This cannot be achieved by confining higher education to an elite club who can afford to study in another country (Ergin 2019b). By enhancing Syrian refugees' access to universities, Turkey has made a real effort to enable untraditional international students who cannot meet traditional requirements of being an international student such as a fund, proficiency in a host country's language and proof of previous academic credentials (Ergin et al. 2019). Nevertheless, a closer look at the above given available official statistics reveals that inclusivity in enhancing Syrian refugees' access to higher education in Turkey has not fully been achieved yet for several aspects.

As mentioned, only 37% of Syrian students in Turkish universities are female. Compared to that of local female students, this ratio is low as almost 50% of total Turkish university students are female (CoHE 2020). This might result from societal and cultural reasons regarding women's place in Syrian society. Marriage at an early age is more common, and birth rate is higher in Syrian society than in Turkish society. To make matters worse, post-war trauma and lack of income and security might force Syrian women to marry to a local man, take care of family members at home or work in order to contribute to family budget (Barin 2015; Çakır 2017; Erdoğan et al. 2017; Hohberger 2018).

Next, 92% of current Syrian students in Turkish universities are enrolled in an associate or undergraduate level study program. It means that eight percent is pursuing a graduate degree only (CoHE 2020). This huge imbalance between the levels of enrollment can be caused by several reasons. Firstly, Turkish universities may not be attractive enough for Syrian refugees to pursue a graduate degree. In a survey of 360 Syrian university students in Turkey, it is noted that almost half are willing to move to a third country. Western countries, such as Canada, UK, Germany, USA and Sweden, are on the top of the most desired destinations by this group of Syrian students (Erdoğan et al. 2017). The increase in the number of Syrian students in these countries confirms this inference. For example, there is a high demand for higher education in German universities by Syrian refugees. The number of Syrian university students in Germany increased by 69% between the years 2017-18 and reached 8,618. Of the newly registered refugees in 2018/19 winter semester, 22% are graduate students (Trines 2019). Secondly, Syrian refugee students might have difficulties to get access to graduate education by lack of documentation of their previous education and equivalencies, a rather general problem for refugees' access to higher education, but more so for graduate education.

Only 13.6% of Syrian students in Turkey are enrolled in private universities (CoHE 2020). It means that—except a few individual exceptions- Syrian students in private universities have to cover their own expenses, such as a tuition fee. This inevitably divides refugee parents into two, ones who can afford their children's study in a private university and others who cannot.

In addition to the imbalance in Syrian university students' number by type of institutions, another imbalance is observed regarding the geographical regions they are in. There are seven geographical regions in Turkey. Yet, 66.8% of Syrian students are enrolled in universities in three of these regions, Marmara, which is the most developed region with the highest number of universities, and Southeastern and Mediterranean, which are close to Syria (CoHE 2020).

Important to note here also is that very few Syrian university students in Turkey sponsor their education cost by a scholarship. According to Mülteciler Derneği (2019), this ratio does not exceed 5.7. As the above-given survey of a group of Syrian students reveals, education cost of 57% of the group is sponsored by their parents, while 25% have to work for it (Erdoğan and Erdoğan 2018). This reminds us of the risk of elitism in internationalization (Ergin 2019b). A vast majority of today's international students are funded by their wealthy parents. If the same applies to Syrian university students in Turkey, then we have to face a risk that only the Syrian parents in Turkey who can afford their children's study in a university or Syrian students who are healthy and fortunate enough to find a job to afford their costs are included in the system.

Last but not least, parents' awareness about the significance of higher education may play an important role in their children's access to universities. Lack of official statistics makes it unlikely to come up with a socio-economic and educational inference about parents of Syrian university students. However, as the above-given data about a group of Syrian students indicate, 60% of them have parents either or both of which have attained higher education (Erdoğan and Erdoğan 2018). This reminds us

of the concept of family educational capital (Howard et al. 1996). If the policy mostly enhances children of parents who have higher education capital, then it means that children of others who do not have this capital are left behind.

6 Conclusion

It should be noted here again that hosting 3.6 million Syrian refugees and providing 27,034 of them with access to higher education (CoHE 2020; UNHCR 2020), Turkey has served as a model to other countries. This study does not expect an emerging country to include refugees in higher education flawlessly. However, in order to attain a more inclusive policy, it brings forward several recommendations:

– Special projects for encouraging more female Syrian refugees to access higher education should be planned and implemented. Scholarships open to application of female Syrians only, daycare at universities for mother refugees' kids and raising Syrian parents' awareness about their daughters' higher education attainment could be among possible practices.
– A long-term route map should be made to enhance more Syrian refugees' access to graduate programs. Job opportunities on the campus, such as a graduate assistantship, and special quotas for Syrian students in graduate program admissions could foster Syrian refugees' access.
– Private universities should be included in the policy in a more active way. Each private university should admit a certain number of Syrian refugees with a full scholarship and without expecting a tuition-fee payment.
– In order for a more balanced distribution of them around the country, regional quotas for Syrian students should be determined.
– In order not to leave the access to higher education only to those whose parents can afford it, more scholarship opportunities should be provided.
– It is obvious that Syrian parents with higher education attainment are already aware that their children should attain higher education. In order not to ignore the others whose parents do not have this educational capital, campaigns should be organized to raise awareness of Syrian parents about the significance of higher education.

Refugees face similar challenges while they struggle to access higher education in their host countries. Wherever they are, financial restrictions, family issues, postdisplacement traumatic experiences, bureaucratic problems and local tension in the host society could be counted as common barriers before their right to higher education. For this reason, the findings and recommendations of this study in our opinion are not only relevant for the case of Syrian refugee students in Turkey, but also for other countries in the Middle Eastern region and in other contexts, such as Venezuelan refugees in Latin America and refugees from Myanmar in South Asia (Unangst et al. 2020).

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The Role of Demographic Policies in the Internationalization of Romanian Higher Education

Robert Santa and Cezar Mihai Haj

1 Introduction

In recent years, several European countries have tuned their policies pertaining to international students to their need for immigration reform and the recruitment of highly skilled, highly educated professionals into their economies. Europe has been lagging behind other developed regions when it comes to attracting highly educated labour from abroad, despite being one of the regions with the steepest demographic downturns in the world. Governments have been trying to correct this either by making it easier for highly skilled immigrants to move to Europe (via a multitude of schemes such as the EU-backed 'Blue Card') or by allowing international graduates to become long-term residents in an expedited fashion.

A growing shortage of skilled workers and the role of higher education in tackling this issue have also been emerging as an important topic in the Romanian public debate, and immigration legislation has been revised and tuned to European practices. This paper aims to analyse the implementation of recent legal changes that now facilitate the employment of non-EU graduates of Romanian universities. It will try to explore the extent to which the law is already implemented, the way in which it has been internalized and used by universities to communicate to non-EU students or in their student recruitment activities, but also to look at how inter-institutional cooperation functions in light of recent legal changes. The paper is exploratory in nature and tracks the implementation of Romania's new immigration legislation at a very early stage, just a year from the time of adoption. Nevertheless, from a policy analysis perspective, this is useful in order to identify weak spots on the road between legislative decisions and institutional practices.

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Avoiding any major controversies, the Romanian Parliament discretely modified immigration legislation in 2018,[1] trying to overhaul high thresholds for access to permanent residency. Prior to this, becoming a permanent resident in Romania as a non-EU citizen was more difficult and blocked at several choking points. On the one hand, a higher minimum wage was regulated for foreigners, on the other, a fixed quota and stern enforcement of employment preference for EU citizens represented further obstacles, though the latter provision is still formally in place. Changes in the new legislation included a provision that enabled foreign graduates in Romanian universities to seek employment for up to nine months after graduation, as an alternative to the six months awarded for the resolution of administrative issues following studies. The legislation was spearheaded by the need to align Romanian legislation with the provisions of European Directive (EU) 2016/801. The purpose of the Directive is, in turn, to harmonise the conditions for admission and authorisation at EU level and foster mobility for students and researchers. The Directive governs the conditions for third-country nationals for admission and authorisation as a researcher (and family members), student, trainee or volunteer in the context of European volunteer service.[2]

These new approaches are not unique to Romania and should be seen in light of similar policy adaptation across Europe. These changes address the need of many governments to compensate for the ageing population of various European countries, the need for fiscal sustainability and the desire to make immigration fiscally valuable.

2 Background

While the EU is trying to expand the share of persons aged 30–34 who have completed a form of tertiary education to 40%, non-EU immigration in many countries weighs down such goals. With a few exceptions, notably the UK with its high share of educated migrants, European countries tend to have immigrant populations with low levels of education.

For example, according to Eurostat data, almost 35% of non-EU immigrants had at most lower secondary education (ISCED 0–2), double the rate among Europeans without a migrant background. The share of tertiary education graduates among migrants was lower than the rate for natives and EU immigrants.[3] Tertiary level

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[1]Law text (Romanian) available online at: https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gmydqobqgeza/legea-nr-247-2018-pentru-modificarea-si-completarea-unor-acte-normative-privind-regimul-strainilor-in-romania.

[2]https://ind.nl/en/news/Pages/New-directive-improves-mobility-within-the-EU-for-researchers-and-students-from--%E2%80%98third-countries%E2%80%99.aspx.

[3]Eurostat, retrieved in October 2019 and available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190523-1.

attainment would be even lower in the post-Brexit EU27, as Britain (and indeed, Ireland) tended to be outliers via their attraction of a highly educated migrant population.[4]

The education level of immigrants seems to have a cascading effect in society, impacting other metrics. For example, one can easily notice that Britain has a smaller gap between non-EU migrant employment rates and the respective rate for natives.[5] Ireland is in a similar position. Also, the gap in PISA test scores between immigrant and non-immigrant students is lower in countries with a more educated migrant population. In the case of Europe, this again leads to smaller differences in the United Kingdom,[6] though it should be noted that—despite having a large number of migrants with ISCED 0–2 education—countries such as Spain and Italy also display moderate differences in results based on migration background. Research has already identified the key role of immigration policies in shaping the success of immigrants and their children in educational settings (e.g. Entorf and Minoiu 2004).

All of these issues are, from a demographic standpoint, important for European countries. All EU members, *sans exception*, have below-replacement fertility levels and have had them for decades. This means that the eventual decline in the number of people working will have to be compensated either by raising the productivity of the dwindling domestic workforce (for example via greater automation), by immigration or (as is most likely) by a combination of both.

International students have become a target for increasingly generous 'waivers' offered upon graduation in order to look for employment. While Britain briefly reversed a pre-2012 policy on allowing students to seek employment, it has since reverted to it, offering graduates a generous two-year period to seek employment (Adams 2019). Sweden has also introduced similar policies in order to tackle shortages of skilled workers (The Local 2019). Such policies also exist in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and, indeed, Romania since 2018.

These policies have a fairly simple principle: they enable international students to try and apply for employment in the country they study after graduation. The host country, especially if it has not asked the students to pay for the full cost of their tuition, or if they study in a field that sees skills shortages, is directly interested to at least offer the graduates a chance to extend their stay. The host country solves several issues related to immigration and integration by selecting graduates from domestic universities. First of all, there is a head-start on integration, even though it has to be said that many contemporary programs are taught in a foreign language (usually English). Secondly, issues such as diploma recognition and sector-specific internship experience are often solved before employment. Lastly, when the point

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[4]Eurostat, retrieved in October 2019 and available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_education#Educational_attainment.

[5]Eurostat, retrieved in October 2019 and available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migrant_integration_statistics_%E2%80%93_labour_market_indicators#Employment_rates.

[6]OECD data for PISA 2015, retrieved in October 2019 and available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2015-results-volume-i/immigrant-background-student-performance-and-students-attitudes-towards-science_9789264266490-11-en.

of immigration is tertiary education, the state waives most prior integration costs (language tutoring, pre-tertiary education) and quickly starts receiving the net fiscal benefit of having one more highly skilled resident in the tax system.

All of these benefits contrast with the more problematic integration of children with an immigrant background in general. Dronkers and de Heus (2012), as well as Dronkers and van der Velden (2013) point to a complex web of factors that influence educational performance among immigrant children in general, with factors such as religion, country of origin and community structures playing a role in education outcomes. With immigrants arriving as international students, the point of entry already includes a fairly high barrier defined by previous academic success.

Still, this *modus operandi* has some limitations. Policies aimed at recruiting students as skilled workers have a different logic than points-based systems, such as those developed by Australia and Canada. Most European countries use neither explicit quotas nor formally quantified systems of grading the merit of individual applications for residency.[7] Employment and immediate labour market needs seem to be key concerns for policy-makers, in line with prior European efforts of recruiting 'guest workers'. Immediate needs take priority over long-term concerns with integration, and this could be seen as reflective of the lack of cultural awareness of what being a 'country of immigration' entails.

Policies aimed at facilitating immigration by international graduates are already impacting the makeup of immigrant contingents that are awarded residency in some of the countries that use them. The Netherlands, for example, now receives a steady flow of Indian immigrants, which often top annual non-EU, non-refugee immigration.[8] Efforts to reduce immigration via family reunification that have preceded the recent international student boom mean that such inflows now dwarf immigration from previously dominant countries of origin (such as Morocco and Turkey). France has also seen its immigrants become increasingly educated,[9] as have other countries inside the EU. The impact of the adoption of policies aimed at attracting a greater share of those highly skilled might be difficult to gauge for a while, especially when concerning indirect networked migration,[10] as the 2015 refugee crisis has seen a big inflow of migrants that were not screened before arrival in Europe. That means that the overall sociodemographic profile of the total immigrant population might not improve in the short term.

While Romania has been—until recently—aloof of these efforts, the debate around attracting international students has intensified. After 2009, the number of students fell abruptly, especially in the private sector and in the fee-paying subsector in public universities (CNFIS 2014). At the same time, the one chronic problem of

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[7]Exceptions do exist, such as the recent UK proposal on using a points-based system to assess immigration decisions after 2021.

[8]Dutch Statistics CBS, retrieved in October 2019 from: https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2019/30/indian-knowledge-migration-has-doubled.

[9]French Statistics INSEE, retrieved in October 2019 from: https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3640742#titre-bloc-6.

[10]For example, family reunification.

unemployment and underemployment began gradually being reversed, with unemployment being as low as 3.9% in September 2019,[11] below the EU average. Shortages in high-skills sectors could be potentially problematic in any national effort to completely close the middle-income trap. Romania is in a very poor position, as Eurostat places it in the very last spot when it comes to tertiary education attainment. Less than 25% of people aged 30–34 have a higher education diploma as of 2018, and the number has even declined year-on-year.[12] Romania is thus one of the few EU countries that risk failing to meet their Europe 2020 targets for tertiary education attainment.

In these conditions, Romania is at a tipping point in its need to attract a greater number of highly skilled graduates. It displays a mix of demographic contraction, low share of highly educated people among its own citizenry, rapid economic and wage growth and low unemployment. Legal efforts to facilitate highly skilled immigration now exist, and the ensuing trickle-down effect has now been set in motion by defining a legislative framework, though it is yet to be seen whether and how it will be used.

3 Methodology

The present paper used a three-fold approach in analysing the relevant topic. On the one hand, it analysed the legislative tools that govern education-centred immigration policies in both greater Europe and in Romania. This was necessary to frame recent legislative changes in Romania into what is a wider policy practice in Europe. The second tool was a brief desk research covering materials and articles related to internationalization efforts, including the argumentation used for the adoption of current legislation. The third tool was the use of interviews with key institutional representatives in Romania, to see the degree to which policy changes have been internalized by universities and are being used as part of Romania's offer to international students.

Of these instruments, semi-structured interviews were arguably the most important given that the paper tackles a very recent issue that has not yet been documented in academic literature or even in statistics bulletins. Due to some difficulties in establishing interviews with central authorities, the first four interviews were taken with representatives of universities that were deemed representative for the scope of this paper. These included three public and one private university. Three of the universities were based in Bucharest, while one was regional. The fifth interview was with central level representatives of the authority responsible with immigration, while a sixth was taken with the representative of a human resources company. The interviews, with two exceptions, were either with two persons or included follow-up

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[11]Eurostat, retrieved in October 2019 and available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Recent_developments.

[12]Eurostat, retrieved in October 2019 and available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_education#Increasing_attainment_at_tertiary_level.

phone calls. This was due to the need, in bigger universities, to ask questions from both persons involved in decision-making and staff involved with the practical and administrative side of managing admission for international students. Thus, in total, 10 individuals were interviewed for this article.

It should be noted that some criteria were used in selecting universities. These had to have a significant (by Romanian standards) number of international students. Medical universities were excluded as these have traditionally attracted international students due to factors such as cost, *numerus clausus* in the home country or the value of Romanian diplomas in the context of professional regulation. Similarly, the universities were screened to avoid those that have an overwhelmingly Moldovan-origin international student body, as linguistic ties and legal facilities mean that Moldovan students are not international *stricto sensu*.

4   Internationalization in Romania

Internationalization has been the object of attention for education and policy researchers over the past few years, while its importance in higher education discourse and political practice has been rising. As universities have seen fewer and fewer domestic students due to the poor quality of secondary education and due to demographic factors, internationalization has also presented a greater level of interest for universities.

Deca et al. (2015) noted that internationalization efforts in Romania started off in a largely *ad hoc* manner, with no national strategy and with many policy changes determined by the need to comply with Bologna Process requirements or policy requirements associated with EU accession. These included the adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the use of the diploma supplement and more participation in EU mobility programmes, but did not preclude the continuation of traditional partnerships such as those associated with Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) membership (*ibid.*). They also point to several structural obstacles existing in the way of internationalization efforts, including poor data collection, the lack of a national strategy and limited use of institutional strategies.

These deficiencies are also visible when looking at existing statistics. Romania remains a fairly marginal destination for international students. This can, for example, be seen with European mobilities, with 2.5 times more Romanians leaving the country than other Europeans arriving to study in local universities (UEFISCDI 2018). But the number of international students who undertake their studies in Romania outside the field of medicine, and who do not benefit from ethno-preferential access is small.

There is no research with regard to the degree to which employability was a factor in determining existing students to choose Romania. Such research does however exist for more general international student populations. When Medina and Duffy (1998) defined five main directions for branding for universities seeking to promote themselves internationally, graduate career prospects were one of these directions.

In their paper, graduate career prospects referred to employment prospects per se, expected income and employer attitudes towards said graduates. Rajika Bhandari (2018) noted that Indian and Chinese students (the main US intakes) reported concerns about employment opportunities, especially when enrolling at graduate level. 41 of university campus administrators in the United States had, in fact, reported that concerns over the limited number of H1B work visas (which offer temporary employment to skilled foreign nationals) were a factor in the decline in the number of international students applying to study in the country (*ibid).*

An earlier study by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) found that immigration and admission procedures ranked second after educational standards/qualification recognition among motivations offered by international students who had chosen to attend universities in Britain. Employment was third, ahead of costs, culture and lifestyle. The impact of talent retention is, of course, quite positive for the countries of destination, which reap the rewards of having a greater number of graduates within their overall populations. Varghese (2008:24) noted that employment prospects for internationally mobile students are high and that while this premium is greater in developing countries (often the countries of origin), many do stay, giving as an example the large share of Chinese and Indian students in the US tech sector.

It should be noted that while employability and employment prospects are a potential hook for international students, they are not necessarily a key driver for internationalization efforts by institutions. Altbach and Knight (2006) do not list the provision of employment for national labour markets as an institutional objective for internationalization. Ultimately, universities themselves benefit from internationalization mainly while the students are present.

As stated above, data shows that progress in attracting international students remains limited. Despite increased efforts to promote Romania as an international student destination, the number of newly arriving international students has been rising slowly. Furthermore, once Moldovans (who, due to the common language, are an atypical group of international students) are taken out of the tally, we actually see the past few years witnessing a slight decline in the number of study visas issued to non-Moldovan non-EU citizens (Table 1).

Nevertheless, within the body of students awarded Romanian study visas, there has been some diversification. While Israeli, Tunisian, Iraqi and Nigerian students seem to have witnessed a steep decline in the past few years (the latter two nationalities with a steep drop between 2015 and 2016), there has been a steady rise in the number of 'other' students coming from non-traditional destinations. These have risen from 28.3% in 2015 to 36.5% in 2018 among non-Moldovan arrivals. Of the big traditional countries of origin for international students, Turkey has seen a significant rise in total arrivals.

Table 1 International student admissions (source: IGI)

Citizens of	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Moldova	1612	1720	1849	2202	7383
Israel	655	692	641	479	2467
Turkey	443	509	586	591	2129
Morocco	255	260	277	256	1048
Tunisia	355	234	200	173	962
Serbia	215	256	201	196	868
Ukraine	115	138	141	183	577
Iraq	226	132	96	107	561
Syria	126	96	113	112	447
Nigeria	246	53	67	75	441
Other	1039	1149	1175	1249	4612
Total-MD	3675	3519	3497	3421	14112
Total	**5287**	**5239**	**5346**	**5623**	**21495**

5   Findings

Our initial research effort looked at existing legal documents and the arguments that they used. The Law 237/2018 was a catch-all overhaul law for Romania's immigration and residency legislation, creating new immigration pathways, simplifying others, reducing the requirements necessary to employ non-EU staff and facilitating international mobility in research, education and *au pair* childcare work. These changes brought Romanian legislation in line with European practices, but the law itself went beyond the scope of European Directive (EU) 2016/801.

Among the new provisions introduced or perfected by the Law, the most meaningful from the standpoint of education include:

1. A definition was now provided for what an international student was (both tertiary and pre-tertiary). A similar definition was provided for international interns ("stagiar"). These definitions did not change *de facto* practices but enabled better alignment with EU and additional legislation;
2. The concept of educational project was introduced and used as a criterion in awarding certain types of visas;
3. Punitive clauses were introduced to limit access to residency in Romania for foreigners who had committed various crimes and misdemeanours, including criminal acts, breaches of migration and employment legislation in Romania and other EU states;
4. The criteria for being awarded an international study visa was updated (though in practice remained broadly similar to prior conditions);
5. Additional criteria linked to income and assurance were inserted, in order to both ensure that international students can afford their studies;

6. Provisions were introduced to facilitate the international mobility of non-EU citizens studying in another EU country;

7. There was an overhaul of criteria used to award visas to non-EU researchers, and to ease intra-EU mobility for non-EU researchers;

8. Lastly, students graduating in Romanian universities were awarded the chance to stay for nine months to seek employment.

It should be noted, however, that Romanian legislation does limit the absolute number of visas issued across categories. As such, there is an absolute cap that is placed on the number of foreign workers, currently at around 30.000 persons per year (Interview 5). This additional legislation authorizes the government to regulate the cap on a year-by-year basis, though interviewees from the immigration authority noted that this cap is not set in stone, and the total number of new admissions can be extended.

The other restriction to the formally open legislation is the requirement for prioritization of Romanian and European Union citizens. This is common across most of Europe as part of anti-social-dumping regulations that aim to limit employers from recruiting foreign workers and limiting wages. Nevertheless, law 247/2018 also toned down existing restrictions. For example, it lowered minimum wage requirements for non-EU citizens. Romanian minimum wage is now sufficient to employ a non-EU foreigners while before 2018 the floor was higher. The changes in legislation are likely to have a more limited effect on tertiary graduates, as they usually have a higher level of income to begin with.

It should be noted that while the new legislation explicitly regulated seeking employment as a valid reason for a visa extension, graduates had been able to find employment under the previous law (Interviews 4, 5). Even though legislation did not explicitly permit seeking employment upon graduation, immigration officials noted that the six-month extension offered to students in order to finish graduation formalities were in some cases used for this purpose. Nevertheless, the pre-Law 247 immigration regime was often restrictive. One university (Interview 2) complained that, in practice, students had been struggling with visa extensions should they need a deadline extension for final thesis projects.

Labour shortages seemed to be acknowledged by most interviewees as a societal reality that is likely to affect Romania's long-term development. And, in the informal setting of the interviews, the respondents often acknowledged the importance of universities in attracting highly skilled foreign workers in the context of the demographic crisis. Employing skilled foreign workers has indeed been a long-time demand by employers, who often complain about labour shortages and currently use corporate networks or foreign agencies to recruit non-EU labour (Interview 6). In fact, legislative and executive authorities had already been addressing this issue before the adoption of Law 247/2018. For example, the overall cap on foreign workers has been raised in the past few years consistently, and it is current policy to raise it should the demand for workers exceed supply (Interview 5). However, up until now, this cap has mostly been used for recruitment in the hospitality and construction industries (Interview 5, 6).

However, none of the academic responders had resorted to using employment prospects as a hook or a prominent feature of their public discourse targeting potential international students. Universities would often tout the cost-effectiveness of their programmes (Interviews 1, 3), the lifestyle offered by living in a major European capital (Interview 2) or a mix between the two (Interview 4). Respondents usually seemed to consider membership of the European Union as a major selling point, as this would enable easy recognition of awarded degrees for employment purposes (elsewhere in the European Union).

This, of course, is not entirely unexpected given the recent nature of the topic of immigration in public discourse in Romania. And, while immigration has been limited for the most part and is broadly a very recent phenomenon, emigration of both graduates and non-graduates has been a massified trend which has resulted in over 3.500.000 Romanian citizens living in other European Union countries. Nevertheless, there has also been a sharp increase in the number of immigrants living in the country in recent years, though this in itself is still largely an effect of circular migration by Romanian citizens moving back-and-forth from/to EU countries and a small but rapidly rising contingent of foreigners.

As Eurostat data indicates (see Table 2) the highest share of foreign-born residents in Romania is given by countries with Romanian diasporas, either ethnic or migratory. This points to a fairly low level of authentically foreign permanent or long-duration immigration to the country and could be a factor in explaining why the idea of targeting non-nationals for employment purposes has yet to catch on. There is a rapidly growing number of non-nationals who are employed on a temporary basis, but these are not skills-selected but are awarded visas based on existing (and often short-term) needs in the labour market (Interviews 5, 6).

This non-familiarity with the very topic of immigration can also be seen in inter-institutional cooperation, and how respondents related to it. While Bucharest-

Table 2 Residents in Romania by country of birth (source: Eurostat)

Country/year	2013	2018	Country/year	2013	2018
Romania	19,862,852	19,013,651	Russia	4,952	7,189
Moldova	59,670	199,703	Greece	4,085	6,864
Italy	22,486	62,914	China	2,978	5,473
Spain	18,827	47,311	USA	2,360	4,888
Ukraine	8,743	24,570	Israel	1,665	3,660
United Kingdom	2,604	21,050	Syria	2,295	3,358
Germany	3,759	20,168	Belgium	54	3,269
France	3,780	15,867	Ireland	3,780	2,632
Bulgaria	11,163	10,543	Serbia	1,529	2,465
Hungary	5,795	8,648	Austria	121	2,084
Turkey	5,057	7,901	Iraq	1,136	2,045

based universities tended to appreciate their cooperation with immigration authorities (Interviews 2, 3, 4), they mainly valued its role in facilitating visas and informing students on their rights, status changes etc. The only regional university interviewed had a less fortunate track-record in cooperating with regional immigration authorities (Interview 1). This contrasted with the attitude of the responders from the immigration authority, which seemed to consider employment as a priority in awarding visas. It should be noted that respondents who became familiar with recent legal changes during the interview process expressed openness to using employment prospects as a bigger part of their marketing and branding efforts.

A major point of criticism within inter-institutional cooperation was the process of awarding first-time entry visas for students. Due to the timing of the Romanian admission process (just 2–3 months before courses commence), the tradition of summer holidays in embassies and the limited capacity in consular offices, many students arrived in Romania after course started, with universities reporting delays ranging from over a month (Interview 2) to as long as three (Interview 4). There were also reports of countries where the rate of rejected visa applications was high enough to discourage future applicants (Interview 4). Among other findings of the interviews, there seemed to be a trend towards simplifying bureaucratic processes (a decision is often communicated to students using scanned files as opposed to physical dossiers), as well as an effort to better accommodate international students during their stay. The needs of international students reported by the interviewees were diverse, ranging from the provision of foreign language administrative services to—in an extreme example—protection from radicalization efforts. One university complained that accreditation processes are not conducive to the development of study programmes in foreign languages, placing significant burdens on universities that try to develop English or French language versions of their existing study offer (Interview 2).

6   Conclusions

Romanian authorities have, in recent years, simplified many of the immigration-related restrictions that previously made attracting international students more onerous than in many other European countries. This has included better alignment to European regulations, more leniency in processing admission dossiers and indeed greater leeway for international students graduating in Romania to stay and seek employment within the country.

Administrative bodies tasked with implementing legislation seem proactive in implementing legislation to the advantage of international students, though the recent nature of the current legal framework does not offer scope for a quantitative analysis based on the number of issued visas and variations by category. Nevertheless, most Bucharest-based respondents deemed central level institutions as being supportive in their efforts to attract international students.

On the other hand, the intra-institutional dialogue still seemed problematic. Most universities did not seem entirely familiar with the impact of recent legislative changes but were overall keen to use them in the future in order to better market themselves abroad. However, other state bodies were less conducive to greater openness. The late timeline of admissions, as currently regulated by law, means that students are pressed to obtain visas in a very short amount of time. Bureaucratic burdens remain and are indicative of a lack of inter-institutional trust, with certain policy priorities not reflected in the operational practices of embassies, for example.

As a broad conclusion, it can be said that the updated legislative framework is, at the moment, limited in its overall impact on internationalization of Romanian higher education by the permanence of certain barriers. Chief among them is the scheduling of admissions and the limited capacity of overseas Romanian embassies to process dossiers in order to award visas, though domestic bureaucratic issues also exist. The present article should warrant a follow-up once statistics are compiled for the first few years in the implementation of Law 247/2018, in order to determine if a statistically significant rise in international graduates seeking employment in the country occurs.

From a chronological point of view, and going beyond the findings of this paper, the new reforms can be seen as a new waypoint on the road to aligning Romanian higher education policies to those found in much of the rest of Europe. This started with the adoption of most Bologna tools, greater levels of mobility and greater research cooperation, but policy alignment is now crossing the boundary between education and immigration legislation in line with recent European practice. However, the extensive transformation brought about by Bologna and European Union membership is still incomplete. As in many other countries, *de facto* practices in the higher education system are anchored as much in older and deep-rooted traditions as they are in newer policy initiatives.

List of interviews

Interview	Responders
Interview 1	Public university. Conducted via phone in two stages. Two responders
Interview 2	Public university. Conducted face-to-face. Two responders
Interview 3	Private university. Conducted face-to-face. One responder
Interview 4	Public university. Conducted face-to-face with phone follow-up. Two responders
Interview 5	Public authority dealing with immigration. Face-to-face interview with two responders
Interview 6	Representative of human resources company. Telephone interview

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Access and Success for Every Learner in Higher Education (Coordinated by David Crosier and Cezar Mihai Haj)

Evolving Social Dimension of the European Higher Education Area

David Crosier and Cezar Mihai Haj

1 The Social Dimension in the Bologna Process

> …student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations' (Bologna Process Bologna Process 2007a)

The social dimension is a term coined in the early years of the Bologna Process (BP). Although mentioned in the early ministerial communiqué texts, the term itself was not clearly defined until 2007. Looking back, this could perhaps be considered an oversight. However, the more likely explanation is that the term was chosen intentionally, leaving open possibilities for national and institutional action while, at the same time, committing countries to nothing precise. In the early years of policy-setting for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the use of the term "dimension" was indeed a signal of aspiration in a rather loosely defined policy area. Thus, as well as the "social dimension", references can be found in Bologna documents (communiqués and working group reports) to the "European dimension" of higher education as well as to the "international dimension" and also to the "external dimension" of the Bologna process. None of these terms was accompanied by clear definitions.

An important moment for the social dimension in the Bologna Process came in 2007 when in London the higher education ministers adopted the recommended definition of the working group that had been mandated to reflect on how policy in this area should be developed. They defined the objective of social dimension policy to be that the '*student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations*' (Bologna Process 2007a).

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This definition continues to be a valid and actual reference point. It is a definition that embraces a clear, aspirational objective—the representation of the diversity of the population. It also entails a process to reach the goal—i.e. the development and implementation of policies and practices (Bologna Process 2007b). Most importantly, establishing this definition brought clarity to discussions.

Everything that has been written in subsequent communiqués and EHEA policy texts derives from and sometimes repeats the 2007 Working Group report and the definition in the London Communiqué. Thus "*Student body within higher education should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations* (Bologna Process 2009)", "*The student body entering and graduating from higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations* (Bologna Process 2012)", "….*the student body entering and graduating from European higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations…*(Bologna Process 2018)"

Some subsequent communiqués focus on commitment to develop and implement national strategies (Bologna Process 2009, 2012) while others give particular emphasis to other aspects. For example, the higher education role in building inclusive societies is a focus of the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué. In this document, ministers agree to '*enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.*' (Bologna Process 2015). The communique further emphasises flexible learning paths and the inclusion of different types of learners by promoting life-long learning and recognition of prior learning.

While responsibility lies with countries and institutions, there have nevertheless been important developments in European-level discussions throughout the Bologna period. Despite each country being left to determine the particular parameters of under-representation in its specific context, a European discussion has required some broad categories of under-represented groups to be identified. These categories may also correspond to notions of disadvantaged or vulnerable students in national contexts and commonly include people from a low socio-economic background (identified through low income or low educational background of parents), gender, disability and immigrant or minority status. Mature students are also often included. European discussions also recognise that students from particular geographical regions may be disadvantaged—particularly those in isolated rural areas or areas of high urban social deprivation, and that under-representation is also associated with insufficient formal education qualifications for entry into higher education.

These categories of under-represented, vulnerable or disadvantaged groups are not separate, discreet entities. In lived reality, they combine as characteristics of individual citizens, and under-representation may be apparent in a combination of these different factors. Thus, a person from a low socio-economic status background will also have a gender, may come from an area of social deprivation, may be a migrant or have a disability, and all of these factors will combine to play a role in shaping or limiting opportunities in a particular context. Within the Bologna Process, the main discussion focuses on the need to develop strategies and actions to improve access to, participation in and completion of higher education for members of these groups.

This paper aims to present an overview of the ways in which the issues under the umbrella term of "social dimension" have been conceptualised and addressed by higher education policy throughout the Bologna Process. It also considers the challenges that lie ahead in improving social reality in European higher education and introduces the papers that have been selected to provide in-depth research on different aspects of the social dimension.

2   Social Dimension Strategy

Despite discussion and commitment for national strategies and action plans (Bologna Process 2007a), there are few countries that have actually made a conscious effort to develop genuine social dimension strategies in the European higher education Area. Ireland is perhaps the most notable exception to this general rule. Here, a succession of higher education policy strategies has consistently featured inclusion and widening participation as high-level policy goals throughout the Bologna period. The country has also developed support measures focused at students from under-represented groups—particularly mature students, students from the traveller community and students with disabilities. Ireland has also established good quality monitoring systems to track the impact of policy—measuring completion and drop-out rates for specific under-represented groups. (Department of Education and Skills, Dublin 2011)

The focus on social inclusion has not inhibited other policy initiatives. On the contrary, Ireland's strategy has engaged fully with other trends in learning and teaching, research and innovation, community engagement and internationalisation. Indeed, the country's approach offers a good model for the wider EHEA commitment being prepared for the 2020 Rome Communiqué to make the social dimension a core commitment on which to build all future policy.

Other countries also offer interesting models. In particular, the Nordic countries demonstrate a model of social equity that permeates higher education. This can be most clearly seen through the type of financial measures that are used to support students. In contrast to nearly all other European systems, no tuition fees are charged to national and European students. This policy also extends in some countries to all international students, but in recent years, countries such as Denmark and Sweden have introduced fees for students from outside Europe. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018)

In addition to the absence of fees, a very high proportion of students receive grants, with amounts usually adjusted according to the individual student's socio-economic situation. The public investment is, therefore, considerable and provided in a mainstream form.

One important aspect of this Nordic model is that no specific groups are identified. Through providing generous conditions and support to all students, disadvantaged or vulnerable students also receive sufficient support and are not stigmatised.

While one major benefit of this model is its inherent inclusivity, its most significant disadvantage is that there is no way of knowing how many students from under-

represented, disadvantaged or vulnerable groups actually benefit from the support. As the notion of groups is anathema to a system designed to support everyone, there remains a potential for hidden inequity to continue without specific action being taken to address it.

Almost all other European higher education systems take a different approach to student financing. Most commonly, countries charge tuition fees to some students—but provide fee reductions or exemptions to students who are considered as 'disadvantaged'. This refers to students with low socio-economic background and those belonging to various under-represented groups, such as students with disabilities, ethnic minorities, orphans or, in a few countries, children of war victims. Fee waivers or reductions based on socio-economic criteria generally concern a relatively small proportion of students.

A number of transition countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and North Macedonia use merit-based criteria in differentiating fees paid by full-time higher education entrants. In these countries, based on performance in upper secondary education and/or results of admission tests, students start their higher education studies in one of two groups: a 'state-funded' group, including better-performing students who do not pay fees or pay only small administrative charges, and a group of 'self-financing' students who cover (fully or partially) their tuition expenses. Depending on the country, self-financing students may comprise between 30% and 60% of students.

Even more countries use merit-based criteria for allocating grants. According to Eurydice data, in 22 higher education systems, grants are awarded either based on educational outcomes during higher education studies or based on secondary school results or performance in admission tests.

This merit-based approach to student funding appears to be blind to the reality that it rewards previous social and educational advantage. Yet research consistently shows that students coming from families where parents have themselves benefitted from higher education have greater opportunity to access higher education. Providing fee waivers and grants on the basis of merit-based criteria thus shores up social advantage and inequity.

One of the reasons why merit-based student funding may not be a high profile social justice concern for citizens or policy makers is that almost all countries also have parallel support that is attributed on a needs basis. Indeed, Eurydice shows that in 32 higher education systems, grants exist that prioritise socially or economically disadvantaged students.

While student financing is widely understood as an important aspect of the social dimension, there is little evidence that specific funding approaches are effective in widening participation. The United Kingdom provides an interesting case study in this respect, as England (and to a lesser extent Wales and Northern Ireland) operates a system where high fees (capped at £9 250/€10 000 per year) are charged to all students. However, these fees are only paid after the student graduates, and when she or he is earning over a specific income threshold. In combination with these fees, students may take out loans which also have to be repaid after graduation. Most

prospective students, therefore, begin their study programmes in the knowledge that they will accrue high levels of debt.

While this system transfers some of the cost of higher education from state to individuals who participate, it has also been designed with features to support under-represented groups. Indeed, higher education institutions have to sign access agreements that aim to ensure equality of opportunity for students from low-income and other under-represented groups and to increase retention rates. Some of the fee funding is thus redistributed to low income and other under-represented groups through specific measures at institutional level, while higher education institutions also take other action in terms of service provision to support disadvantaged students.

Scotland, which has full responsibility for its education system, takes a radically different approach to student funding. No fees are charged in short and first cycle higher education to Scottish and European students—except to those from the rest of the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, a combination of grants and loans support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Interestingly, there is no clear evidence that one approach is having a more positive impact than the other on widening participation to students from under-represented groups. The evidence suggests rather that the factors affecting participation of under-represented and disadvantaged groups run deeper than funding. In other words, if funding at higher education level is the main mechanism used to attempt to widen participation, then success is likely to be limited.

Austria and Romania are both countries which have made attempts to take a broader strategic approach to social dimension issues in recent years. These countries are thus the subject of a comparison of experience in the paper by Torotcoi. Austria has established long-term targets for increasing participation from under-represented groups and has set multiple goals for different societal groups. (BMWFW 2017) Stakeholder representatives have all been involved in defining and developing the objectives, and there appears to be a widespread understanding of the underlying rationale for action. Torotcoi demonstrates, however, that other national strategies and policies are in contradiction with the objectives of higher education social dimension strategy, and hence the likelihood of deeply-rooted change is diminished.

In contrast, Romanian universities have worked individually to define their social dimension strategy and have then been brought together through stakeholder interaction. However, so far improving the social dimension has not proved to be a sufficiently strong motivating factor for universities to form a true critical mass. A broader debate and greater societal engagement will be needed if there is to be agreement on the direction of such social inclusion policies. This debate needs to engage actors in social policy across a number of sectors and involve different responsible government ministries.

3 Exploring Social Dimension Policies

One of the main challenges for research in this field is that it has often been limited to exploration of policy measures taken at higher education level. There are many rational reasons for this research choice. Among them is the fact that policy-making is often differentiated by sectors in national systems. While some governments have a ministry responsible for all aspects of the education system, many countries separate ministerial responsibility for school and higher education. Moreover, even in more unified systems, administrative divisions may facilitate separate spheres for action in higher education.

One important study (Orr et al. 2017) examined the impact of admission systems on higher education outcomes—including opportunities for access as well as successful completion of degree programmes. This study showed that admission is best conceptualised as a process that is developed through the relationship between different parts of the education system. Thus in some countries, the fact that a significant share of lower secondary education pupils may be directed into educational paths that do not provide access to higher education is a stage of defining who can and cannot be admitted to higher education. The implication is that, if the social dimension agenda is to be coherent, it must consider how this kind of system feature can be reformed to ensure that equity runs throughout the education system. This approach would apply from early childhood education and care, through primary and secondary education as well as higher education.

Gender is another aspect of the social dimension that illustrates the difficulty of taking action only at higher education level. The 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report shows that fields of study are highly differentiated by gender. Women make up almost 80% of first cycle students enrolled in subjects related to education, health and welfare, but less than 20% of the students in information and communication technologies. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018)

This reality is shaped by our societies from early childhood education onwards. Without awareness of gender differentiation and action to address it coherently throughout society, there is little hope that the pattern of participation in higher education programmes would change. Indeed, it is a moot point whether this is an issue that can be significantly affected by higher education policy reform.

Higher education is also a sector that often seems to be more reactive than proactive in the face of certain societal developments. One example is demographic change. Since 2010, many EHEA systems, particularly Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Estonia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Lithuania, have been experiencing a decline in the numbers of secondary school leaving students seeking access to higher education. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018)

This demographic decline could have been a catalyst for policy makers and higher education institutions to innovate in adjusting their offer. Such innovation could, for example, have comprised the exploration of targeting new potential learners in higher education. Admission through the recognition of prior learning, or other criteria than achievement of upper secondary education could have been explored. Alternatively,

countries could have invested in preparatory programmes to develop a baseline of knowledge, skills and competences in more mature returners to higher education.

It is noticeable, however, that none of the countries mentioned above has taken steps to make this kind of adaptations to their system. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018) Rather, they remain steadfast in the model of higher education on offer. While there may be discussion to broaden access among the typical higher education age group, there has been little or no reflection on changing the nature of the programme offer.

Two of the papers in this section consider the way in which social dimension policy is having an impact on under-represented groups in different parts of Europe. Torot-coi et al. explore the question of whether existing policy measures have demonstrated success in increasing participation of under-represented groups. Through analysis of research in the field, it becomes clear that this question has no simple answer. Just as different characteristics combine in the single identity of any given citizen, so too do different factors affect the impact of actions and measures in any particular context. Guidance and counselling services, for example, may be highly effective to support certain students in accessing higher education and studying. However, the quality of these services, their ability to identify and target students in need of support and myriad other factors may affect their impact. Similarly, funding support to disadvantaged students can intuitively be recognised as a necessary measure to support those students with few financial resources to participate in higher educa-tion. However, if this is an isolated policy action that is not complemented by other elements of a widening participation strategy, then it is very unlikely to stimulate significant change. A further problem identified in this paper is that policies may often be developed without sufficient attention to the monitoring required to assess their impact.

The outcomes of this work emphasise the complexity of understanding reality, of developing effective policy, and of assessing impact. The research confirms the enormous need for quality data and research to improve understanding of social reality and to develop and refine more effective policy interventions.

Brooks et al. approach the issue of policy needs in this area from the perspec-tive of learners and staff. The research explores how staff and learners perceive the impact of social characteristics on higher education experience. They do this through a research project focused on subjective perception of staff and learners' experience of social characteristics in seven European countries. The research uses focus group discussions to reveal a number of interesting findings. Notable among them is that staff and student perceptions of social reality differ significantly. While staff may be conscious of certain characteristics in the student population—particularly char-acteristics often featured in national policy and media discussion—they are often seemingly unaware of others. Students, on the other hand, appear to have a higher level of awareness of the different social characteristics of their peers, as well as of the impact that these characteristics may have. Discussions with students thus tended to consider a broader range of factors than those with staff. The research also revealed significant national differences in the perception of impact of social charac-teristics on opportunities to access higher education. In particular, in Poland—which

was the only example of a post-soviet transition country in the sample—there was a widespread view that there is no issue of under-representation to be tackled.

These findings give further arguments to pursue some of the challenges that the European Higher Education Area faces. Firstly, there is clearly a need to engage students in policy discussions—particularly in relation to social dimension issues if these are to be tackled effectively. Secondly, it is essential to provide training to staff to raise awareness of how social characteristics may affect student learning and the overall higher education experience. There is also a need to improve understanding of how education provision could better respond to a broader range of needs in a more diverse student body. Finally, it will be important to assess the impact of measures taken to address these challenges. Effective monitoring, therefore, needs to be built in to all policy actions.

4 Lack of Impact of the Bologna Process in the Social Dimension

Although the social dimension has remained a constant discussion on the Bologna Process agenda, it is difficult to find evidence that the process itself has been an effective vehicle for addressing social dimension challenges. Nevertheless, the 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report shows that most countries have some measures in place designed to improve inclusion. As already discussed, financial support for students from under-represented groups exists almost everywhere, and access in some systems has also been facilitated by preferential treatment and opening alternative entry routes. Outreach programmes and information campaigns directed for under-represented groups are also commonly used, and counselling and guidance services are widespread. Performance indicators for institutions often now include financial incentives for institutions to improve access and completion for under-represented groups. However, there is no macro-level correlation of the existence of these measures with any improved outcomes.

The main aspects of inequity have remained constant throughout the Bologna period and across geographical boundaries. Under-representation persists in all countries, despite a variety in policies and diversity in the underlying socio- economic conditions of countries. There remains a clear correlation between high educational background of parents and the chance of their children entering higher education. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018)

Gender differences in certain study subjects persist and are strengthening. Students with an immigrant background are also clearly under-represented in most EHEA higher education systems. Meanwhile, although the numbers of mature students vary between countries, life-long learning is often not a significant reality. Few inroads have been made to any of these aspects of reality.

5   Monitoring: Neglect in Social Dimension Policy

One important aspect of social dimension policy is that impact—positive or otherwise—can only be assessed if policy is underpinned by effective monitoring. All countries monitor the composition of the student body to some extent. However, when monitoring practice is examined more closely, gaps are revealed.

The 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report shows that EHEA countries report that the student body is monitored usually at entry and during studies, but to a lesser degree at graduation and least often after graduation. This means that, even if information on the social composition of the student body can be provided at entry and during studies, comparable information is not collected at the point of graduation, and thus the effectiveness of measures and services in supporting under-represented groups through higher education is impossible to determine. Even less is known about what happens to graduates beyond higher education and whether social factors continue to have an impact on their opportunities in the labour market.

The lack of systematic monitoring at key stages of higher education is compounded by two other issues. The first is that monitoring tends to be undertaken as a snapshot—revealing a picture of current reality. It is rare to find systems that monitor the development of cohorts or track individual students. This type of tracking, however, is needed to allow a clearer picture to emerge in relation to the particular characteristics of the student population.

The second problem is that, even when administrative monitoring is undertaken, many relevant social characteristics are commonly overlooked. Across the EHEA, it is unsurprising to find that gender and age are routinely monitored. Beyond that, the picture varies. Many systems collect data on disability, but this is likely to be far from comprehensive as many students with impairments may choose not to disclose them for fear of stigma. (e.g. Eurostudent) Data on socio-economic background is also often collected in relation to student support systems. However, it may not be used for policy reflection. Data on migrant or ethnic minority status is much less often gathered. Overall, according to the 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report, only 11 EHEA countries have reliable data on completion rates of studies for students from under-represented or disadvantaged groups. The other 37 countries, despite monitoring overall completion and drop-out rates, do not collect information in relation to specific groups.

The only conclusion that can be drawn from this information is that this rather ineffectual action in monitoring means that social dimension policy implementation cannot be considered as a great priority. If it were, there would be available data gathering systems in place to understand the impact of policy.

6   New Social Dimension Challenges

The issues already outlined in this paper provide a massive policy agenda implying, as they do, a major effort at holistic education system reform. Nevertheless, the reality that we face today is fast-moving and rapidly changing, as exemplified by the sudden onset of the covid-19 pandemic. The closing of higher education institutions is being accompanied by a surge in online provision, and this temporary reality will no doubt drive a shift in attitudes towards digitalisation that will have some permanent repercussions. The social dimension, therefore, needs to take account of the changes in the global context as well as the potential opportunities provided by new developments.

The social dimension is inextricably related to sustainable development, another paradigm that must guide future policy-making. The objective must be to harness new technologies, as well as new ways of thinking and collaborating to face the challenges in our world. This is the logic that has been followed within the Bologna Process by moving the social dimension to a core commitment for future development. It implies that other emerging challenges—such as the harnessing of digital technology to support inclusive teaching and research, or the integration of micro-credentials into the higher education framework—are understood as part of a new social dimension paradigm.

7   The Integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

From 2015, Europe was faced with what at the time was often described as a "migration crisis". This followed the significant increase in numbers of asylum seekers and refugees seeking to enter European Union countries as a result of war in Syria, and continued post-conflict societal degeneration in a number of other states—with the most significant refugee numbers coming from Afghanistan.

Mass migration is not a new phenomenon: while the factors behind mass movements of people change, the reality of migration has been with us throughout the modern era. So while the increase in numbers of asylum seekers to European shores was an unusual and unexpected event, it is inevitable that migration will continue to be a feature of our lives in the future. We may not be able to predict the precise causes of future mass migration, but we can prepare for such events knowing that they will occur at some point.

Two of the papers in this volume—by Berg and Erdogan—consider the emergence of refugees and asylum seekers as a group affecting the social dynamics of higher education systems in recent years. While media reporting tended to focus attention on the potential impact of asylum seekers and refugees in each individual country, in reality, the only European Union countries that responded through opening up their countries to refugees to any significant extent were Germany and Sweden.

It was the neighbouring countries to Syria that accepted the vast majority of asylum seekers and refugees. Foremost among these countries is Turkey, which in 2020 has a population of more than 4 million asylum seekers and refugees—the largest population of displaced people in the world. Overall, among all Syrian asylum seekers fleeing the country in 2015 and 2016, more than 50% were in the age category 18–34. Among these, many have been seeking to develop their educational skills since leaving Syria. This provides challenges as well as opportunities for the host country in developing skilled and educated citizens.

The paper from Erdogan is based upon survey research with Syrian refugees studying in the Turkish higher education system. The research explores a variety of aspects of the refugees' experience of Turkish higher education, and the findings provide an important overview of the extent to which this vulnerable population has been supported into higher education institutions. The findings are relevant for improving Turkish action and measures. However, they are equally relevant for wider European policy-thinking—especially if European countries are to prepare better to integrate asylum seekers and refugees in the future. It is, of course, impossible to predict when a significant new wave of refugees will be in need of asylum nor in relation to what particular conflict or natural disaster. However, it is entirely possible to predict, on the basis of past experience and known realities about climate emergency, that the future will see significant numbers of new refugees arriving at some point. It would, therefore, be sensible to prepare for such an eventuality.

Berg consider the integration of Syrian refugees into Germany—the European Union country that also welcomed a large number of refugees in 2015 and 2016. The research explores the transition into higher education, focusing on refugee students, and highlighting the ways in which the experience for refugees may differ from ideal or typical transitions. The paper illustrates how professionals working in the higher education system may need to think carefully about their routine practice. While "typical" native students may have acquired knowledge of the transition process, many of these aspects cannot be assumed for refugee students. Hence there is a need to think ahead of potential barriers and the support that refugees may need. To do this effectively, it is important to find out directly from refugee students how they experienced the process.

This research focuses on how often the provision of information is constructed with a particular idea of a student (coming out of secondary education) in mind, and not considering the needs of vulnerable students. It also shows how counselling services may carry unconscious or conscious biases that mean that sometimes refugee students are not encouraged to develop their full potential but rather to enter low-level education programmes.

Both papers on refugee students point to the need not only for the potential student to adapt to the higher education system, but also for the system, institution and support services to adapt to the needs of the student. The capacity of a system to do this effectively should be considered as a measure of success in the social dimension.

8   The Third Cycle

Perhaps because only a small minority of students studies in third cycle programmes, these studies have often been neglected in considerations of the social dimension. The research undertaken by O'Regan addresses this cycle, focusing in particular on differences between full and part-time doctoral candidates in Ireland in access to programme-based information and academic and personal support networks.

In the particular sample selected, part-time candidates have a higher share of mature, female students. The findings suggest that awareness and consideration of the needs of this group of students would enable information and support to be more effectively delivered. While this research draws on information related to a specific geo-cultural reality in Irish higher education, the outcomes are worthy of more general reflection. Indeed, they reinforce points revealed in the research by Brooks et al. and by Berg that academic staff often appear not to be sufficiently aware of students' social characteristics, or of the impact that these characteristics may have on their learning experience.

9   Conclusions: Addressing the Challenges Ahead

The social dimension, despite being a broad concept, has been clearly defined in the European Higher Education Area since 2007. The definition of the London Communiqué responds to a basic question for citizens and policy makers alike, "what kind of higher education system do we wish to develop?" The response contained in the definition is that we are striving for a higher education that is open and equitable, and where the diversity of our populations is reflected in higher education.

Although the goal has been acknowledged throughout the Bologna Process, it has largely remained an aspiration. No country has achieved the objective, and most countries have taken little action even to move towards it. Indeed, the social dimension has remained a largely peripheral concern of the EHEA, with periodic reminders in subsequent communiqués to develop strategies to address the topic.

While the social dimension has been largely a neglected aspect of EHEA attention, there are now signs that this is set to change. Recent work undertaken by the BFUG Advisory Group for the social dimension has produced a document that aims to push the social dimension agenda to the forefront of policy discussion in the Bologna Process. The Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA will be a highly beneficial tool for any government willing to address this area seriously. They provide a clear and concise set of issues that require reflection and debate (Bologna Process 2020).

The Principles and Guidelines document establishes ten principles, accompanying each principle with guidelines on how they could be implemented. It should be adopted by Ministers in Rome, November 2020, alongside a strong statement on why the social dimension should be at the core of the Bologna Process.

Another reason to hope that the Principles and Guidelines may stimulate positive change is that it is a very comprehensive overview of the issues that need to be considered. It provides the perspective of long-term commitment, with governments mainstreaming social dimension, accessibility, equity and inclusion in all aspects of their education systems. If implemented seriously, it may act as a catalyst for the type of holistic thinking around education systems that is essential for social dimension challenges really to be addressed.

The Principles and Guidelines also consider the main areas of action required from higher education institutions and the fact that they need support to strengthen their capacity to respond to the needs of a more diverse student body. The document highlights the need for effective counselling and guidance and raises questions about the type of student funding required to strengthen the social dimension. These actions will require good systems for monitoring, and this task is also fully incorporated within the Principles and Guidelines.

The social dimension clearly requires major policy attention. European higher education serves many purposes, but until now, it is not a strong force in redressing societal inequity. Indeed, admissions systems, curriculum organisation and resource distribution are currently more likely to contribute to and strengthen inequity than to tackle it. Greater understanding of social reality is clearly needed, and better data gathering systems must be developed. However, it would be wrong to wait for better data before taking policy action. The process of addressing social dimension challenges needs to begin now as a matter of urgency.

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What Does It Take to Build a Social Dimension Strategy? A Cross-Country Comparative Analysis of Romania and Austria

Simona Torotcoi

1 Context

Within the Bologna Process, every two or three years, there are Ministerial Conferences organised in order to assess the progress made and to decide on the new steps to be taken. Based on ministers' deliberations, each meeting has produced a declaration or communiqué which indicates the new higher education priorities. The various national representatives and organisational structures involved in the Bologna Process provide evidence about participating countries' political interest in the process, their stance of higher education policies, and the ways decisions are arrived at. Bergan and Deca (2018) point out that in the last 2–3 ministerial meetings there has been a declining political interest from the ministers' side, with a decreasing number of ministers participating in the ministerial conferences. The authors argue that this might be driven by the "lack of new politically appealing commitments that would make the Bologna Process more attractive within national debates" (Bergan and Deca 2018, 298). Other scholars like Viðarsdóttir (2018) argue that the increasing lack of political interest in the Bologna Process comes along with considerable implications for the lack of implementation at the national level. Can this explain the low number of initiatives taken by participating countries to build a social dimension?

Given the voluntary aspect of the Bologna Process, the current paper aims to shed light on the relationship between setting the Bologna Process social dimension agenda and participating countries' implementation responses. More specifically, it asks why there has been little attention given to the social dimension among Bologna participating countries, and why the attempts to build and implement a social dimension and life-long learning strategy or national plan have failed to become a reality at national level. First, it provides an overview on the social dimension agenda-setting at the European and national level. Then, the paper proceeds with an overview

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of how Romania and Austria reacted to these policy proposals in terms of immediate steps to comply with such commitments. Last but not least, this paper identifies and analyses the key rationales for why countries have or have not developed specific strategies or plans.

2 Introduction: The State of Art of the Social Dimension in the EHEA

The EHEA is not only about competitiveness and employability, but also about social aspects (Halford 2014; Yagci 2014). The Sorbonne Declaration referred to the fact that "students should be able to enter the academic world at any time in their professional life and from diverse backgrounds" (1998, p. 2). In her book *European Higher Education Policy and the Social Dimension: A Comparative Study of the Bologna Process*, Kooji (2015) provides an account of the development of the social dimension and contends that when it first appeared on the agenda, it was an ambiguous item, which appeared under other action lines such as student mobility or lifelong learning. In 2001, the social dimension was discussed in relation to mobility and the need to expand it to students who were less likely to be mobile due to their socio-economic background. In 2003, there was an emphasis on strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities, and in the upcoming years, participating countries were encouraged to make quality HE equally accessible to all, create appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background.

A clearer conceptualisation of this action line is presented in the 2007 and 2009 Communiqués, where it is stated that it is about access, equity, equal opportunity to quality education and widening participation of underrepresented groups[1]:

> We [the Ministers] share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, London Communiqué 2007).

With the adoption in 2015 of the "Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the EHEA to 2020", participating countries were asked to create concrete national plans to address the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education:

> We [the Ministers] agree that all member countries in the EHEA will develop a coherent set of policy measures to address participation in higher education which identify under-represented groups in higher education and outline specific, measurable actions to improve access, participation and completion for those groups, consistent with national approaches.

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[1]For a historical development of the social dimension see Kaiser et al. (2015). No Future for the Social Dimension? In: Curaj A., Matei L., Pricopie R., Salmi J., Scott P. (eds) The European Higher Education Area: Between critical reflections and future policies. Springer, Cham.

> An effective way of doing this is through national access plans or strategies, for which a set of European guidelines has been developed (Widening Participation for Equity and Growth 2015, 1).

In the guidelines,[2] the following steps are recommended:

1. Set up a coherent and inclusive process.
2. Set general objectives.
3. Analyse the current position. (A) student population (B) existing measures
4. Identify data gaps and ways to overcome them.
5. Identify barriers to access, participation and completion in higher education.
6. Contrast existing measures with identified barriers.
7. Develop strategies to overcome these barriers.
8. Implement a follow-up process and set specific targets.

The accompanying guidelines—a "roadmap" for member countries in order to ensure that national plans or strategies are developed using a systematic approach—aimed to assist countries to meet the challenge of developing or enhancing national plans or strategies. The weakness of the guidelines at hand stands in the fact that they do not focus so much on the content but rather on the process of how the stakeholders should reach a consensus.

Bologna implementation studies and reports have shown that participating countries move towards the same direction when it comes to implementing the agreed commitments, however, they do so at varying degrees and paces (Heinze and Knill 2008). The 2015 Bologna Implementation Report reveals that overall, in the EHEA, "the goal of providing equal opportunities to quality higher education is far from being reached" (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015, p. 19), with less than 20% of participating countries setting concrete quantitative objectives with reference to underrepresented groups. Similarly, little progress has been registered with regards to lifelong learning—a concept which is rarely well defined and operationalized in the participating countries. The 2007–2009 Bologna Process template for national reports introduces a section within the report which aims to explore the potentials for National Strategies for the Social Dimension or even present initiatives in this sense. The national responses vary in this respect. If countries like Ireland, Austria or Romania put forward specific actions or plans for addressing the social dimension, countries like Portugal are rather reluctant to provide details on current or intended plans. According to the European Student's Union (hereinafter ESU) (2015), in 2015, access plans were successfully implemented in two countries, six were struggling with proper implementation of action plans, ten countries were debating implementation of an action plan, and 13 countries did not debate it until that moment (Wulz et al. 2018, p. 213). The 2018 Bologna Implementation Report states that "only few countries have introduced measures in recent years to improve the conditions for under-represented groups to access and complete higher education" (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018, p. 15) and that "equal access

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[2]Report of the 2012–2015 BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning to the BFUG 2015, 35.

to higher education for students of different backgrounds is far from being a reality (p. 167). It is worth noting that despite these developments, countries like Austria, the Czech Republic, France and the United Kingdom have set longer-term targets for different groups of students (i.e. students with 'non-traditional' backgrounds or from low socio-economic status, or at reducing the gap between male and female participation).

The uneven implementation of the social dimension might question national representatives' pledge over turning words into deeds by endorsing the ministerial declarations or communiques and their comprehensive understanding of the policies they will have to implement at the national level as a follow up of their signing. The next sections explore the relationship between setting the Bologna Process social dimension agenda and participating countries' implementation responses.

3   Setting the Social Dimension Agenda at the EHEA Level

Setting the social dimension agenda at the Bologna Process level has been a topic of interest for scholars and practitioners alike. One of the most relevant works on the topic of agenda-setting for the social dimension at the Bologna Process level is Yagci's (2014) article, which aims to identify the major actors interested in the issue and their motivations for having it as a widespread European policy. For example, ESU has been among the first actors within the Bologna Process to define access inequalities, insufficient studying and living conditions of students; and later became a policy entrepreneur advocating for having the social dimension as a Bologna action line within the Prague Communiqué (Klemenčič 2012). The European University Association (EUA) mentioned the importance of student satisfaction and free access (Yagci 2014). The EUA considered such inequalities problematic in relation to increasing the competitiveness and excellence of universities and institutional autonomy. Education International (EI) also supported free access to higher education, considering its focus on the commodification of higher education (Yagci 2014). Moreover, in order to ensure a sustainable supply of a highly qualified labour force for the overall European economy and, therefore, enhance economic growth, the European Commission (EC) advocated for increasing and widening access to higher education (Yagci 2014; Keeling 2006).

The Bologna Process, therefore, cannot be reduced to the decisions of the Ministers of Education or country representatives participating in the ministerial meetings. Beside the above mentioned transnational networks, there are several parties organized through different structures, including a Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), a Board, a Secretariat, different working groups and consultative bodies—all of which have a clearly defined role in supporting the background policy development. As far as the BFUG is concerned, it is the main follow-up structure in the Bologna Process; it can establish working groups which might deal with certain topics in details according to the priorities and tasks set within the Ministerial Communique, etc. The BFUG is made up of representatives of the participating countries, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the European University Association, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), ESU,

UNESCO, Education International, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and BUSINESSEUROPE. The BFUG is responsible for the actual work and for the development of the overall process, and it is supported by the Bologna Secretariat. While it is claimed that there is an uneven practice when it comes to the roles of the Secretariat (so far seven Secretariats), it mainly ensures the continuity of the Bologna reforms by supporting the BFUG and its spinoff bodies (e.g. for the social dimension several working groups have been developed during the last Bologna secretariats) by preparing draft agendas, notes or minutes, or even reports and policy recommendations (Torotcoi 2017), with the latter almost always laying within the working group members, especially the co-chairs.

One of the hidden actors (Kingdon 2003) within the Bologna Process is the European Commission (EC), which through different tools (mainly funding and expertise) succeeded to become a partner in the Bologna Process. Even though the Bologna Process goes beyond EU member states, the idea of associating the Bologna Process with the European Union becomes nowadays a fact which cannot be contested (c.f. Deca 2013 on the discursive use of the Bologna Process in the Romanian higher education system as an EU initiative; Keeling 2006 on the role of the EC in shaping the European higher education landscape). In the European Union, education policy was always under the responsibility of the Member States, however, starting with the late 80s, the EC expanded its soft competencies in the field. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) provided a legal basis for the EC to contribute to the development of quality education cooperation by fostering cooperation between Member States and, therefore, developed different higher education programs which aimed at strengthening cooperation between universities and enterprises, promoting student mobility and exchange, encouraging teaching and research in the field of European integration, and even promoting innovation and equal opportunities in all sectors of education. Currently, due to its expertise and capacities (funding, expertise, producing policy papers, and reports on the progress of the Bologna Process), the EC is recognized as indispensable (Klemenčič 2018). Moreover, Bologna participating countries and other stakeholders have embraced the Commission's deft combination of research and priorities, utilizing this common language for higher education to describe and contextualize their national reforms.

Many projects regarding the implementation of the Bologna Process have been funded through a special funding mechanism for EHEA reforms.[3] For example, Expanding Opportunities in European Higher Education through peer learning (ExpandO) is a project funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. ExpandO, a pilot project of peer learning on the social dimension, promoted the implementation of Lifelong Learning Strategies in the field of widening access through peer learning. It aimed to carry out a focused survey on 'widening access', to develop a series of national/regional action plans, and to formulate a series of practical guidelines and recommendations for the participating

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[3]See Support to the Implementation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) reforms: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/library/support-implementation-european-higher-education-area-ehea-reforms_en.

LLP countries and the whole European Higher Education Area. The Peer Learning Initiative for the Social Dimension (PL4SD) was a three-year project (2012–2015) funded by the European Commission through the Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus Multilateral projects) aimed to provide national and international policy makers, stakeholders and practitioners with resources to develop effective measures for ensuring the social dimension of the European Higher Education Area. Among others, the project aimed at ensuring transparency in current developments, stimulating international exchange and debate on policy measures and enabling peer learning and easing the implementation of policy measures by other countries.

The outcomes of such projects like PL4SD or ExpandO, including the socialization processes in between, the results from different Bologna implementation reports and other venues, made the members of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning Working Group 2012–2015 (SD&LLL WG)—which functioned as the PL4SD stakeholder forum—propose certain solutions (Kingdon 2003)—a strategy and a set of guidelines—to the Bologna Follow-up Group:

> The BFUG is requested to consider the strategy [Widening Participation for Equity and Growth- A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the EHEA to 2020] for adoption by Ministers at the Yerevan meeting. (Report of the 2012–2015 BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning to the BFUG 2015, 18).

Most of the times, through a process of interaction, the WG makes proposals to the relevant stakeholders, including Ministers, about the relevant data, developments, challenges, best practices etc., and such, these groups of actors arrive at common views about the next steps (De Bruijn and ten Heuvelhof 2002). The findings and recommendations about which consensus is reached—more specifically, the negotiated knowledge which meets professional standards—"will be more directive for the decision to be made than those about which there is dissent" (De Bruijn and ten Heuvelhof 2002, 233). However, the dynamic of such processes is not so simplistic. Involving such multiple streams of stakeholders, from students, higher education institutions, national governments to private enterprises (e.g. Business Europe), implies that they have to negotiate with each other and they do their best to gain support for problem definitions and aims, interests and to conclude favourable package deals. As such, each stakeholder will try to gain the maximum from the agenda-setting process. However, as it has been mentioned before, "it is only after being stated in the ministerial communiqués and declarations do issues have a chance to be translated into national agendas" (Yagci 2014, 515).

4   Setting the Social Dimension Agenda at the National Level

While the topic of strategy formation and agenda-setting has been largely discussed in relation to how issues come about at the Bologna Process level (Yagci 2014; Huisman and Van der Wende 2004; Keeling 2006), there is a literature gap with regards to strategy formation and stakeholders' involvement at the national level.

The few existing studies point out that the development of national social dimension strategies differs country by country in terms of the stage of strategy development (as a process) and content. For example, Wulz et al. (2018)—who are looking, among others, at the role of students' unions in the development and implementation of social dimension strategies—report that in Lithuania, no strategy on social dimension was in place before 2018, however, a process involving students' union in specific working groups existed. In Spain, students have been involved in the consultation process, but they were not satisfied with the results. In Germany, no national strategy is in place, but students have been involved in different working groups. Unlike in Italy where students were involved as a consultant body, and they were not satisfied with their involvement in the process, in Slovenia students were satisfied with the outcome of their involvement.

Most of the times, the Bologna Process has been understood by policy-makers, stakeholders and scholars as a top-down linear model in which policy-makers postulate policy objectives and goals which are later put into practice at lower levels (i.e., at the HEIs level). The underlying assumption of the top-down strategy formation is that actors at the top (either at the Bologna Process level or country level) can control what should happen at lower levels of the implementation chain. The bottom-up scholars argue that in order to understand the reality and the process of strategy formation and implementation, one should look at the main policy deliverers. The bottom-up literature theorizes that implementation outcomes are the results of interactive processes involving various levels of government including the street-level bureaucrats who may distort or modify initial policy goals and objectives (Lipsky 1980; May and Winter 2009).

Within the Bologna, top decision-makers and politicians are responsible for participating in the Bologna Process decision-making structures, and for adopting the commonly agreed commitments at the national level. As far as the first role is concerned, two aspects are worth mentioning. The first one refers to the participating countries' bargaining power (Peters 1993) in putting on the Bologna agenda issues they consider relevant for their national higher education context (policy upload). Their bargaining power in uploading policy preferences (Vukasovic et al. 2017) would reflect national needs and interests but also strategic goals (i.e. enhancing competitiveness). It can be claimed, therefore, that the more similar policy-makers preferences with the Bologna Process commitments, the higher the speed with which policies will be adopted and implemented.

The process of drafting and negotiating a Bologna policy direction is important not only for understanding its contents but also for knowing if implementation problems might be related to the decision-making process. Besides, policy scholars argue that there is need for implementation actors and target groups to be incorporated into the supranational decision-making processes in order to avoid political decisions that are out of step with the reality on the ground (Schneider and Ingram 1993). Involving all relevant domestic actors in the preparation of the supranational policy-making processes can lead to smooth implementation; otherwise, they might resist during the downloading process.

This paper addresses the question of how participating countries within the EHEA have taken on board the suggested guidelines for developing national action plans and

strategies for the social dimension: how the strategy development process started, who were the actors involved, what was the main strategy formation mechanism, and what was the outcome of such a process. Whereas more countries have a social dimension strategy or have started a process for developing such strategies—i.e., Croatia, Ireland—due to the feasibility of data collection process, this paper looks in depth at two country cases that attempted to create the necessary conditions for such strategies, that is Austria and Romania. These countries are different in many aspects, including traditions, type of higher education system, governance, policy-making, and most importantly, different socio-political contexts (Wodak and Fairclough 2010). The common point, however, is that both of them have joined the Bologna Process in 1999 and attempted to build a social dimension and life-long learning strategy: Romania embarked on a bottom-up approach, whereas Austria on a top-down approach.

4.1 Romania: An Unsuccessful Attempt to Comply?

Despite the fact that Romania does not have a national strategy for the social dimension strategy, the social dimension aspect of higher education is rather developed. Starting with the early 1990s, Romania developed a system of free higher education, and in the next decade, it reached to have a ground student aid system (Alexe et al. 2015) including scholarships (i.e., for students from rural areas, with disabilities), loans, noon-cash support, social assistance and even reserved places in universities for the Roma minority. More recent developments are considered to be the result of the main actors interested in the issue, such as the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR), the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), and other actors. According to Wulz et al. (2018), in Romania, the students' union (ANOSR) started to campaign more intensively for social dimension issues in 2016, demanding public funding and other goals for higher education development, i.e., basic funding for scholarships, investment funds in higher education, subsidy for transport or canteens, student counselling, etc. As a result, the student scholarship fund increased by 142% between January and March 2017, and the students benefited from free train transportation throughout the year.

A former president of ANOSR claimed during the interview that they have recently started to approach the social dimension from a financing perspective. They want to support the services for students, including the amount of scholarships, at a national level. Another area on which they work is student accommodation and canteens, and here they succeeded to get a 12% state subsidy increase. Moreover, the representative added that they also focus on access to education and "we decided to focus on the post admission aspect—more specifically on the orientation and counselling offices. In Romania, in this respect, we have quite a basis because there is a network of this type of centres across the country and you're focusing on ensuring that they increase their visibility in different projects and programs" (Interviewee #1122017).

In Romania, building a social dimension strategy came up as a bottom-up approach tried by key policy actors—the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) in particular—in bringing universities together and then work towards a potential national social dimension strategy. UEFISCDI engaged in a grassroots level approach which included a pilot exercise to measure the impact some national social dimension policies had in some selected universities. This experience has shown that social dimension as the topic was not developed enough (internalized by universities or by the Ministry).

One of the interviewees, who has quite a rich experience with the Bologna Process both at the national and European level, mentioned that at the national level UEFISCDI had an important role in promoting a certain type of discourse with regards to Bologna.[4] UEFISCDI started its activity more intensely in 2010 when Romania started to host the Bologna Secretariat. UEFISCDI brought a team of young capable people and experts, and ever since, it started to develop projects and research in this area, bringing, therefore, the "know-how" to the country. Practically, it helped the Ministry of Education in the policy-making process:

> Willingly or not, currently we, the agency, are the component which brings a bit of strategic intelligence to the Ministry [of Education] and to the higher education sector in general. If you have a look at the ministry indeed, you have some 50-60 people working there in the higher education unit, but none knows what they do. They always come to us because they do not have where else to go. We are the only ones who have proposed strategic things (Interviewee #2122017).

From a policy perspective, the UEFISCDI has been permanently active in the policy-making process by running a cluster of European structural projects regarding the future of Romanian higher education. One such project is "Internationalization, equity and university management for quality higher education" (IEMU) co-financed by the EC through the European Social Funds, implemented by UEFISCDI at the end of 2015, which aims to develop the social dimension of higher education in Romania and put forward the basis for a strategy:

> This project was developed within a social program and obviously aimed to provide some guidance considering the lack of strategic approach in the field of equity and participation - in other words, the Romanian state had different policies, but they are not connected by a logical thread. By developing a national strategy on equity through this project, we aimed to have an overall view of what is happening in the field. We have worked with a lot of experts and had various inputs from several institutions. (Interviewee #3122017).

This strategic framework was among the first initiatives aimed exclusively at improving equity. The project brought expertise and evidence-based research on the current situation of the social dimension in Romania, with which the actors envisioned to transform the strategic framework into something more formal. Overall, the framework can be considered as an instrument aimed to increase the capacity of the central decision-making institutions to create more policies in this area and to promote certain aspects on the public agenda.

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[4]Similarly, research has shown the UEFISCDI contribution to the Romanian higher education and research—see Curaj et al. (2015)

When asked about the intentions behind this policy process, one of the actors involved in this project contended that their decision was not to repeat "the top-down approaches which have no bottom-up content", and, therefore, they decided to continuously invest in bottom-up approaches at the institutional level (Interviewee #2122017). The idea was that by following such an approach, they could identify the major actions that have to be consolidated in order to later justify a top-down approach.

The actors in this project have also reflected on the parallel processes they have been involved in with regards to the development of an internationalization strategy. In this case, they have had field visits and have worked with around 24 universities so that each of them develops its own internationalization strategy. In the second stage, they came to the ministry with a strategic framework:

> In the case of the social dimension we could not do that. It is interesting from a narrative point of view, but not attractive enough. We have tried to look and work with the universities to define their approach, their strategy related to access and equity. What happened… what these projects have shown is that universities have not been prepared to do a critical mass out of this topic. When it comes to access and equity, not even the language was as it should - this is sad… We almost needed a dictionary to make them understand what we meant. For this reason, we decided that the social dimension is not a mature topic… (Interviewee #2122017).

What this project experience shows is that at the institutional level, there are different structured and envisioned approaches. By thinking about equity and access only in terms of an equally distributed scholarship schemes, universities have a rather narrow understanding of the social dimension. Last but not least, there were no incentives for universities to be proactive regarding the social dimension of education by developing an institutional strategy (Matei and Curaj 2014). Nowadays, as the number of potential students has declined dramatically, universities have a clear incentive to attract and include previously underrepresented groups or non-traditional students in order to cover the available subsidized places and benefit the corresponding *per-student* funding (Santa 2018).

4.2 Austria: A Case of Creative Compliance?

The Austrian Government Programme for 2013–2018, among others, aimed to promote non-traditional ways to higher education access and raise the balance and compatibility of studies with work and family life. One of the tools for doing so was the output-oriented budgeting, through which output-targets in the field of science and research have been set, such as raising the quota of students with parents without higher education entrance qualifications. The topic of the social dimension of higher education was already touched upon in other governmental strategies: the 2016–2021 "Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities" aims in its system goal 8, to "Support a cultural shift towards social inclusion, gender equality and diversity in universities". The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW) makes provision in its "Development and Funding Plan for

Universities of Applied Sciences" through to 2017/2018 to address a number of aspects of the social dimension (National strategy on the social dimension of higher education. Towards more inclusive access and wider participation, 2018).

The Austrian approach is very much in line with the idea that institutions in order to influence political outcomes "structure incentives, instantiate norms, define roles, prescribe or proscribe behaviour or procedurally channel politics" (Jupille and Caporaso 1999, 432). In such cases, preferences are endogenous, meaning that actors' goals cannot exist separately of institutions (p. 432); actors' preferences thus are conditioned by such institutions which also define what constitutes appropriate behaviour. Both the more structural/technical (such as the above guidelines for building national action plans or strategies) and the socializing instruments (conferences, seminars, peer learning activities) create a space for dialogue between the different stakeholders and, more importantly, create a common understanding of what is expected from them. An indicator of whether these socialization practices matter is given by whether actors, participants and representatives refer to them when justifying or legitimizing decisions at the national and institutional level.

In line with the Bologna promoted social dimension guidelines and policies, starting with 2016 and based on the recommendations of two Austrian Higher Education Conferences (2013; 2015), the Austrian Ministry of Education started a one-year strategic process which involved the relevant stakeholders (800 participants) in varying discussions (9 workshops) on the possible content of such a strategy. The result is the "National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education. Towards More Inclusive Access and Wider Participation" which aims to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students in higher education, to widen inclusive access and participation (e.g. students with migrant background, regional balance across Austria), to promote gender balance, etc.

According to Kingdon (2003), actors and stakeholders—political and elected actors, interest groups and researchers, ministers and civil servants—are considered the main drivers of agenda-setting. Governmental actors, most of the times, have exclusive formal authority of decision-making processes. Those actors which are more visible are also more influential in bringing issues on the agenda, whereas the hidden actors are more influential in the generation of solution alternatives and preparation of detailed policy proposals (Kingdon 2003, 69–70). As Yagci (2014) puts it, "if an issue is pushed into the agenda by visible actors, it has a higher chance to rise in the agenda and if visible actors do not pay attention to an issue, its chance to rise deteriorates" (p. 512).

Interviewed about their role in the strategy formation process, one of the representatives of the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA) claims that indeed, the building of the social dimension strategy has been fostered by the Ministry, however, it is not a purely top-down process; all the stakeholders were involved, including universities and different sectors of the education system: "you can't really do it any other way in Austria" (Interviewee #2112017).

Another stakeholder involved in the development of the national strategy is the Austrian Students' Union. When asked whether there was such a need for a strategy, the students have diverse opinions. On the one hand, they think it was something the government thought "is nice to have", on the other hand, they were advocates for

such a strategy. Reflecting on the strategy formation process, the students appreciate the thorough process behind and, as they put it "it was really nice to be involved there because we had a lot of working groups and workshops, and make policy with other people and other stakeholders on an equal level which was really cool" (Interviewee #3112017). The disappointment was that "the piece of paper that came out of this process did not really reflect what was made in the working groups—which is frustrating…"

Reflecting on the big picture of the policy-making process and the politics behind, the students considered that the strategy does not have the envisioned impact, and current educational policies are in contradiction with what the strategy is promoting (e.g. the student fees, restricted access). The issue, therefore, was that because of a similar strategy formation process running in parallel within the same ministry—the Future of Austrian Higher Education "huge project in which they [decision-makers] tried more or less to tackle the whole education system" (Interviewee #3112017)— there was no communication among themselves, or better said they have kept these processes independent: "I think that in the Future of Higher Education in Austria, they did not take in consideration all the system but details of it. They tried to tackle the issues with certain fields of study, for example, one working group was about IT informatics, and they tried to work on that problem, and they did not actually go to the root of the problem, as we have problems with synergies and with the four different systems. They tried to tackle more the symptoms, which—if you have such a big, broad process—does not really give you a lot of results" (Interviewee #3112017).

As a conclusion of the overall process, the social dimension expert claims that Austria took the lead in creating a national social dimension strategy mainly because Bologna was pushing for it. The expert referred to the fact that there are a number of policy interpreters and entrepreneurs—"they are middle-level bureaucrats, civil servants"—who have been following the development of the social dimension at the Bologna process level for about 10 years, and who:

> [S]aw an opening, saw a possibility and they wanted to look good in front of the international community - they have decided… So, you often have that, especially in these kinds of forums like Bologna. Sometimes you will get the minister who says - I want to look better than the other guys around the table and I think they said: "social dimension agenda - I think this is something we need". Maybe it had more symbolic power or symbolic importance… If you talk to the students now, they will tell you it has not been used yet. One thing is setting up the framework, and the other is not just the commitment but acting, action… (Interviewee #1112017).

Austria is one of the few countries, if not the only one, who has, since 1999, a national Bologna Follow-up Group consisting of representatives of the responsible ministries and authorities, as well as representatives of the higher education sector. This group was responsible—among others—for the preparation of the Austrian contribution to the European follow-up process and for the elaboration of the Austrian position for the Ministers' conferences, but also to ensure the flow of information within Austria with regards to Bologna developments.

Being part of the Bologna Follow-up Group at the European level, the members of the national group act in a similar way with the policy analysts setting the social dimension agenda at the Bologna Process level. In other words, the national BFUG

makes proposals to the Ministry about the relevant data, developments, challenges, best practices, etc., and such, they arrive at common views about the next steps. The findings and recommendations about which consensus is reached will be more directive for the decision to be made, however, without anticipating the effects such initiatives might have, and how they are interconnected with other issues at the national level.

This situation also leads to an information asymmetry between the principal and the agent (Akerlof 1970), between the national BFUG—the agent, and the Ministry—the principal, in which the principal chooses a scheme (in this case to have a social dimension strategy) about which it does not have complete information. The principal, in this case, would entrust the agent—considering the expertise and information it has—to act on its behalf and comply with the international commitments it adhered. This leads in other words, to a type of compliance "which pretends to align its behavior with the prescribed rule or changes its behavior in superficial ways that leave the addressee's original objective intact" (Batory 2016, 689).

5   Conclusions

In the case of the Bologna Process, member states and higher education institutions do not adopt the Bologna Process practices—such as the 2015 adopted social dimension strategy and guidelines—only because of the means-ends efficiency, but due to the social legitimacy these new practices (widely valued within a broader cultural environment) bring for the participating countries, higher education institutions but also for Europe at large. These common institutional practices are emerging from an interactive process of socialization and exchange among the actors, which gives them the opportunity to share their problems, possible solutions, etc., processes that are taking place in a variety forms and shapes, and based on which actors are developing a sense of appropriate institutional practices. Projects like ExpandO and PL4SD are a clear illustration that the Bologna Process actors and stakeholders provide plenty of opportunities for the participating countries to learn from each other and exchange practices and ideas with the aim of encouraging implementation and shared practices. Such socialization practices have as main aim norm internalization which contribute to a great extent to "the development of a widening pool of common sense understandings, roughly coherent lines of argument and self-evident statements about higher education in Europe" (Keeling 2006, p. 209).

Higher education policy stands completely in the hands of the participating countries; however, the Bologna Process provides many opportunities for peer learning, trainings, seminars, forums and other such tools which create the possibility to bring upfront best experiences, obstacles and challenges in implementation but also to create a space for dialogue between the different stakeholders. While both at the European and national level there are key policy actors, decision-makers, implementers or targets, under condition of voluntary compliance, these types of actors synchronize their moves with regards to the social dimension through a "coincidence of interests" in order to achieve the higher governance goals. If at the Bologna

Process level the actors are rather coordinated in their actions, at the national level representatives in the BFUG and relevant working groups together with other actors have a crucial role in making decision-makers and universities understand the need for further action with regards to the social dimension.

This scenario is very much in line with a newly developed concept called orchestration, which implies that due to their lack of sufficient capabilities for hard, direct governance, international organizations (such as the ones mentioned above) engage intermediary actors on a voluntary basis (analysts, experts, etc. who have complementary capabilities and mutually correlated goals), by providing them with ideational and material support (through different socialization instruments and funds), to address target actors (national governments and higher education institutions) in pursuit of [an actor's] governance goals (social justice, qualified labour force, etc.) (Abbott et al. 2015, 3).

This paper has shown that the countries explored have included the relevant stakeholders in the consultation process, however, they had different approaches and outcomes: Austria came up with a strategy, yet other national strategies and policies were in contradiction with what the strategy promoted, whereas in Romania no strategy was developed despite the involvement of the main stakeholders (n.b. the Rectors' Council, or teachers' association were not involved in the process due to political changes of the time). In Romania, a bottom-up approach has been tried by bringing universities together and then working with each of them individually in order to define their social dimension strategy. The experience showed that universities had not been prepared to become a critical mass in this regard (unlike in the case of building an internationalization strategy).

In Austria, the strategy formation was done top-down: the Ministry in charge legitimatized the strategy by using the Bologna, and the country committed to implementing it. This would reflect what Falkner et al. (2005) would call the "law observance" case, that is compliance overrides domestic concerns. Because it ranks high despite the conflicting national policy styles, interests or ideologies, the implementation is done in time and in line with the proposed guidelines. However, because of this, within the same ministry, there was another parallel process around regarding the future of higher education at the national level which promoted policies which were at odds with the ones promoted by the social dimension strategy. This paper analysed the social dimension of the Bologna Process at the national level. For each of the country cases, the context of strategy formation has been analysed from the perspective of the involved stakeholders. The conclusions show that the ideas about the Bologna Process and its promoted policies reach the decision-makers agenda through different ways, including different interest groups, policy experts and policy entrepreneurs.

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What Works for Underrepresented Groups? Identifying Effective Measures for Enhancing Access to Higher Education in Europe

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1 Equity Considerations Within the Bologna Process

Despite the general increasing access to tertiary education, HE systems remain highly stratified (Marginson 2016), gender imbalances still exist between different fields of study, and students with an immigrant background or with parents without a HE degree have lower chances to achieve tertiary attainment, etc. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018). On the one hand, there is a social demand for access to a variety of degrees (i.e., high-status professional degrees, or within elite universities), on the other, there is a normative inquiry for access to quality education for a diversity of students. Widening access and participation can be regarded as a strategy for change since the social benefits of inclusion in HE can have long term effects both for the individual and the society he/she lives in. Among these there are: tolerance and expanded social networks, contribution to the economy, cohesiveness in society, political participation, health and wellbeing, lower crime propensity, higher earning potential, better parenting and others (Murray 2009).

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1.1 Access to Higher Education as Part of General Equity Discourses

In HE policy the concept of equity—originated in welfare economics—started to be used at different moments in time, in different places around the world, usually along with the shift from elitist universities towards mass HE systems. There is no one single definition of equity in HE policy, but several that are more prominent both in the literature and among practitioners, thus showing the flexibility of the concept and the divergent understandings of it by both researchers and policy-makers. It is understood as equality, providing equal opportunities for access to and success in HE in order to even out the circumstances that are beyond one's control (i.e., financial resources of the family or educational attainment of the parents) (Salmi and Bassett 2014). The concept is linked to evening out (previous or existing) inequalities through the special allocation of resources that could be translated into HE policies, and policy instruments (Geven 2012).

Equity is sometimes considered to be synonymous with access to HE thus with "widening participation and improving the chances of success of under-privileged youths" (Salmi and Bassett 2014) through utilizing tools for ensuring diversity (i.e., affirmative action).

In its narrow sense, access to HE can be defined as entry/admission to HE (Prodan et al. 2015) while more generally, it can be defined as the ability of people from all backgrounds to access HE on a reasonably equal basis (Usher and Medow 2010; Wang 2011). This definition is comprehensive in scope and implies that students of all backgrounds must not only be "reasonably" able to take advantage of educational opportunities, but also must be adequately prepared and equipped to do so in order for the system to be considered "accessible". In both cases, it is merely the starting point whereas the final goal of access policies is successful participation (Tonks and Farr 2003).

Considering this, interventions aimed at HE equity address one or a combination of access, retention and persistence and successful transition to further studies or professional career. Holistic approaches tackle all potential sources of inequity such as socio-economic, ethnic, gender- and disability-based, both at individual and system-level through policy instruments that equalize economic, cultural and social capital within the education system (Geven 2012). These approaches can propose solutions for the difficulties encountered by students enrolled in lower levels of education (primary or secondary), at the transition between secondary and HE, or while attempting to enrol, participate in and successfully graduate from HE programs. These types of holistic approaches to inequities are needed as barriers tend to overlap in the cases of potential students coming from difficult socio-economic backgrounds that are traditionally underrepresented in the educational system or are excluded from it. However, there is no one-size-fits-all type of solution (no mix of policies will work everywhere), and initiatives in the field should address the goal of eliminating both individual and system barriers (e.g. admission selection should be freed of any privilege bias) (Usher 2015).

1.2 The Social Dimension of the Bologna Process

The Bologna Process (and the subsequent European Higher Education Area—EHEA) represents the most significant and ambitious HE agenda in Europe with an equity dimension. The Sorbonne Declaration referred to the fact that "students should be able to enter the academic world at any time in their professional life and from diverse backgrounds" (1998, 2), and this was the beginning of the sequence of moments linked to the Bologna Process when countries reiterated their support for integrating a diverse student body within their programs and structures. Therefore, in 2001, through the Prague Communiqué, member states were encouraged to create lifelong learning policies, to facilitate the partnership of HEIs and students in promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA, as well as the policies aiming at the social dimension of HE, including the access of underrepresented groups. The 2003 Berlin Communiqué acknowledged that "the need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the EHEA, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level". This trend continued in the ministerial conferences after 2003, as it became clear that 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 with a view to widening access" (Bergen Communiqué 2005). As of 2007, participating countries were asked to report on the actions taken at the national-level and on the effectiveness of national action plans and measures targeting the social dimension of HE (i.e. access participation and completion measures for underrepresented students). More specifically, some of the means refer to adequate student support and services, counselling and guidance, flexible learning paths and alternative access routes, including recognition of prior learning (Bucharest Communiqué 2012), but also implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy (Yerevan Communiqué 2015). However, the social dimension of the Bologna Process remains one policy action with very few concrete results.

1.3 Literature Gap and Methodology

A significant number of countries and HEIs have started investing resources and take onboard initiatives aiming at widening access for disadvantaged or underrepresented groups—that we will refer to from now on as "equity groups"—(i.e., through quota systems, preparatory programs, etc.). However, little is known about whether such initiatives actually shape opportunities for potential students. Knowing which of these initiatives work and whether they are achieving the intended goals is of utmost importance for policy-makers. Given the fact that national-level programs might provide different responses/reactions from HEIs, which have a certain level of

autonomy, this paper addresses the relative effectiveness of access initiatives at the HEIs level.

While in the US there is a considerable amount of research about the effectiveness of access policies (Pharris-Ciurej et al. 2012; Perna et al. 2008; Myers et al. 2010), in Europe we found very few such studies focusing on the university level, fact which motivated us to take up the challenge of mapping them out. The existing literature focusing on Europe are systematic reviews of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions for widening access, participation and completion rates of equity groups in HE. For example, Torgerson et al. (2014) and Younger et al. (2019) provide a synthesis of the international evidence, mainly from the US and the UK. Similarly, Herbaut and Geven (2019) selected 71 studies, most of them across the US and few from Europe, and compared more than 200 causal effects of outreach and financial aid interventions on access and completion.

As Perna et al. (2008) claim, efforts to understand why policies and programs are not working are hampered by the absence of a framework for organizing the myriad efforts designed to reduce participation gaps and, by extension, for demonstrating policy blind spots and redundancies. The overarching aim of this paper is to contribute in addressing the current literature gap by focusing specifically on access measures and interventions for widening access for equity groups, that can be primarily addressed on HEIs level.[1] For this purpose, the paper will collect, document, scrutinize and critically analyze the current research literature (i.e., through the work of others, evaluation reports/studies, etc.) which assesses the effectiveness of these types of policies, aiming, at the same time, to identify gaps and make recommendations for both potential further research and for policy-makers. The main research question this paper explores is: **what is the relative effectiveness of different access measures implemented at the university level, and which characteristics moderate their effectiveness**?

Before proceeding to the actual research, it is worth mentioning what is referred to here as *access*, who are the *equity groups* and how *effectiveness* and *impact* can be measured. For the purpose of this paper, *access* is defined here in a narrow sense as entry/admission to and enrolment of students in HE education programs (Prodan et al. 2015). As far as the *underrepresented groups* are concerned, authors chose to refer to a broad category of students, including those with diverse, ethnic, cultural and migration background, sexual identity and orientation, socio-economic background, educational background (alternative pathways, lifelong learners, first-generation students), caring responsibilities, religious background/beliefs, age or students from rural areas (c.f. Claeys-Kulik et al. 2019). When it comes to the *effectiveness* of various approaches to increase access to HE, the authors opted to consider the extent to which (i.e.) a program has reached the goal(s) that has been set initially, or whether it achieves the set expectations or the goal(s) that were intended or desired by stakeholders. Similarly, Cowan (1985) refers to effectiveness as the ratio of the actual

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[1]It is part of a larger effort and preoccupation of the authors to address all types of measures and interventions targeting reducing inequities, but this paper only presents the results connected to different types of access measures.

outcome to the possible or the ideal outcome. The three most often used indicators for measuring the impact of HEIs activities on diversity, equity and inclusion refer to the number/share of students enrolled from less represented/disadvantaged backgrounds, the success stories of the people targeted through the measures, and the graduation rate of students from underrepresented/disadvantaged backgrounds (Claeys-Kulik et al. 2019). For the purpose of this paper, we will be looking at the first set of indicators but keeping in mind the initial goals and intentions of the measure under consideration.

In order to reach the expected results, we first undergo a mapping exercise looking for studies referring to the access policies relevant to our research initiative. The approach for this entailed extensive searches of comprehensive education databases such as Web of Science and the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)—the world's largest educational database and the most frequently used index for carrying out educational research. The search for the studies of interest was also conducted through the Google Scholar search engine using combinations of search words referring both to the interventions of interest (e.g. bridging programme) and to underrepresented groups of students (e.g. first-generation students). The search was complemented by consulting the bibliography/reference list of related studies, by consulting the (non-academic) publications of key organizations and structures in the HE sector in Europe, and by our knowledge on studies on the topic including non-academic studies from different organizations, structures and HEIs. In line with similar studies (Younger et al. 2019), publications' titles and abstracts in these databases were searched for a combination of keywords related to "underrepresented groups" in/or/and "higher education", "tertiary education" or "universities". In total, a number of 17 studies written in English have been included in the sample used for this paper, out of which two of them are non-academic. The selection was first and foremost determined by the availability of studies analyzing institutional-level equity policies.

Section 2 of this paper looks at the different social dimension targets set by the EHEA participating countries and evaluates policy instruments (financial and non-financial) promoting equity.

2 Access Policies Between National Frameworks and Institutional Practices

In Europe, the social dimension is an increasingly important policy issue with both state and HEIs intervening to increase access and participation. The 2018 Bologna Implementation Report states that several countries have set long-term goals and targets with regards to the access of different social groups. For example, by 2025, Austria aims to have at least 10% of men/women in each study program and increase the proportion of second-generation immigrants among entrants to 30%. By 2030, Scotland aims to increase the access for students coming from the most deprived

backgrounds so that it represents 20% of the entrants. By 2020, the Czech Republic set out to increase the access of students with specific educational needs in HE so that their share will be close to share among high school graduates. Setting such targets is a crucial step, however, considering the fact that the admission systems provide the transition to HE, they are the key point for determining which students go into which type of HEI (Haj et al. 2018). The type of admission systems in a country can positively contribute or hamper equity and access. Orr et al. (2017) and Haj et al. (2018) reflected on the types of admission systems and their impact on the equity of access, progression and completion in HE in Europe. By using 36 European countries, Orr et al. (2017) created a two-dimensional typology of admission systems based on the extent to which school streaming leads to some forms of HE, and whether HEIs have the autonomy to use their own selection criteria.

The result of Orr et al. (2017) typology is a four type admission system as follows: a selection by schools system (Type 1) in which secondary schooling does not lead to HE entry, and HEIs cannot select with additional criteria; a selection by HEIs (Type 2) in which HEIs can select with additional criteria, and all previous schooling pathways may lead to HE entry; a least selection system in which neither the school system limits students nor the HEIs select them (Type 3); and the last type, a double selection in which both the school system and HEIs select students (Type 4). An assessment of the performance of each type (Orr et al. 2017) shows that HE entry rates are higher where HEIs have increased autonomy. Moreover, countries that put up the fewest academic barriers to access to HE are also the ones with the most equitable outcomes by social background (measured using HE attainment of graduates' parents), whereas countries in which HEIs can use their own admission criteria are more likely to admit a higher proportion of mature students. In countries with streams not leading to HE, and HEIs have the autonomy in organizing assessment, females have a higher increase in participation between upper-secondary and HE.

When it comes about these types' performance with regards to equity Haj et al. (2018) argue that the systems with the selection system Type 1 have the lowest relative participation rates of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This is due, on the one hand, to the school streaming where pupils are placed in schools with different likelihoods of leading to HE, on the other hand, by HEIs using students' secondary school examination scores for admission. In Type 2 systems equity is not restricted as in Type 1. However, when applying additional criteria, HEIs might focus on the academic achievement of the student, limiting the chances for students with lower socio-economic backgrounds, contributing therefore to perpetuating inequality. Provided the level of autonomy HEIs have, they can promote their own discretion positive actions for certain groups of students, or alternatively can control the student distribution per field of study (Haj et al. 2018). Type 3 systems present the best outcome in terms of equity since it has the fewest barriers to access, but compared to systems in which HEIs can select students, these Type 3 systems might have higher drop-out rates since HEIs might not be able to get students that fit with a study program (Haj et al. 2018). Last but not least, Type 4 systems are expected to be the least equitable considering both the school streaming and HEIs selection criteria, with numerous potential students that are not being considered for HE (Haj et al. 2018).

3   Access Measures and Their Effects: What Works for Underrepresented Groups?

Access measures can be categorized in several ways: whether they are financial or non-financial, the problem they tackle, the phase they intervene in (i.e., during secondary education, during the transition to HE or after the enrolment in the HE system).

As far as financial instruments are concerned, they might primarily target students with low socio-economic backgrounds, but might target other equity groups as well. However, it is widely known that the principal dimensions of inequality overlap in many ways, for example, ethnic minorities are more likely to live in rural areas or peripheral neighbourhoods and, therefore, are more likely to be affected by poverty. Salmi (2018) argues that, nowadays, financial aid policies are the most commonly used, often in combination with non-monetary aid policies. Among these is worth mentioning the tuition-free or partially subsidized HE, the needs-based grants, scholarships and bursaries, student loans, and a variety of funding formulas.

As far as the non-financial policy instruments are concerned, the most widespread practices relate to different forms of positive discrimination, reformed selection procedures and/or preferential admission programs. For example, Usher (2015) identifies several categories of measures universities can incorporate within their work aimed at enhancing HE, including early interventions strategies designed to eliminate barriers in the educational pipeline prior to tertiary education. Claeys-Kulik et al. (2019) put forward 12 most frequently used access measures used by universities among which: guidance, counselling and mentoring, accessible building and activities, assurance about non-discrimination, part-time study options and flexible courses, financial support, preparatory courses, recognition of prior learning, childcare on campus, positive action, housing support, quotas for students from certain groups/backgrounds, and general positive discrimination measures.

As resulted from our bibliographic search, most of the identified studies focus on three main measures as summarized in Table 1. It provides an overview of the identified studies as follows: blue—outreach, counselling and mentoring; yellow—financial aid; green—preparatory courses and programs. It also summarizes the main aim of the study, its data and method, and the main finding with regards to effectiveness ("+"—effective, "-"—negative, or "0"—no effects).

As Table 1 above shows, with some exceptions (i.e., the studies focusing on Aimhigher) the identified studies look at different measures targeting different equity groups of students, in different countries and HEIs contexts, and, therefore, the findings do not allow for a cross-comparison of the results. Thus, we abstain from making obsolete conclusions and cause-effect inferences. Rather, the conclusions we reached represent the authors' opinions as emerged from the analysis of the studies sample of the paper. The section below (1) provides a general description of the type of measures under consideration, (2) offers several examples of such measures by specifying the university accommodating the measure, the type of measure and its components, its target group and the intended goals of that specific measure, and

Table 1 Overview of the identified studies

Author(s) and measure	Aim of the study	Data and method	Effects
Gumaelius et al. (2016) Outreach	To describe and compare outreach initiatives aimed at increasing enrolment in engineering programs (DE, DK, SE, ES, PT)	Self-reported institutional data; comparative analysis	+
Pekkala-Kerr et al. (2015) Information	To test whether the match between educational choices and the demand for skills in the labour market can be enhanced by providing information (FIN)	Randomized field experiment with graduating high-school students	0
Ehlert et al. (2017) General information	To examine whether correct and detailed information on the costs of and returns to HE increases the likelihood of HE applications (DE)	Field experiment with less-privileged high school graduates	+
Abbiati et al. (2018) Personalized information	To assess the role of information barriers for patterns of participation in HE and the related social inequalities (IT)	Randomized experiment with high school seniors	+
Wulz et al. (2018) Counselling	To provide an overview of counselling activities targeting disadvantaged learners (AT, DE, ES, IT, LI, UK, RO, DK, SL)	Survey with national student unions	+
Doyle and Griffin (2012) Mentoring	To review Aimhigher's contribution to widening participation for students with non-traditional backgrounds (UK)	Literature review	+
McCaig and Bowers-Brown (2007) Mentoring	To determine the success of Aimhigher as a potential mechanism of social justice (UK)	Literature review	−
Fack and Grenet (2015) Fee-waiver	To provide evidence on the impact of a need-based grant on HE enrolment for low-income students (FR)	Regression discontinuity design	+
Baumgartner and Steiner (2006) Financial aid	To evaluate the effectiveness of student aid targeting students from low-income families (DE)	Difference-in-difference	+/−

Table 1 (continued)

Author(s) and measure	Aim of the study	Data and method	Effects
Hatt et al. (2005) Bursaries	To explore how HEIs administered a national-level bursary scheme (UK)	Institutional databases and interviews with bursary students	+
Lannert and Garaz (2014) Scholarship	To investigate the degree in which the scholarship contributed to enhance access	Online survey, focus groups and interviews with beneficiaries	+
Roma Education Fund (2015) Scholarship mix	To investigate whether the scholarship contributed to the academic trajectory of its beneficiaries	Program data, and surveys with mentors and beneficiaries	+
Berg (2018) Language classes	To compare the support and integration programs at different HEIs (DE)	Interviews	+
Rostas (2017) Mixed	To understand the impact of measures supporting Roma's access to HE	Personal experience	+
Pinheiro-Torres and Davies (2008) Mixed	To evaluate the effectiveness of a program supporting higher ability students from lower socio-economic backgrounds	Program data	+
Casey et al. (2011) Mixed	To identify students' responses to the different components of the program	Program data; longitudinal study	+
Walker (2010) Pre-university summer school	To assess the impact on enrolment and retention of non-traditional students attending the summer school	Institutional data	+/−

(3) synthesizes the evidence collected on their effectiveness and impact based on existing studies.

3.1 Outreach, Counselling and Mentoring of Prospective Students

Early interventions for eliminating barriers prior to access to HE include outreach and bridging programs or services like personal and professional counselling, mentoring

Table 2 Selected examples of outreach, counseling and mentoring of prospective students

HEI	Type of measure and components	Target group	Intended goal(s)
University of Barcelona, Spain	Full tuition scholarship, housing, free language course, mentoring, legal advice, psychological support and dental care	Refugees	Widen access and ensure participation
University College Dublin, Ireland	Outreach—Student access leader programme	Students with disabilities, mature and part-time learners, and students from socio-economic disadvantage	Widen access and ensure participation
University of Lille, France	Financial and pedagogical support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds during their first year of study	Supporting students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds	Ease access to graduate and postgraduate studies
University of Strathclyde, UK	Introduce prospective students to the life on campus and deliver tailored learning activities	Prospective students	Increase students' awareness of various HE aspects (i.e., courses and entry requirements)

and tutoring systems or general academic support. Counselling is applied in a wide range of areas such as education problems, psychological issues, career guidance, and disability guidance and it can be used as a tool for reducing dropout (Wulz et al. 2018). Counselling can be provided by universities, private associations, NGOs, etc. and can support the increase in demand to access HE (Wulz et al. 2018). The counselling of prospective students can serve as a source of social capital for first-generation students (Pham and Keenan 2011) helping them to overcome a lack of social capital, assistance and advice from their families. Career counselling and personal development programs can also contribute in improving retention rates and results (outcomes). While in some countries universities have an obligation to provide counselling, in others—especially those with high demands to access HE—many private associations or NGOs provide it. Specific counselling is offered to different equity groups. Table 2 below exemplifies the different measures within this category implemented by universities.

The identified studies focusing on this category of measures show that they have a relatively positive effect on access. However, one should consider that *outreach initiatives* aimed at increasing interest in science and technology are evaluated either based on whether participants liked the activities or not, or based on changes in the enrolment of a degree program (Gumaelius et al. 2016). For example, the Stockholm

University summer school and the Praktikum UPV (at Universitat Politècnica de València) provide activities for prospective students closely related to universities' everyday activities, including the opportunity for school students to perform small research projects with Ph.D. students. Praktikum UPV includes a one-week stay for secondary school students within university research groups for fostering engineering and scientific vocations. Both initiatives measured the number of participants who chose to enrol in a STEM program at their university after the activities are completed. At Stockholm University, 12–14% of them chose to study a STEM field at Stockholm University, and 70% chose to do so at UPV (however, participants might choose to attend a STEM program at another university, which is not reflected in the percentage but could be considered a success).

Pekkala-Kerr et al. (2015) examined the impact of an *information intervention* offered by student guidance counsellors to randomly chosen high schools in Finland on the return to HE, including labour market prospects associated with post-secondary programs. The results show that on average, the information intervention did not affect the likelihood of being enrolled in a post-secondary program or the type of programs where students enrolled. Furthermore, the study shows that the application patterns among students graduating from the treatment and control school are indistinguishable from each other, but a third of the students reported that the intervention led them to update their beliefs regarding their return to HE.

In Germany, Ehlert et al. (2017) conducted a field experiment among high-school students from Berlin who had HE intentions to find out whether *information* deficits lower the likelihood of college-eligible students from less-privileged families to pursue their college intentions. The findings show an increase in the application rates overall, including for students without academic background parents, with one college-educated parent, though no significant effect when both parents have an academic degree.

A large-scale clustered randomized experiment (Abbiati et al. 2018) involving over 9,000 high school seniors from 62 Italian schools shows that overall, treated students (who were provided *personalized information* on the costs, benefits and chances of success in HE through three meetings) enrolled less often in less remunerative fields of study in favour of postsecondary vocational programs (the latter was mainly due to the offspring of low-educated parents). The study shows that children of HE graduates increased their participation in more rewarding university fields.

Looking at existing practices and needs in terms of *guidance* for inclusion in European universities, Cullen (2013) suggests that "institutions that adopt peer and mentoring support programs have lower rates of dropout" (cited in Wulz et al. 2018). More specifically, they are successful in preventing dropouts. Wulz et al. (2018) consider that counselling is an effective measure to widen participation in HE, together with the provision of student facilities (e.g. housing, medical support, childcare). 74% of the beneficiaries of student union counselling perceived it as useful (study referred to by Wulz et al. 2018).

Looking at the impact of Aimhigher (2004–2011) on widening participation in HE for young people from underrepresented groups (pupils aged 12–16 including first-generation students) in England, Doyle and Griffin (2012) find positive effects

on pre-entry *mentoring* (information advice and guidance) on students' aspiration-raising and access to HE when combined with other measures, such as campus visits or guest lectures. However, results of Aimhigher are mixed, with Doyle and Griffin (2012) finding positive effects for mentoring, but McCaig and Bowers-Brown (2007) finding no measurable impact but rather 'smoking gun' causal links between Aimhigher and enrolment.

To conclude, the seven identified studies show that the discussed measures do not have a strong potential by themselves but work best when combined with others. Personal and professional pre-entry counselling, mentoring tutoring systems, and academic support reach maximum results when complemented by a "school culture that values and promotes going into tertiary education, that sets high expectations for participation in higher education and offers a curriculum that attracts and supports students in their postsecondary and career development" (Salmi and Bassett 2014). Moreover, they are considered more efficient in systems that have a clear set pathway towards HE through secondary education (like Anglo-Saxon educational systems), and less in countries like Germany that select students for different streams of the system early in their educational careers (Usher 2015).

3.2   Financial Aid Measures

Initiatives addressing the financial barriers that students face aim at easing the financial pressure for students already considered eligible. They are either reimbursable or non-reimbursable. The latter are under the form of needs-based grants and scholarships that target students coming from families with lower income, certain ethnic minority groups or rural areas, women or students with disabilities. The alternative is often tuition fee waivers or subsidies for the traditionally underrepresented groups. All of them aim at eliminating the possibility that the low family income acts as a deterrent to access and success in HE. Reimbursable financial aid schemes (i.e., student loans) are sustainable forms of financial support requiring a lean administration setup, low subsidies and an effective recovery system. They are implemented differing in terms of the source of capital, the type of expenses they cover, the eligibility rules, the guarantees they require, and the repayment scheme (e.g. direct loans; loans guaranteed by the Government that are shared-risk loans; income-contingent loans). Table 3 provides several examples of the shape and dimensions of financial aid measures embraced by several universities.

Existing studies focusing on Europe show that the *amount of aid* had a direct effect on HE enrolment and access. Fack and Grenet (2015) show that a fee-waiver (which amounted to 174 euros) in France had small positive effects on enrolment in the first year of undergraduate programs, whereas the provision of 1,500 euros cash allowances to prospective undergraduate or graduate students increases their college enrolment rates by 5–7%.

Baumgartner and Steiner (2006) evaluated the effectiveness of a student aid reform in Germany that substantially increased *the amount received* by eligible students to

Table 3 Selected examples of financial aid measures

HEI	Type of measure and components	Target group	Intended goal(s)
Open University of Catalonia, Spain	Scholarships and online learning	Professionals, refugees and asylum-seekers, people with functional diversity	Providing flexible distance learning degree programs
Universities of Glasgow, York, Barcelona, Edinburgh, Sussex, Warwick	Scholarships (i.e., waiving fees, providing tuition scholarships, and offering free courses)	Refugees	Widen access and ensure participation
University of Vincennes in Saint-Denis, France	Scholarships for refugees with little knowledge of French—Diploma University (DU)	Refugees	Preparation for additional academic courses

raise enrolment rates into tertiary education. The study found that the reform had a small positive, but statistically insignificant, effect on enrolment rates despite the 10% increase in the federal students' financial assistance scheme.

Hatt et al. (2005) evaluated the Opportunity Bursary scheme (introduced in 2001), for students from low-income backgrounds where institutions were allowed considerable discretion over the allocation of these awards. The research reports differences in the way the two institutions—in the South-west of England—administered their bursary schemes, and the generated effects: bursary students from low-income backgrounds were more likely to continue beyond the year of entry than those students from low-income backgrounds who did not access the award. Moreover, it also revealed that the award of a *bursary* is strengthening the student's motivation to succeed and playing an active role in underpinning student persistence and success. Hatt et al. (2005) argue that there are two possible explanations for this effect upon HE continuation as the money might be useful and might strengthen the student's commitment to study.

Lannert and Garaz (2014) are tracing Roma Education Fund's (REF) Law and Humanities Program *scholarship* beneficiaries (awarded a yearly amount between 500–2300 EUR depending on the existence of a tuition fee and living expenses) in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. Between 2004 and 2014, a total of 413 students benefited from the scholarship scheme. The results of their evaluation show that among these, 200 (48%) students obtained at least tertiary level degree with complete or partial LHP support, while 144 did not graduate yet but are still in the program. Also, 35 beneficiaries (8%) dropped out of their university studies before graduation or postponed graduation for later.

Since it was launched, in 2008, and until the summer of 2015, REF's Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP) provided support to 527 Roma medical students from

Romania, North Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria. The support can be operationalized as financial, academic and professional (i.e., scholarships—between 375 EUR and 5,360 EUR per academic year, preparatory courses, mentorship, advocacy camps and additional funding for courses, conferences and small community development projects). Out of the 527 beneficiaries, 146 (28%) were still in the program at the time of the study, 187 people graduated successfully with at least one degree and exited the program, 45 people interrupted their studies or dropped out, and 57 people continued their studies without RHSP support, and 86 people exited the program, but their academic progress and graduation status could not be tracked (Roma Education Fund 2015).

The evaluated evidence shows that the amount of the financial aid can have positive effects on enrolment, but, depending on the target groups and the field of study, financial aid measures need to be complemented by other measures in order to foster enrolment.

3.3 Preparatory Courses and Programs

Preparatory courses and programs aim to even out previous or existing inequalities with regards to prospective students' previous education (can refer to, i.e., the quality of previous education, switch of the field of study, the language of instruction, academic ability, etc.). They target first-generation and non-traditional students, disadvantaged and students who do not have any experiences with academia and HE. The general purpose of these measures is to enable the students to prepare efficiently to continue their studies towards HE. The format in which these courses and programs take place can differ from university to university (see Table 4): intensive academic courses in areas students would like to pursue HE studies, general academic preparation (academic writing, critical thinking and study skills), auditing courses, introductory semesters, language courses enabling students to pursue studies in English (or other) language, but also general application process support and information. Completing the program enables students to apply for university in various fields of study but also to gain first-hand experience and insights into a HE program. Last but not least, such measures could also contribute to enhancing students' familiarity with a HE environment and help them overcome (academic and social) integration barriers at universities.

In Germany, prospective refugee students—who are treated like all international students—during their application and enrolment, receive special support in order to deal with their specific situation. Since the entrance criteria for the preparatory colleges include advanced knowledge of the German *language*, special classes prepare them for the entrance test in order to enrol in the preparatory courses. According to Berg (2018), these preparatory colleges and courses can be seen as important institutions for the internationalization of German HE and the support of prospective refugee students.

Table 4 Selected examples of preparatory courses and programs

HEI	Type of measure and components	Target group	Intended goal(s)
Leuphana University, Germany	A first semester as an induction period	Mainstream students	Familiarity with academic life and reduce drop-out
Technical University of Munich, University of Tuebingen and Bielefeld, Germany	Free German language courses	Refugees	Prepares students for HE studies at German universities
Central European University, Budapest	Preparatory, non-degree language and academic courses, tutoring—OLIve, Roma graduate preparation	Roma, refugees and asylum-seekers	Prepares students for HE studies at international universities
Brunel University, UK	Preparatory monthly sessions in key subjects, guest speakers and role models—The urban scholars programme	Prospective talented students from deprived areas	To increase achievement and HE aspirations
University of Vienna, Austria	Free academic courses—Open learning initiative	Individuals with refugee or asylum-seeking status	Preparation for the Austrian academic HE system pursuing
Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany	Intensive language course, attending modules over two semesters—Welcome year for refugees	Refugees	Offering the opportunity to take on or continue a degree course
Metropolia University of Applied Sciences	Training courses, application processes support	Persons with an immigrant background	Increase the ability of immigrant people to enter HE

The Roma Graduate Preparation Program (formerly known as the Roma Access Programs) at Central European University (CEU) is an initiative providing preparatory courses for Roma students. The program aims to prepare Roma university graduates across Europe—through *academic English, academic writing* and *tutoring in a field of choice*—to compete for master's programs either at CEU or abroad. Since 2004, when it was founded, the program has enrolled 218 Roma students from all over Europe. Out of them, 215 graduated, and 141 (nearly 65%) were accepted into a master's program at the end of their studies (Rostas 2017).

Pinheiro-Torres and Davies (2008) evaluate the Brunel University's Urban Scholars Programme, a 3–4 year intervention aimed at *increasing achievement* and *HE aspirations* among talented students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and disadvantaged areas, aged 12–16. The paper discusses the emerging findings after

the first 2 years of the program and suggests the biggest change occurs within scholars' confidence. Updated, self-reported data shows that program leavers had a HE orientation of 88% after 3-years attendance, and almost half of them received offers of places in universities, and 83% of them started HE studies. Looking at the same program, Casey et al. (2011) found that it "had some success in steering students toward greater ambition and an awareness of the rewards of higher education" (p. 43), and that 90% of the students who participated and completed the programme either met or exceeded the school targets compared with 22% of the rest of the gifted and talented group who met or exceeded their school targets.

Walker (2010) investigates the academic performance of adults who entered the University of Glasgow via the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) between 1988–1993, including a *pre-university summer school* where non-traditional students (i.e., adults, with a socio-economic disadvantage) receive preparation and independent advice about opportunities to access HE. The findings show that there were few differences between the students who attended the summer school and those who did not—both dropped-out at largely the same rate. Recent self-reported data shows that, since the first pilot of SWAP in 1987, more than 32,000 adults have taken the SWAP route to return to study, and helped many adults realize their potential and given them the confidence to succeed in college or university. In general, preparatory courses and programs prove promising efficiency, however, this depends on their specific components.

4   Conclusions

Overall, this research found little publicly available studies and information about the actual outcomes of most measures. First of all, the identified studies cover a limited number of access measures available in Europe (i.e., none of the studies identified looked at the effectiveness of the widespread online platforms—most of them targeting refugees). Secondly, the existing studies do not provide a comprehensive geographical overview across Europe. With few exceptions, most of the identified research explores the context of the UK, Germany, France, Italy or Finland. This suggests that more evidence-based approaches will be necessary to effectively learn from these specific access measures.

The impact measurement is hampered by the impossibility of isolating the effects of such policies in order to attribute cause and effect, as well as by the difficulty of generalizing particular results. The current promising but limited amount of research in the European context shows that the most effective way to tackle unequal access to HE is the measures that combine financial assistance with measures that help to overcome non-financial obstacles. Success is also guaranteed by cooperation between governments, HEIs or other education providers, NGOs, public authorities (in fields like health or welfare that complement the interventions in education), families and/or private companies. Programs with a positive track record in terms of improving equity seem to be those combining financial support with non-financial aid offered

to students (Salmi and Bassett 2014) as well as those empowering students, setting high academic expectations and helping students and parents believe in themselves and in their educational success (Usher 2015). These latter ones tend to be more intrusive and require frequent contact with the targeted individuals—e.g. academic support, mentoring programs.

Usher (2015) contends that making definitive statements about "what works" is hindered by the impossibility to generalize particular results (i.e., issues of transferability in different institutional settings) and the tendency to re-define the term "equity" when results become inconvenient (i.e., politically unwelcomed results). Similarly, Claeys-Kulik et al. (2019) argue that the collection and use of data on equity are often subject to controversial discussions, and perspectives vary according to cultural, political and legal contexts across Europe.

Lack of adequate, reliable and consistently collected data is often used as an excuse for the lack of action towards more equitable systems, but it also hinders the option of evidence-based policy-making or of measuring the impact of the initiatives already put into practice. Referring to specific measures targeting refugees, Streitwieser et al. (2019) argue that while sponsors described their plans for supporting refugees, they often do not share the amount of funding, the number of beneficiaries impacted, and other key data.

To conclude, this paper addressed a question about the relative effectiveness of various university-level access measures for underrepresented groups. The inference that can be made from this literature review is that all measures have a limited effect when implemented solely. More profound effects can be reached when the access measures are implemented in combination with each other, accounting also for the field of study and underrepresented group in focus.

The recommendations to policy-makers would include using, developing and ensuring prospective students' access to both financial and non-financial aid measures *in their combination*. The measures that have been already developed and validated at other, but similar context could be put in practice first. Development of new measures, their constant evaluation and extensive research on their effectiveness should be encouraged both by the HEIs themselves and national governments.

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Access to and Experiences of Higher Education Across Europe: The Impact of Social Characteristics

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1 Introduction

Policymakers across Europe have increasingly emphasised the importance of paying close attention to the social dimension of higher education and taking further steps to ensure that the composition of Europe's universities more adequately reflects the diversity of the wider population. While there have been a number of studies that have explored this through analyses of European- and national-level policy and others that have assessed a range of quantitative indicators related to student diversity, this chapter assumes, in contrast, an interpretivist stance; it is interested in the perspectives of those studying and working 'on the ground' within the European Higher Education Area. Specifically, we seek to answer this research question: To what extent do students and staff, across Europe, believe that higher education access and experiences are differentiated by social characteristics (such as class/family background, race/ethnicity/migration background, gender and age)? In doing so, we draw on data from a large European Research Council-funded project, including 54 focus

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groups with undergraduate students (a total of 295 individuals) and 72 in-depth individual interviews with members of higher education staff (both academic and non-academic). Fieldwork was conducted in three higher education institutions in each of the following countries: Denmark, UK-England,[1] Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain—nations chosen to provide diversity with respect to welfare regime, relationship to the European Union (EU) and mechanisms for funding higher education. We explore commonalities and differences between staff and students and between different countries, before identifying some implications for policymakers keen to promote further social inclusion within Europe's higher education institutions (HEIs).

2 Background

Education is often seen, by various commentators, as an important space for social mixing, where people from a variety of different backgrounds can come together and learn from one another. Indeed, Bennett et al. (2017) have argued that, within relatively large educational institutions, 'the formal processes of learning, delivering the certificates, is accompanied by more informal processes in which students manage and negotiate difference …. Colleges are key sites within which urban multiculture is experienced and through which it is defined' (p. 2319). Nevertheless, studies from across the world have documented how, with respect to higher education, despite processes of massification, student bodies often remain far from diverse, with those from 'non-traditional' backgrounds under-represented and, in many cases, more likely to drop-out during their studies or attain a lower level of qualification than their more privileged peers (e.g. Bathmaker et al. 2016; Bunn et al. 2019).

Within Europe, there have, over the past 20 years or so, been significant efforts to widen access to higher education for traditionally under-represented groups and to ensure that they succeed during their degree programmes. For example, within the Bologna Process, a 'social dimension' was included to encourage all signatory states to adopt measures to improve the inclusivity of their higher education sector, with the stated aim of ensuring that the student body within Europe represented 'the diversity of our populations'. The 2015 Yerevan Communiqué reiterated this commitment: social inclusion was specified as one of four priority policy areas. Nevertheless, despite these pronouncements, progress has been slow and variable (Pérez Cañado 2015). Indeed, the executive summary to *The European Higher Education Area in 2018* report noted:

> Social dimension challenges have accompanied the Bologna Process throughout its existence. Yet, disadvantaged learners still face access barriers to higher education: students from low and medium- educated families are strongly under-represented, and are more likely to enter higher education with a delay; gender imbalances, if improving slightly, still persist and remain marked in some discipline areas with significant implications for the labour market and society; and life-long learning is not a reality for learners in many countries.

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[1] England rather than the whole of the UK was chosen because of the significant differences between the higher education systems in the four nations of the UK. In this chapter, we refer to England as 'UK-England'.

> In addition to barriers to access, disadvantaged students also face difficulties in completing higher education, dropping out in higher proportions. Despite evidence of these trends over a number of years, and commitments re-iterated in several ministerial communiqués, only a few countries have introduced measures in recent years to improve the conditions for under-represented groups to access and complete higher education. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018a, p. 15)

Where progress has occurred, it has often been within higher education institutions perceived as of lower prestige and/or which occupy relatively low positions in league tables (Boliver 2013; Pérez Cañado 2015). In explaining this relative lack of progress, some scholars have pointed to the policy measures used by the European Union. Weedon and Riddell (2015) claim, for example, that relying on relatively 'soft' forms of governance, such as the Open Method of Co-ordination (which has operated independently of the Bologna Process), has been insufficient to motivate change on the part of national governments. Countries have only been 'invited' to adopt national objectives to promote social inclusion, and commitments in this area have not been legally binding. (Indeed, it is currently not possible for any such commitments to be legally binding either under the Bologna Process or through the European Union policy in higher education.) This has resulted in countries choosing to focus on different groups of under-represented students and not always monitoring the success of implemented measures. In 2014, Eurydice reported that most European countries claimed that they did not have sufficient data to say whether the diversity of their national student body had changed (Eurydice 2014). Even by 2018, relatively few countries had adopted quantitative targets for improving the participation or attainment of under-represented groups (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018b). (Of the six countries in our study, only Ireland and UK-England had adopted such targets.) Furthermore, only three nations (France, UK-England and UK-Wales) had adopted all of the five indicators relating to student diversity that had been suggested by the European Commission (ibid.).

Scholars have also maintained that there has been a long-standing tension between the social and economic goals of the Bologna Process, with Robertson (2009), for example, suggesting that its various social objectives have served primarily as a smokescreen to conceal the economic drivers that underpin the initiative. This tension has led to a lack of clarity, within policy, about the priority that should be given to measures to promote social inclusion and the specific groups upon whom measures should be targeted (Weedon and Riddell 2015). Moreover, targets set at the European level have typically excluded measures of social inclusion. The EU's Education and Training Strategy 2020 (which is distinct from the Bologna Process), for example, specifies that, by 2020, 40% of 30–34 year olds in the EU should have completed higher education, but there is no particular focus on the participation of under-represented groups[2] (ibid.). Studies conducted within specific nation-states have indicated that, often, there is considerable ambiguity and lack of clarity associated with policies in this area. Writing with respect to Germany, Klein (2016) has

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[2]To some extent, the lack of focus on under-represented groups is associated with some of the points made later in the chapter, namely differences in understandings related to this area across Europe, and the relative lack of data at the national level in many countries.

argued that while some measures have been introduced to increase the heterogeneity of the student body and strengthen the competence of staff to work with a more diverse student body, these have suffered from the absence of any overall strategy or coherent concept of diversity—with economic and social justice rationales often in tension. She also contends that lack of agreement about what categories diversity initiatives should cover impeded work in this area, and were often exploited by those who wanted to undermine the idea of equity altogether.

In many respects, the European experiences, outlined above, are reflected in other parts of the world. The challenges of promoting 'diversity' in higher education institutions have been noted by several scholars. They have shown how initiatives can often be about promoting recognition and tolerance rather than structural change (Deem and Morley 2006), and have more in common with marketing efforts than transformation. Indeed, Ahmed (2007) has argued, with respect to ethnicity in particular, 'Not only does this re-branding of the university as being diverse work to conceal racism, but it also works to re-imagine the university as being anti-racist and even beyond race' (p. 606). Appearances are thus altered, but not the university cultures that underpin them. Research has also indicated that, as within Europe, progress towards widening participation and securing the educational success of traditionally under-represented students tends to be best in lower status institutions (i.e. those perceived as less prestigious and/or which are ranked relatively lowly in league tables) (Marginson 2016).

The research reported in this chapter takes this policy context as a point of departure and explores the extent to which considerations of social characteristics inform higher education staff and undergraduates' understandings of the contemporary student.

3   Methods

We draw on data collected as part of a European Research Council-funded project ('Eurostudents'), which considers the ways in which higher education students are conceptualised in six European countries: Denmark, UK-England, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain. These countries were chosen so as to provide some diversity with respect to welfare regime; relationship to the European Union; mechanisms for funding higher education; and available sources of student support (such as grants and loans). Between 2017 and 2019, in each country, we conducted fieldwork in three higher education institutions, selected to represent key dimensions of the higher education sector in that country. In Ireland, for example, we included an institute of technology in our sample, as well as two universities. In each higher education institution, we conducted three focus groups with undergraduate students from a wide range of subject areas and individual interviews with at least four members of staff. Where possible, we included both academic and non-academic employees in our sample. In total, our sample comprised 295 students and 72 members of staff. All the staff interviews were conducted in English. The student focus groups were conducted

in English in UK-England, Denmark and Ireland; in the other three countries, they were carried out in the native language and then translated prior to analysis. All interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed and analysed (employing both inductive and deductive approaches) using NVivo.

During the interviews and focus groups, we were keen to explore the ways in which our respondents understood what it means to be a higher education student in their country today, and we asked them a variety of open-ended questions about this. The undergraduate students were also asked to make plasticine models of how they thought about themselves, as students, and how they thought they were seen by others. We then asked both groups of respondents (staff and students) a more specific question about whether they believed these understandings differed by the social characteristics of the students, such as social class/family background, gender, ethnicity and migration background. It is the responses to this particular question that inform this chapter. In the sections below, we outline the views of both staff and students, before discussing them together in the final section.

4   Staff Perspectives

Many of our staff interviewees believed that what it means to be a contemporary higher education student is, to some extent at least, differentiated by social characteristic. However, unlike the student sample (discussed below), they each tended to focus on a small number of factors, and often just one. Moreover, as might perhaps be expected in light of the discussion above, in which variability across Europe—at the level of policy—was emphasised, the narratives of the staff we interviewed mapped on quite closely to *national* priorities and discourses, with clear contrasts evident between countries. In Germany, for example, there was much more concern about the ways in which immigrants may be disadvantaged within universities than in the other five countries. Staff in German HEI 1,[3] for example, reflected on the struggles they had encountered in trying to support those who had recently immigrated to Germany:

> Those who come from more recent immigrant waves, that's a sort of harder thing to figure out how to support them. It could be anything from the writing and dealing with the language issues to [coping with an unfriendly local non-student population, many of whom are opposed to Germany's position on migration]

As we have argued elsewhere (Brooks 2018a, 2019), Germany's higher education policies more generally take a markedly different position from the other five countries in our sample on inward migration, arguing that the sector has a particular responsibility for integrating refugees, for example. This is closely related to Germany's broader migration policy, in which, in 2015 and 2016, refugees were welcomed in ways not played out in other European countries (see European Commis-

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[3]HEIs are numbered from 1–3 in each country. The labelling is consistent across all outputs from the wider project.

sion/EACEA/Eurydice 2019 for a discussion of the impact of this on the German higher education sector). In Ireland, in contrast, differences by age were discussed much more frequently, with staff outlining some of the particular challenges of being a mature student, but also how such students were often the most motivated and eager to learn. Here, again, we can see echoes of dominant policy positions. In Ireland, policymakers have been keen to emphasise the importance of opening up the higher education system to a greater number of mature students, including those in full-time work (Brooks 2018b). The narratives of the staff in UK-English institutions were distinct because of the prominence many gave to international students (i.e. those from outside the European Union)—reflective of the larger population of such students in UK-England than in the other five countries, but perhaps also the policy and media context in which such students are discussed regularly in terms of their economic benefit to the nation but also sometimes problematised as 'backdoor migrants' (Lomer 2017; Tannock 2018).

Social class was a rather more common theme across the various nations, discussed in some depth in Denmark, UK-England, Germany and Spain. However, the ways in which this was talked about differed somewhat. In Germany, for example, emphasis was placed more on the academic support and preparation that families with a history of higher education could offer their children, which 'first generation' students missed out on. In the other nations, however, material factors were more commonly foregrounded, including the impact of having to work during a degree programme (in UK-England and Spain), and the middle-class nature of many higher education institutions problematised:

> We see that people from more humble origins have more difficulties in … economic terms, in terms of like buying books or spending money for photocopies. One very important thing … these people have to work [in paid work] more … and then you have less time to study, much more stress and things like that. (Staff member, Spanish HEI 3)

A common theme across almost all of the countries, however, was that while some staff appeared to be aware of the difficulties students from less privileged backgrounds faced, it was often difficult to take action as they were usually unaware of the class background of their students until specific problems had emerged.

Different from all five other countries, however, was Poland. Here, almost all staff interviewed believed that students' social characteristics had very little, if any, impact on their studies and stated that they had given little thought to such issues in the past. The following comments are typical:

> [With respect to] social classes, to be honest, I can't say anything about it, in the sense that I don't ask people about it, and they do not share any information like that with me. (Staff member, Polish HEI 1)

> I don't see any differences between students. (Staff member, Polish HEI 2)

> I do not care whether the students are rich or poor. For me, there's no difference between them. … I treat them as blank boards, to write something on the board. (Staff member, Polish HEI 3)

The Polish staff explained this position with reference to the fact that higher education was funded by the state, tuition fees were not charged (for study in public institutions), and entry was open to all with the required grades. One respondent also argued that Poland remained a largely non-hierarchical country because of its Communist past. In these accounts, unlike those from most of the other nations in our sample, there was no recognition that attainment, itself, could be affected by social background, or that students could experience the same higher education institution or course in different ways depending on their background. This, to some extent, illustrates the confusion, often seen within higher education and other areas of public policy, between equality of opportunity and equality of outcome.

Alongside these national differences were some notable institutional variations. In three countries (UK-England, Germany and Ireland), social class was discussed at greater length in the most prestigious university in each of the countries than in the other institutions in the sample. For example

> It's clear that the upper levels of society are more represented in the student body than the lower elements of society …. But the reality is, in the lower social strata, the pressure to start earning money is greater, so it means the luxury of being able to spend four years, you know, further educating yourself, for some people that just simply is not seen as an opportunity, they cannot do that. (Staff member, Irish HEI 3)

Here, the elite context appeared to have brought issues related to social background to the fore. Other variations were apparent in two institutions (one in Germany and one in Denmark) that had unusual profiles—either because of the specific subject mix they offered (vocational subjects with a strong emphasis on social change), or the particular pedagogy that was employed (which included a focus on reducing power differentials between staff and students). In both of these organisations, staff were much more aware of the potential impact of social characteristics on access to and experiences within higher education—including the ways in which various hidden curricula and institutional norms can work to exclude 'non-traditional' students:

> The core academic codes are more or less upper middle-class codes that still prevail … So what is judged out and in is still based on some sort of Scandinavian upper middle-class normativity. (Staff member, Danish HEI 3)

This sensitivity to the impact of the dominant culture of higher education was notably absent from many of the other interviews, including those in other institutions in Denmark and Germany.

5   Student Perspectives

When we turn to the data from the student focus groups, a rather different picture emerges. In general, students across all six countries in the research believed that a variety of different social characteristics operated together to have a significant influence on what it meant to be a student and spent considerably more time than the staff outlining the nature of this impact. The most commonly discussed social

characteristic was social class or family background. This was mentioned in all six countries. The ways in which it was thought to influence the nature of being a student included the extra pressure put on those from low-income families who had to engage in paid work to finance their studies (mentioned particularly in Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain), and the greater sense of 'belongingness' felt by those with family experience of higher education (a notable theme in Denmark, Germany and Ireland). The examples below are illustrative:

> Participant 1: I know a lot of people who have to have a job in college, whereas they can't go, and that kind of means that they have to miss certain like lectures and stuff, and so they'll find it hard just to keep up with the content and then to do the work on top of that. So I think social class does play a factor like.
> Participant 2: Yeah, definitely. (Focus group participants, Irish HEI 3)

> … those from a lower social class will probably have the added difficulty of having to work, perhaps, in order to pay for their studies, so, for them, it's much more difficult to finish their degree. (Focus group participant, Spanish HEI 1)

Gender was the next most commonly discussed characteristic, deemed relevant in all countries with the exception of UK-England. In Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain, focus group participants believed that gender had a significant impact on the courses students chose, and thus the dynamics of particular programmes of study, which could be dominated by either men or women. Some students also talked about the gender-differentiated norms that operated at university. For example, Irish students believed that a strong 'lad culture' within higher education encouraged many male students to adopt what they saw as a 'toxic masculinity' that revolved around heavy drinking and partying. In Denmark and Poland, some students believed that men tended to be privileged within the classroom and could dominate discussions, making it harder for women students to participate. For example:

> I feel like men are more appreciated at my school because they are a minority. So I kind of feel like sometimes that they are … like they're a bit more privileged, like the professors seem to be more optimistic sometimes about their inputs. (Focus group participant, Danish HEI 2)

> Participant 1: Some lecturers don't challenge female students and give them the lowest grades that allow them to pass the exam because they assume that most of them are not going to work as engineers, anyway.
> Participant 2: It exists. Just last week I overheard a conversation while waiting for consultations and two professors were talking about one female student in that manner, that she is stupid and she has no chance to pass their exams. In most cases, they try to encourage women, but on the other, you can still experience this kind of male chauvinism. (Focus group participants, Polish HEI 3)

Other social characteristics such as age, ethnicity, status as a home or international student, and whether one was disabled or not, were discussed in detail but not necessarily in all institutions, in all countries. As with the staff perspectives outlined above, these patterns were sometimes seemingly related to the wider national context. For example, fee status (whether an individual was classified as a home or international student) was discussed in UK-England, Ireland and Denmark but not the other three

countries. It is perhaps unsurprising that this was evident in UK-England (mirroring in some way the staff perspectives discussed above), because of the large number of international students in UK-English universities and the public profile of issues related to international students. Ireland has also witnessed a sharp increase in its international student population (45% from 2013–2017) as a result of a substantial marketing effort, while the position of international students in Denmark was the focus of considerable political debate around the time of the data collection.[4] In contrast, the number of international students in Poland is significantly smaller, which is likely to explain their absence from Polish focus group discussions.

In general, across all our focus groups, the differences by social characteristics, which participants identified, were typically related to the surrounding social context—the students believed, on the whole, the differences played out in higher education were reflective of those in wider society. Many spoke, for example, of how gendered assumptions about jobs and areas of study affected the course choices made by students, which then led to very gender-imbalanced cohorts and affected the prestige of particular degrees (with those viewed as 'feminine' typically seen as lower status than others), and how 'clustering' by different ethnic groups was played out in university spaces in the same way as in wider society. However, it was also the case that, in some respects, the higher education system and higher education institutions were thought to have exerted an independent influence on these differences. In Germany and Denmark, but notably not in the other four countries, some focus group participants viewed higher education as an important space where individuals from different backgrounds could come together, integrate, and be treated the same. They believed that it was often more tolerant and open than many other spaces in their nation-state:

> That's the great thing about uni, I think. That people are accepted ideally for who they are and that distinctions aren't made and also, that uni is a place where things such as gender are questioned, and some realise: "Hey, there's a third gender." So, a few fundamental questions that make uni a very open and tolerant place in my view. (Focus group participant, German HEI 1)

More common, however, was a view that higher education could often work to exacerbate the inequalities that were evident in wider society. Participants claimed, for example, that the hierarchical structure of the sector (more pronounced in some countries than others), compounded differences by social class, tending to further advantage those from more affluent backgrounds, who were more likely than their peers to gain access to prestigious institutions. Furthermore, some participants also emphasised the role of higher education staff in exacerbating inequalities in the classroom. As noted above, some Danish and Polish students believed that a number of lecturers tended to favour male students in class discussions.

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[4]In Denmark, steps have been taken over recent years to reduce the number of international students, because of concerns that too few were staying to work in the country after graduation, and thus not making a sufficient financial contribution to the country through tax (Myklebust 2018).

6   Discussion

We noted at the start of this chapter that there is considerable diversity, at a national level, in the social characteristics that governments have chosen to prioritise (Weedon and Riddell 2015). A similar degree of national variation is evident in the staff perspectives we have outlined above. Typically, staff considered only a relatively small number of social characteristics to be influential, and those that they foregrounded often appeared to be closely linked to the national context within which they were working. This is perhaps indicative of how policy can come to frame the ways in which we see the world, as Bacchi (2000) has argued. Even when the same social characteristic was discussed, different aspects were emphasised—for example, while some respondents stressed the impact of material factors in relation to social class, others placed more emphasis on perceived degrees of 'social fit'. In contrast, the students we spoke to appeared to have a broader, more all-encompassing view of salient social characteristics, with many such variables being mentioned within each focus group. This disconnect is important, as it signals rather different perspectives on the part of students and those who teach them and, perhaps, a lack of awareness on the part of staff of the factors that many students believe affect learning and the higher education experience more generally. The most extreme example of this difference emerged in Poland: while students in the focus groups were able to identify various ways in which family background, gender and place of origin all had an impact on what it meant to be a student in Poland today, many staff appeared to believe that such factors were not relevant to classroom interactions and had little effect on how their students experienced university life. While our data do not offer any clear explanations for this obvious variance, it is possible that it relates to the enduring dominance of Communist narratives about equality, and perhaps also the relatively late entry of Poland into European Union debates about the importance of promoting social inclusion within higher education. Staff views differed not only by nation but, in some cases, by institution (and, to some extent, also by individual). Indeed, as we have shown above, awareness of the possible impact of social class or family background appeared to be strongest in three of the highest status universities in our sample, and two other institutions that had an atypical profile (either in their pedagogical approach or the profile of the subjects they offered).

In contrast to the staff, the students we spoke to appeared to have more similar views about the impact of social characteristics across all six of our countries. This was particularly notable with reference to social class and/or family background. As documented above, they were able to provide detailed and nuanced accounts of the ways in which such factors impacted on both access to higher education, and experiences once there. Here, there was a notable contrast with some of the staff interviewees, who—particularly in Poland and Ireland—did not discuss social class/family background as a significant variable (and also with the perspectives of policymakers, which we have discussed elsewhere (see Brooks 2019)). A similar degree of understanding was apparent with respect to gender: inequalities in this area were discussed widely across the focus groups, with participants showing sensitivity

to the ways in which women could be disadvantaged within university classrooms, and the pressures on men to conform to particular types of masculinity, for example. The similarities of students' views across our six European countries contrast not only with the perspectives of staff, but also the national differences evident at the policy level (for example, in relation to which social characteristics are prioritised in data-collecting and monitoring exercises) discussed above (Weedon and Riddell 2015).

An additional theme that emerged from the staff interviews was the difficulty of making judgements about the social composition of the student body without relevant data being made available. This was articulated particularly in relation to social class or family background, which is often less visible than other markers, such as ethnicity, age or disability. Such concerns about the lack of information within institutions reflect those voiced at the European policy level and discussed in an earlier part of this chapter. While European policymakers have criticised nation-states for the quality of their data collection and monitoring—and the European Commission has itself been criticised for using only 'soft' methods of governance to incentivise such data gathering (Weedon and Riddell 2015)—we see how, in the staff narratives, such issues can have implications at the local level, too. Various respondents in our study claimed that it was difficult for them to take action to reduce social inequalities, or even be aware of what such inequalities looked like, as they typically did not have any data on the social characteristics of their students (we noted this above, explicitly, in relation to social class).

In explaining the various differences they described, staff and many students made reference to the wider social context in which they were located. In this way, higher education was seen as a microcosm of society. There were, nevertheless, some exceptions to this general pattern. As noted above, students in Germany and Denmark echoed some of the arguments made by Bennett et al. (2017) about the university offering a more open and tolerant space, where a difference could be encountered and responded to in more positive ways than commonly seen in society. It is not clear from our data why these views were expressed in Germany and Denmark but not the other four countries, particularly since German higher education has often been criticised for its lack of social diversity (e.g. Neugebauer 2015). Students in the other four countries did not share these views about the openness of higher education institutions in their country. Many did, however, hold that such institutions did not merely reflect wider societal inequalities; some believed actions by staff (such as privileging male voices within classrooms) could exacerbate inequalities, as could the structure of the sector as a whole. An example of the latter point was the way in which university hierarchies were held to magnify differences between social groups—because, as discussed previously, across Europe non-traditional students are more likely to be found at lower status institutions (Marginson 2016; Pérez Cañado 2015).

Various policy implications follow from the discussion above. To drive a more consistent and less nationally variable emphasis on social inclusion, it may be useful for policymakers to collect and analyse data on a much more systematic basis and make more use of the student's voice. As outlined above, the students in our sam-

ple appeared to have a comprehensive view of the possible impact of various social characteristics on learning, and how these could be exacerbated by higher education-specific factors. The commonalities of perspectives across the six European countries was striking, and a notable contrast to the national variation highlighted both amongst the staff we interviewed and, as discussed at the start of this chapter, at the level of policy. Involving students more fully in initiatives to promote social inclusion may thus constitute a useful future focus for European policy-making.

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Which Person Is Presumed to Fit the Institution? How Refugee Students' and Practitioners' Discursive Representations of Successful Applicants and Students Highlight Transition Barriers to German Higher Education

Jana Berg

1 Introduction[1]

Transitions into higher education are risky manoeuvres. Prospective students need to fulfil a number of formal criteria, are confronted with institutional expectations and yet have to figure out "the understandings, knowledges and practices needed to be successful in their studies" (Baker and Irwin 2019). While this concerns all students, some face additional obstacles and challenges which make them more likely to not enter or drop out of higher education. Research on higher education for refugees has shown a number of structural, institutional and individual aspects that hinder the hopes and goals of (prospective) refugee students. Overall, access to higher education can still be seen as stratified, even though equity in higher education has been an important topic on institutional and political agendas.

Education is a Human Right, "enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28)" (UNESCO 2018: 43). The United Nations' sustainable development goal 4 seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all" (United Nations 2015). Recently, the estimated worldwide number of refugees enrolled in higher education has gone up from 1 to 3%. The UNHCR aims for that number to increase to 15% until 2030 (UNHCR 2019a). Responding to social inequalities and striving for equity in higher education is also among the goals for the further development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA n.y.; EHEA Education Ministers 2018).

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In June 2019, there were 70.8 million displaced people worldwide, including 25.9 million refugees and 3.5 million asylum seekers. The majority remains in neighbouring countries. Nonetheless, Germany is among the 5 top refugee hosting countries (UNHCR 2019b). In reaction to their high levels of previous education and strong educational aspirations, the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and many German states ('*Bundesländer*') launched funding schemes in order to support offers for (prospective) refugee students at German higher education institutions (HEI), allowing many HEI to formalize their previously often voluntary-based offers for refugees (DAAD 2018). In 2016 and 2017, over 14,000 refugees and asylum seekers participated in federally funded study preparation courses (Fourier et al. 2018). High numbers of asylum seekers and refugees as well as a large variety of support programs and integration initiatives make Germany an interesting case for investigating higher education for refugees.

In order to support refugees' access to higher education, it is necessary to understand their situation and the conditions of their transition into higher education: "effective transitions require a better understanding of how people progress cognitively, emotionally and socially between different subjects at different stages of their learning, and how they navigate the complex demands of different contexts" (Ecclestone et al. 2010: 6). This paper seeks to contribute to this understanding by investigating the discursive understandings of successful students as a form of knowledge that implicitly highlights access barriers to higher education. It aims to identify the characteristics of successful students from the perspective of experts as well as (prospective) refugee students.

The main research questions are:

- Who is a successful student understood to be?
- How does the situation of refugee students differ from this ideal?
- Which (implicit) barriers are referred to via those understandings?

First, I will discuss understandings and attributes of higher education transitions (2) and describe my theoretical and methodological presuppositions (3) as well as the data and methods this paper is based on (4). Then, I will address the first research question and give an overview of aspects of an ideal transition as described and implied by my interview partners (5.1) and briefly show where they see refugees' situations to differ from this ideal (5.2). Referring to the second research question, I will discuss institutional presumptions as an important access barrier to higher education (6) and end with a working hypothesis. Finally, I recommend that institutional settings should develop more awareness of and adapt to diverse applicants and students in order to widen access to higher education (7).

2   Higher Education Transitions

"Access to HE contributes both to the reproduction of social structures/organisations and their transformation" (Goastellec and Välimaa 2019: 3). As facilitators of social stratification as well as social change, higher education transitions and related

questions of access, inequality and equity as well as widening participation can individually, institutionally and politically be understood to be critical and have been receiving a lot of academic and political attention (Ecclestone et al. 2010; Détourbe 2018). Regardless of continuous political and institutional efforts for equity in higher education, inequalities remain (Goastellec and Välimaa 2019), and groups struggle to access, obtain and succeed in higher education.

> Researchers have used various ways of defining and theoretically approaching transitions. In broad terms, transitions are understood as "a process of change over time" (Colley 2010: 131) and often connected to changes in peoples' "sense of who they are" (Ecclestone et al. 2010: 2). In addition to identity, agency and structural conditions shaping it are seen as important factors but also outcomes of transitions. Transitions are understood as closely connected to, or even as the "product of social institutions [as well as] social expectations" (Ecclestone et al. 2010: 5).

Regarding "the transition to higher education, we could say that educational transitions are any major changes in students' role requirements or study context. The transition from secondary to higher education is clearly a change regarding the study context (i.e. new institution, for some students, also a new city and living on their own) as well as a change in what is expected of students (i.e. their role, e.g. a more self-responsible organisation of their studying in regard of content, time and study mode)." (Coertjens et al. 2017: 359)

Literature on higher education transitions discusses a number of factors influencing the outcomes of transition processes. As Coertjens et al. sum it up, research on transitions into higher education has focussed on the "development of a student identity, [effects of] student engagement [the] fit between secondary and higher education [and] students' motivation [as well as] emotions [and] learning approaches" (Coertjens et al. 2017: 360f.). Colley (2010) argues to also take a sociological understanding of time into account when dealing with education transitions and Ecclestone et al. (2010) discuss the importance of agency, identity and structure. Also, knowledge of institutions and norms regarding the transition process, in other words, the "academic practices and navigational knowledge that students are assumed to have/bring to their studies." Baker and Irwin (2019: 16) has been discussed as an important factor. It seems important to note that a transition "is not a neat, unifying package containing skills or competencies, and neither is it a neutral description of a temporal or spatial linear process" (Taylor and Harris-Evans 2018: 1265). Instead, higher education transition "is a dynamic, multiple, creative and mobile assemblage which changes with individual context, experience and instance, and is entangled with embodied, affective and cognitive ways of coming to, and becoming within, university" (ibid.). Therefore, research should be open to individual experiences, trajectories and influencing factors (Baker and Irwin 2019: 16f.). The understanding of "educational attainment [a]s determined by movement through 'an ordered sequence of educational transitions'" Ecclestone et al. (2010: 6) does not take the variety of pathways into higher education into account.

The importance and, partly, also the interconnectedness of structural, institutional and individual factors and their importance for access to higher education have been discussed in a variety of studies (Goastellec and Välimaa 2019). Walker (2019)

and Grüttner et al. (2018) discuss conversion factors that influence and determine higher education transitions, following Sen's capabilities approach. Sommet et al. have emphasized the importance of a person-institution fit, especially referring to "competitive institution's culture, practices, and identity" (2015: 1), and Baker and Irwin (2019) argue for a better understanding of knowledges and practices that are normalized in and demanded by Western HEI.

Another debate concerns the timeframe of higher education transitions. While Coertjens et al. suggest to include the time "from the last year of secondary education till after students' first experience with formal assessment in higher education" (2017: 360), this definition does not account for prospective students who apply after a gap in their educational biography, or those who (have to) take institutional detours in order to access higher education, such as non-traditional students or international students in study preparation.

2.1 Study Preparation: An Educational Phase During Higher Education Transition

In case foreign school or university certificates are not acknowledged as higher education entrance qualification, international students have to take an assessment test ('*Feststellungsprüfung*') in order to apply for German HEIs. Preparatory colleges ('*Studienkollegs*') prepare international students for this test in field-specific courses. The course determines a range of fields (such as technical or medical subjects) that can be accessed after the respective assessment test. Regardless of its importance for many non-EU international students, this specific educational phase of formal study preparation has only received little academic attention (Berg et al. 2019a).

Refugees have been noted to have strong educational aspirations but also to face interdependent challenges, and even though it is a diverse group, they are assumed to share structural similarities in challenges and needs, often related to a new educational system, cultural environment, language proficiency and missing or not acknowledged social and cultural capital (Grüttner et al. 2018; Ramsay and Baker 2019; Berg et al. 2018). In response to the influx of newly arriving asylum applicants in 2015 and '16, German HEIs and preparatory colleges started additional offers for refugee students (Berg 2018; Unangst 2019). The support was mostly based on voluntary pioneer-engagement and got formalized, mostly using public funding schemes, such as the federal projects 'Integra' and 'Welcome' as well as programs on state-level (Berg et al. n.y.). These offers often focus on study-preparation as well as social integration of refugees and seem designed to support refugee students to fit the institutional environment they aim to apply for Berg (2018).

This paper is investigating the perspective of refugee students taking part in such preparatory courses as well as experts whose counselling—or teaching—positions are related to the transition of refugees into German higher education. Their constructs of successful students are described as an indicator of access

barriers to higher education. The analysis is based on the presumption of discourses as representations of social norms, which will be further described in the next section.

3   Theoretical and Methodological Presuppositions

In order to look into higher education transitions for refugees, I understand them as the time and practice of navigating through institutional requirements and conditions towards becoming a student—formally as well as by developing a student identity. This understanding is oriented on the goal and end of higher education transition and purposefully does not define a number of institutional settings or a time-frame, but aims to be open for individual trajectories and experiences of prospective refugee students. It also emphasized how risky and critical transitions are, since their outcome defines them but remains unclear throughout the transition itself. Institutional and social norms as well as personal background, experiences and knowledge are understood as crucial factors in a norm-person-institution interplay.

> "Access to HE is multifaceted because it includes the provision of study places (HEIs and their geography, the educational system HEIs are embedded in), student' influx patterns and students' characteristics. Admission refers to processes sustaining or restraining students' access on the basis of a variety of criteria (social, economic, academic) and procedures (former degrees, exams, tests, ability to testify one's social position and, more broadly, one's social characteristics)." (Goastellec and Välimaa 2019: 4)

This navigation requires and is influenced by understandings and knowledges of social and institutional norms. In this paper, I focus on discursive representations of 'normal successful students' as a form of knowledge that highlights access barriers to higher education.

Discourse analysis is based on Foucault's assumption that "language use constitutes its subjects as knowledge in discursive practices" (Keller 2007: 2, original quote in German). It aims to interpret, categorize and thus reconstruct discourses, their creation and alterations, their relation to social practices, as well as social actors' strategic discursive performances (Keller 2007: 6, 2011: 188). Therefore, instead of focussing on interpretations of individual actors, discourse analysis is looking for their references to general discourses.

4   Data and Methods

4.1   Sampling and Interviews

This study is based on episodic interviews with 11 prospective refugee students as well as 5 expert interviews with the university's first contact for refugees, who counsels and coordinates offers for refugees, a social counsellor, a general student

counsellor, as well as teachers of preparatory courses at both the university and the preparatory college in one city in Germany. All interviews were conducted within the 'WeGe'-research-project on refugees' pathways to German higher education. The research interest of this paper emerged during further analysis after the interviews were conducted. While the interviews were conducted by the WeGe-project-team, this paper is based on the author's additional interview analysis.

Nine of the interviews with refugee students were conducted in late 2017, and two in early 2019. They participated in study preparation courses at a university or preparatory college. To prepare the interviews, we reviewed literature on ethical research with refugees and developed a project-specific awareness strategy, which can only be summarized here (Berg et al. 2019b, c). Our aim was to create a respectful and trustful research environment and open communication with our participants. This included being open about our work and aims and preventing false hope about potential benefits of participation. Another important aspect was to reduce similarities to interviews that are conducted during the German asylum process. Therefore, we strongly focused on educational aspects and did not inquiry on personal histories of forced displacement, but also offered space if the interviewees addressed their experiences of forced migration. Access to study preparation already depends on a certain level of German proficiency. It is also the language that the investigated field of higher education and study preparation is mainly presenting itself to the participants. In order to acknowledge the language skills they already have, we therefore conducted all interviews in German. Many interviewees stated that using the interview as an opportunity to practice their German was one important reason to participate.

We aimed to represent diverse perspectives by sampling based on gender, age and countries of origin. The interviews chosen for this paper also differ regarding their previous educational experiences, their aspirated subjects and their residential status. We generally followed the participants' self-definition as refugee students. We conducted interviews in general, as well as refugee-specific courses. All interviews included in this paper have been conducted with asylum seekers or people with some sort of refugee protection.

The participants were either contacted during short presentations at preparatory courses, by their teachers or other gatekeepers, depending on possibilities at individual courses. Firstly, an informed consensus, including information on data protection, was provided in English and German and explained by the researcher, as well as signed by the researcher and the participant. After all potential questions were answered, the interviews were conducted. The guideline included questions on their educational biography, the preparation courses, teaching and learning styles, motivation to study, personal networks and living conditions, challenges and support, the relevance of their legal status as well as hopes for the future. While no explicit question on successful students or ideal study situations were asked, one question was included on what they considered important for being able to start studying after the course.

The expert interviews were conducted in late 2017. Practitioners were sampled based on their professional position's connection to access to higher education. For each profession, individual interview guidelines were developed. They included questions on their professional contact to and perspective of refugees, existing support structures at their institution, their networks and sources of information on refugees, specific challenges for refugee students and further, profession-dependent questions on tasks and related experiences.

4.2 Interview Analysis

As mentioned above, the research interest for this paper developed during the analysis of interviews conducted within the WeGe-project. Based on the new research question, I started an additional analysis. The analysis was based on Keller's approach to discourse analysis, which is closely connected to the sociology of knowledge and oriented on aspects of grounded theory methodology. To analyse the interviews, I firstly used open coding in order to get an idea of aspects concerning ideal successful study applicants and students, as well as to where students see their own situation, or experts describe refugees' situations as different from this ideal. The ideals were directly mentioned or indirectly mentioned with differentiations, apparently self-evident reasoning etc. While during the first interviews the number of codes increased rapidly, the open coding of the last few interviews mostly enriched existing codes. This was seen as an indicator for satiation, so no further interviews were included. Also, it quickly became apparent that not only the personality or individual characteristics of successful applicants and students were discussed, but also their environment and activities, which led to the expansion of the research interest from '*who is a successful student understood to be*' to '*what are the assumptions about an ideal higher education transition*'. Based on the open coding, I reconstructed the phenomenon structure ('*Phänomenstruktur*') by outlining its dimensions and its content (Keller 2007: 15f; 21). Axial coding was used to sort the codes into the phenomenon structure ('*Ordnung der Phänomenstruktur*'). Based on selective coding, relevant codes, their interconnectedness and storyline were analysed as narrative structures ('*narrative Strukturen*'). Based on a table that provided overviews of the phenomenon structure in interviews with refugee students and experts, I compared and connected the results for both groups of interview partners.

4.3 Limitations

Regarding the limitations of the study, it should be noted that all sampled refugee students are already participating in study preparation courses. This means they have already decided to aim at higher education and could successfully gain access to study preparation programs. Some of them even got preliminary admitted to a HEI.

Therefore, candidates that got rejected or decided not to apply as well as those that could access higher education without study preparation courses are not represented.

Even though the sampling focusses on one regional case study, it inductively seeks to provide an insight to general discourses by extrapolating from individual cases to general discourses. Nonetheless, regional, institutional and individual factors could further influence this discourse and produce aspects of it that are not present in this case study.

5   Findings

This section deals with the first two research question of *who a successful student is understood to be* and *where the situation of refugee students differs from this ideal*. From direct descriptions of how university studies work or what students should do to implicit references to an ideal situation—all interview partners seemed to have an understanding of successful students and 'normal' pathways to higher education. Those explicit and implicit referrals can be understood as representations of discourses on ideal higher education transitions. Individual statements referred to several stages of transition: study preparation, application and access as well as studying. They give an overview of skills and knowledges that are (assumed to be) either needed during or have to be developed throughout the transition.

It can generally be stated that all interviewees described applicants' high obligations of personal engagement and high individual responsibility for the outcomes of study applications but, on the other hand, also saw institutional obligations to support applicants and students. The following paragraph (5_1) addresses aspects of the discourse on ideal transitions. They include *applicants' and students' characteristics*, *practical skills and knowledges*, *structural and social* as well as *institutional conditions* and *prospective outcomes of successful higher education transitions*. In contrast to those aspects, the next paragraph shows how the situation of refugee students often differs from those ideals (5_2).

5.1   Perceptions of the Ideal Student and Study Transition

When it comes to the *characteristics of successful students*, they are understood to be physically and psychologically healthy, highly motivated and well organised. Both practitioners and refugees mentioned that students should be well-rested. This was brought up in the contexts of psychological wellbeing and housing. Young applicants are described to have better chances due to better learning abilities and more recent experience with formal education. Younger students are also understood to receive better support.

"*Age plays an important role in Germany. And that's why the State supports the young people, or rather until 25. That is important. […] And one can see, one gets child support until around 27, 26? I don't know exactly. But this has a reason. The people who can become something have to make it until that age. If not, then not. That is understandable. For Germany, too. For foreigners I don't say that, but for Germans.* " (Refugee Student 2-interviews are chronologically numbered. All quotes translated by the author)

Fluent (German) language skills are mentioned in every interview—they are described as crucial to follow and fully understand lectures, to interact with others and are closely linked to formal access requirements as well as sound study preparation.

As Muslim holidays and traditions are mentioned to not fit the schedule of some programs, it could indirectly be concluded that an ideal transition is easiest for Christian or atheist students, whose habits fit German holidays and conventional schedules.

"*Only in late May Ramadan started and then the participant numbers very much collapsed. […] It was in the afternoon; they just did not show up anymore. And suddenly we had 15-20 participants, instead of previously 40. […] I know that now for next year, for Ramadan there has to be a break for this course. […] At the university, this break does not exist, but because we are targeted to this group, it does not work, yes?*" (Teacher and math preparation course coordinator, University)

Refugees also mention personal talent for the field of study. Further, they describe the ability of never giving up against all odds which can be understood in the context of a necessary resilience. A practitioner additionally emphasized the need to be adaptable to unforeseen changes and a new institutional environment. One refugee student mentioned exam anxiety as a challenge which leads to the conclusion that, ideally, students have the skill to take exams calmly, focussed and anxiety-free.

Successful students are described to need a number of *practical skills and knowledges*. They have to be very self-sufficient and autonomous. This includes organising their everyday life while living alone, gathering all relevant information regarding formal transition requirements, student life etc. and successfully completing study preparations (if necessary). In this context, language proficiency is connected to the ability to formulate (academic) texts, understanding and using technical terms, as well as presentation skills.

Also, successful students should be disciplined learners with certain knowledge of learning strategies such as learning in groups, critical and curious questions and organised learning materials. They should also be aware of and prepare for specific information and knowledge important to their (desired) fields of study. This requires further skills and practices, such as forming groups, but also refers to social networks and institutional environments:

"*So maybe at the university? They do those groups. They have to consider a little that we as foreigners are not as used to this as Germans. For example, they […] say 'yes, you have to do a group. You have to do a presentation.' But you look and the others, maybe a group, they are already enough. And you want to go to another group and they don't want you. And the professor says: 'Yes, you have to look for this yourself.'*" (Refugee Student 5)

This leads to the next section, the *structural and social conditions of successful higher education transitions*. Ideally, applicants and students can focus only on their

application and further education. This includes being supported by their families (Shapiro 2018) without being put under pressure or having family responsibilities of their own, as well as financial security to the point that only minor jobs are necessary if any. In this context, it would also mean not having to worry about the legal status and residence security. Refugee students emphasize the importance of emotional, institutional and financial support. Many interviewees also point out housing as a crucial factor: it is important to live or be able to move closer to the HEI, and the quality of housing determined the learning environment. Also, social surroundings are understood to make a great difference. Repeatedly, an academic family background is mentioned as helpful, and family and friends are described as important support. One teacher mentioned that successful students should stay away from bad influences:

> "*So this one young man, who also was absent rather often, he had made some friends. […] In this course, who also frequently skipped class. And this was such a clique, he should have better picked others. […] And he did not make [the test]. And had to repeat [the class].*" (Teacher, Preparatory College)

Relevant *institutional conditions* concern institutions visited before applying as well as HEIs. Generally, applicants are assumed to continue from secondary to tertiary education with no gap in their educational biography. The benefits of transitioning more or less directly from high schools include familiarity with formal education, fresh and trained learning strategies as well as study preparation that is supposed to closely fit the respective higher education system. Few interviewees also mention the benefits of private schools. In case study preparation courses are necessary, they should be taught by professionally trained experts in the field and be of high quality while addressing academic and language needs. They need to be well organised because they need to cover many aspects in a rather short time.

Regarding further transitions into HEIs, successful applications have to fulfil a number of formal criteria, including entrance qualification documents, proof of German language proficiency, but also English language skills, proof of social insurance and further, subject-related criteria, including very high grades. The institutional environment and related support structures are shaped by institutional assumptions about 'normal' applicants and students:

> "*And we noticed last summer during orientation week: Oh man, there are really many with refugee background, which we think it great. […] But when it comes to, how do I apply. Meaning, presentations about application procedures are not completely different for non-EU-citizens. And then there sat the first refugees and were slightly frustrated that there was nothing about their topic. We just did not think of them, because it was a classical information day for people fresh out of high school. And we briefly felt really bad.*" (Study Counsellor, University)

Finally, it seems important to apply for a fitting institution. Some counsellors mentioned referring prospective students to other higher education institutions with more fitting programs.

> "*We often refer to certain programs at [HEI]. They are relatively accommodating, a little less complicated than [HEI], I would say. Very friendly staff as well. And so, we exchange*

people when we think it might be a better fit. Whether they do it, they have to decide for themselves." (Study Counsellor, University)

Successful studies are understood to heavily increase future employment and salaries throughout the interviews. Other *outcomes* described by refugee students are proud families, the possibility to contribute to society and personal development, including an increased understanding of possible jobs, but also life-long learning and improved abilities to understand and reflect.

> "*Yes, it is always good if one has a capacity, a Bachelor level. So, if one is at bachelor level, he also thinks a bit differently, because of the knowledge. Meaning, he knows much. So he can plan more. And if parents have a child, and this child has a Bachelor degree, or a Master degree, then he is happy. Exactly, when one is successful*." (Refugee Student 4)

Further, some refugee students hope to increase their chances of staying in Germany by studying successfully.

The practitioners additionally mention happiness and life satisfaction as student-outcomes. They note that domestic students often look for self-fulfilment, while refugee students are often more closely oriented on future chances on the labour market, without rating those different motivations. While being a foreigner was generally understood to complicate higher education transitions, student mobility was repeatedly mentioned as desirable.

5.2 Far from Ideal: Where Refugee Students' Situations Differ from 'Standard' Transitions

Many of those representations of ideal higher education transitions are based on quite contrasting descriptions of the situation of refugee students. While individual situations differ heavily, this section deals with the striking differences to the ideal situation that were mentioned throughout all interviews. It is important to note that this is not a differentiation of refugee students from domestic students or international students with no experience of forced migration but from a hypothetic ideal. Since many aspects have been described extensively in the broad literature on challenges for (prospective) refugee students (Crea 2016; Halkic and Arnold 2019; AbduRazak et al. 2019; Grüttner et al. 2018), I will provide a broad overview of differences to an ideal. In the context of this paper, those differences are important because they are noticed by refugee students and practitioners and could impact their actions.

Generally, refugee students describe and are described as facing a very different situation than most domestic students.

> "*They simply face additional challenges. It just is a foreign country. The language is not the native language. The friends are not the same. The living-conditions are simply harder. And when they also have demanding studies and also have to work so much, it is […] indeed compromising success.*" (Study Counsellor, University)

The described differences to an ideal transition always concern extensive institutional detours in connection with additional bureaucratic effort. The latter includes the formal necessity of study preparations, the inclusion in the highly bureaucratic German asylum system, the additional effort of learning the language and getting to know a new culture and education system as well as difficulties in obtaining comprehensive and correct information. Also, the quality of preparatory courses is sometimes described to be rather poorly, partly because of unfit or not specifically trained teachers.

Another major concern is housing. Many refugees report living too far away from their study preparation and prospective HEIs. Also, shared rooms and crowded common areas are described to inhibit individual learning processes. Many refugees struggle to finance their studies. This is especially hard for asylum seekers and everybody not eligible for public student funding. Often, refugees are older than other applicants and students and must re-build academic knowledge and learning strategies after (forced) gaps in their educational biography.

Refugee students' individual situations differ in many ways, depending on factors such as gender, family background, country of origin, educational biography and many more. Among individually described differences from transition ideals are absent family, responsibility for children and household, no academic background, social isolation and difficulties with the forced independence and self-sufficiency as well as mental health issues (Grüttner et al. 2018).

> "*And then it turned out that they often could not really study anymore. They […] hardly slept anymore. They have, no idea, lost almost all their fellow students, the family was displaced and then we just noticed that they experienced insanely much stress and indeed showed […] health-relevant or sickness-relevant effects of this Syrian crisis.*" (Social Counsellor, University)

Strikingly, many refugees mentioned that they had been recommended to enter jobs or vocational training instead of studying.

> "*People have also said: 'Vocational training is very simple. You can read, your German is suitable for vocational training. You can find a spot immediately.' I have said: 'Actually, I absolutely, I want to study.*" (Refugee Student 8)

This could likely impact their estimation of the difficulties and possibilities of higher education and heavily influence their decision making and implies that high commitment can be an important factor for successful higher education transitions of all groups that are likely counselled not to study. One refugee student describes his strategy of dealing with those situations:

> "*They do not want you to study. If you go to study, you are away from the Jobcenter. They do not belong to the Jobcenter anymore. Yes, rather do not ask. […] One should [talk] to people that support this. If I know that when I say 'I want to study medicine' and they answer 'yes, okay, great, this is good'. Then I should talk to them. But when they say 'no, medicine takes too long', then I should not talk to them.*" (Refugee Student 9)

Refugees report several worries about not being able to deal with the multitude of challenges. Some fear deportation or struggle with the need to frequently renew their

legal status and describe stress and related psychosomatic effects. Others mention that even if they successfully pass study preparations, they are afraid that not enough study places will be available and they might eventually not gain access to higher education. They also feel like they are wasting time and partly put themselves or were externally put under a lot of pressure to make up for 'lost' years (Baker et al. 2019).

Interestingly, being a refugee was almost exclusively discussed in the context of obstacles and challenges and separated from possible student identities. Previous studies are mentioned as a motivation to continue higher education and as subject-selection-criteria, and sometimes as a source of academic experience, knowledge and skills. Nonetheless, forced time during forced migration seems to be a different stage of living and is mostly connected to detours and lost time (Klaus 2020).

6 Discussion

While the first two research questions have been addressed in Sect. 5, this section discusses the third question: *Which (implicit) barriers are referred to via those understandings?*

The topics emerging in the research presented in this paper can be understood as representations of transition barriers that, to some degree, can likely be applied to various groups of, if not all, students. Applicants' and students' characteristics, their practical skills and knowledges, but also structural and social as well as institutional conditions shape higher education transitions of refugee students in Germany. Applicants and students are expected to have certain characteristics, such as high motivation, resilience and self-sufficiency. They are sometimes assumed to be mainly responsible for their individual transition, including its outcome (Colley 2010: 132). While some refugee students and all practitioners refer to the importance of institutional support, the self-sufficiency and individual responsibility are mentioned and implied throughout the interviews. This can create additional pressure and lead to misrepresentations of structural challenges as individual tasks and distract from social power dynamics:

> "Since 'power relations are crucial in defining the situation of refugees' (Dryden-Peterson and Giles, ibid.), these authors show that refugees do not fit in the neoliberal picture of students as 'self-directed agents of all classes who can effectively navigate the postindustrial knowledge economy, able to both meet the skills needs of the economy and experience social mobility' (ibid.): their ability to make informed choices is hampered by 'the unequal social relations and multiple discourses within which [their] aspirations and knowledge are embedded and formed' (Dougherty and Callender 2017, p. 8). In other words, their probability to access HE can be considered as 'the product not so much of lesser desire or ability but of societal and institutional obstacles and exclusions that negatively shape disadvantaged students' aspirations, knowledge, and academic preparation' (ibid., p. 43)." (Détourbe and Goastellec 2018: 4)

One important aspect of transitions is their timing. Firstly, as Ecclestone et al. (2010: 5f.) argue, there are numerous, if not constant transitions throughout the life course,

usually associated with a certain age and an expected order. Formal procedures and expectations are built on those assumptions which can lead to complications in case they are not met:

> "*In this context, I find it problematic […] that the BAföG[public financial student support]-law is a law that had initially been built for […] German students. And study delays that are caused by the circumstance that some is not native speaker. Those cannot be considered for BAföG.*" (Social Counsellor, University)

Secondly, cultural or religious organisations of time are described to create issues of unexcused absence in preparatory courses. Generally, institutional assumptions can be understood as a crucial factor of higher education transitions. This concerns academic and institutional knowledge but also broader cultural assumptions about epistemology, study culture, student identity, self-organisation and learning styles (Baker and Irwin 2019; Coertjens et al. 2017; Colley 2010). Those assumptions can create serious challenges for all that do not meet them. In this context, it should be mentioned that the intersection of different policy areas, such as higher education, welfare or asylum, and of related institutions can cause additional issues for prospective students (Détourbe and Goastellec 2018; Grüttner et al. 2018).

When it comes to institutions, it is also important that formal education obtained before higher education fits HEIs' education (Coertjens et al. 2017: 361). This emphasizes the importance of ensuring high-quality study preparation.

The discourse representation of ideal higher education transitions can also be seen as a barrier in itself. Overall, the research presented in this article can be understood to lead to the following working hypothesis: The further an applicant's situation differs from generally assumed ideal higher education transitions, the more likely this applicant will confront difficulties or even not complete the transition. This could be related to an unfitting institutional environment, HEI actors' estimations of the applicant as unfit and also the applicant's own perception of the transition's costs, benefits and likelihood of success. To work with this notion means not only to address the challenges of diverse groups and the relevance of institutional environments for those challenges, but also to question the presumptions that shape institutional environments and—in this case—the norms of transition.

7   Implications

> "For students who are still developing proficiency in the dominant language of their resettlement country […], universities have a 'moral imperative' (Lenette 2016) to support the development of their language, literacies and cultural practices." (Baker and Irwin 2019: 17)

In order to support their higher education transitions, it seems crucial that students with diverse experiences and identities are not uniformly confronted with institutional expectations and normative discourses far off their own situation. HEI and educational policy should be aware of the variety of (prospective) students. Assessments of their diverse realities, experiences and challenges, but also strengths (Harvey and

Mallman 2019) and capabilities could help HEI to create more flexible practices and a new discourse representing more diverse access routes to higher education. This should be accompanied by the availability of individual and personal counselling (Baker et al. 2018). Since many students deal with issues that cannot directly or only limitedly be addressed by HEI, such as housing, further networks, information exchange and cooperation seem to be increasingly important.

Some studies have also addressed the importance of role models (Bajwa et al. 2017). Throughout the interviews, peers, friends and other students were named as important sources of information and in some cases also inspiration by refugee students. Thus, it can be seen as helpful to provide peer counselling, support peer contact and publicly represent a diverse student body.

Once they entered higher education, students should be well trained in expected knowledges and academic practices. This does not only include academic writing, etc., but offers should also be aware of students' unfamiliarity with the "epistemological practices" (Baker and Irwin 2019: 14) of the academy.

Finally, it seems important to note that transitions that do not lead to HEI, but other transitions and institutions that fit interests and personal development should not generally be understood as failed. Nonetheless, structural disadvantages for groups that often face transition challenges should be met with structural support.

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Syrian University Students in Turkish Higher Education: Immediate Vulnerabilities, Future Challenges for the European Higher Education Area

Armağan Erdoğan and M. Murat Erdoğan

1 Introduction

> *"**Making our systems more inclusive** is an essential aim for the EHEA [European Higher Education Area] as our populations become more and more diversified, also due to immigration and demographic changes."* (Yerevan Communiqué 2015)
> *"We recognize that further effort is required to strengthen the social dimension of higher education. In order to meet our commitment that the student body entering and graduating from European higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations, we will improve access and completion by under-represented and vulnerable groups"*.
> (Paris Communiqué 2018)

Achieving inclusive higher education systems has been one of the priorities of the Bologna Process confirmed in the Ministerial Communiqués since its beginning (Zgaga 2015). The term social dimension, defined as "the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations", has been one of the targets on the agenda since then (London Communiqué 2007). Nevertheless, it is one of the actions that has not been improved and clearly measured so far. To recall the statement in the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué in 2009, it calls for setting measurable targets for increasing participation of underrepresented groups by the end of the next decade. Paying particular attention to underrepresented groups was repeated in the following Ministerial Declarations/Communiqués in Budapest-Vienna in 2010 and in Bucharest in 2012. When new challenges appeared at the borders of EU after the Syrian crisis, a clear reference to this immigration was mentioned in the Yerevan Communiqué in 2015 as can be seen in the above quotation. Three years later, in the Paris Communiqué

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in 2018, the critical role of the social dimension of higher education was repeated without mentioning refugees or even migrants in the text. Completing two decades and creating unique and successful regional higher education cooperation with borders reaching far beyond the European Union, the European Higher Education Area is now facing its future with new challenges, such as the refugee influx. Considering that Ministerial statements give new directions for the new targets, policies and practices for higher education in the member states, a more inclusive approach within the EHEA is needed. Contextual and geographical diversity can make the EHEA more inclusive (Zgaga 2015; Jungblut and Pietkiewicz 2017). For this reason, we hope that this paper, examining Turkey's inclusive policies and practices developed and implemented for the refugee students since 2011, will contribute to the future of the EHEA. Before analysing the findings of our research, Elite Dialogue II, conducted in 2019 and funded by Hopes-MADAD, a brief contextual analysis on refugees in higher education in Europe and on a global scale will be useful to set the ground.

In this tumultuous period of the new global challenges, higher education is a key component to facilitate the personal empowerment, social cohesion, and economic welfare of the vulnerable persons or groups (Cremonini 2016; de Wit and Altbach 2016; Stevenson and Baker 2018; UNHCR 2019b). The social responsibility of higher education needs to respond to the current and future challenges of societies. Migration is one of the most important challenges of our age in the global context. People move from their birthplace elsewhere to obtain better living conditions, better employment, and educational opportunities (UNESCO 2017). It is happening more intensely and faster than ever before in world history. However, it must be emphasized that forced migration occurs due to crises and in the form of influx in emergent situations (Piguet 2018; Bloch and Dona 2019). Therefore, forced migration and its reflections on higher education is a situation that needs to be addressed in a very different way. In many parts of the world, large masses of people are forced to leave their hometowns and places of living because of war, hunger, violence, the danger of death, or other threats. The situation for these people differs legally, politically, socially, economically, and psychologically from those who migrate voluntarily. Furthermore, 63% of voluntary migrants live in developed countries and are regarded as a positive influence on the economy, whereas 80% of forcibly displaced people find shelter in neighbouring countries which are not developed (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2020). Starting from the most basic needs, they have different disadvantages, vulnerabilities, fragilities, and sensitivities. The majority of this group consists of young people and children, which puts the need for education on top of the priority list. Higher education plays a crucial role both for individual, social and economic capacity and the empowerment of vulnerable groups and refugees who have lost their stable conditions (Streitwieser et al. 2016).

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts forth a common standard that higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (UN 1948). Similarly, the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention is the milestone international agreement for defining the status of refugees. Article 22 of the Convention on Public Education clearly states the importance of education for refugee populations. *"The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is*

accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favorable as possible, and, in any event, not less favorable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships" (UNHCR 1951). Although the Convention does not clearly name higher education, it is still one of the fundamental references facilitating higher education policies for refugee populations.

Unfortunately, although international agreements are in place to guarantee the education rights of displaced people, UNHCR data show that refugees' access to higher education remains only 3% (UNHCR 2019b). This ratio shows that young people exposed to forced migration face extra barriers in accessing higher education that cannot be easily eliminated. Therefore, responses to this emergency need to be multidimensional from immediate action to mid- and long-term policies for integration, cohesion, and inclusion. Higher education has been one of the areas that new policies have developed according to need since the Syrian crisis in 2011. Higher education institutions, governments, international associations, UN agencies, and private funders have invested in facilitating access for refugees. In the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals and Targets: "By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university" (Goal 4.3) is in line with the "no one is left behind" commitment of the United Nations' Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2015). In 2016, in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, all Member States of the UN agreed that protecting those who are forced to flee and supporting the countries that shelter them are shared international responsibilities that must be borne more equitably and predictably (UN 2016). In 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) defined four key objectives to "ease the pressures on host countries, to enhance refugee self-reliance, to expand access to third-country solutions, to support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity" (UNHCR 2018). These new policies were developed around global acceptance that education is a right, and all measures ought to be taken to preserve human dignity. Host countries take responsibility for facilitating their participation and taking measures for a holistic integration framework, but the rest of the world has a responsibility to share the burden. In December 2019, the first Global Refugee Forum took place in Geneva, aiming to create a framework for global support for the education of refugees and host communities, complimenting both GCR and SDGs "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030 (UNHCR 2019c). However, global figures show that only 3% of refugees (which was only 1% in 2016) have access to higher education in the world. UNHCR plans to ensure that 15% of refugees have access to tertiary learning by 2030.

The refugee crisis became more visible after more than a million refugees crossed the borders into the EU in 2015, and in 2016 1.2 million people sought shelter in the EU. Each country accepted different numbers and implemented different approaches for integrating these newcomers from outside the EU. While the "majority of countries have no specific policy approach to integrate asylum seekers and refugees into

higher education", large scale measures in addition to linguistic, financial, and academic support were needed (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019). Collective measures were taken by the European Union (EU), the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the European Universities Association (EUA) and other institutions or NGOs for those who were about to start post-secondary education or who dropped out of their higher education. Similarly, the EU initiated new programs, funds, and strategies in its actions for the refugees both within and outside of Europe. The EUA developed some tools to support universities and refugees as well as to support peer-learning collaboration between them. In line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees was developed to "provide reliable information for integration and progression towards employment and admission to further studies" even for those without any documents (Council of Europe 2019). The Bologna Process values and tools, such as social dimension and recognition of prior learning as well as the Lisbon Recognition Convention, have been principal keys for new action in Europe. Yet, peer learning, experience sharing, and research on responses from non-EU countries seem to be neglected or not fully disseminated in this process. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the experience of Turkey in integrating large numbers of Syrian students into higher education.

According to 2019 UNHCR data, 70.8 million people have been forcibly displaced on the global scale due to war, conflicts, violence, and persecution. Around 25.9 million of them are categorized as refugees. The Syrian civil war created a massive influx, and 6.7 million Syrians have been forcibly displaced outside of their country. This is true for Syrian refugees as a majority are being hosted by neighbouring countries, such as Turkey (64.3%), Lebanon (16.4%), Jordan (11.8%), and Iraq (4.4%) with relatively low numbers able to reach Europe (1.4 million) (UNHCR 2019a). Turkey hosts the highest number of refugees with 4.1 million (3.5 million Syrians and 500,000 people from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan). Moreover, these numbers are increasing on a daily basis due to newborn babies and newcomers due to ongoing conflicts in the region.

Turkey's response to the refugee influx from Syria has been unique from many perspectives. Having the longest borders with Syria as well as the political will to help people fleeing from the war created a rapid and massive influx starting in 2011. Two crucial aspects describe the process and frame the current status in Turkey. One is the legal status of the Syrian immigrants, and the other is the open-door policy Turkey implemented at its southeast borders while closing the western borders after the crises started. To start with the legal status, although in this paper and elsewhere "refugee" or "asylum-seeker" are used to define the Syrian people in Turkey, their legal status is, in fact, "temporary protection" a form of international protection. The reason is the "geographical reservation" Turkey put in the Geneva Convention to prevent providing "refugee" status to non-European asylum-seekers (Erdogan and

Fig. 1 Top refugee hosting
countries
Source (UNHCR 2019a)
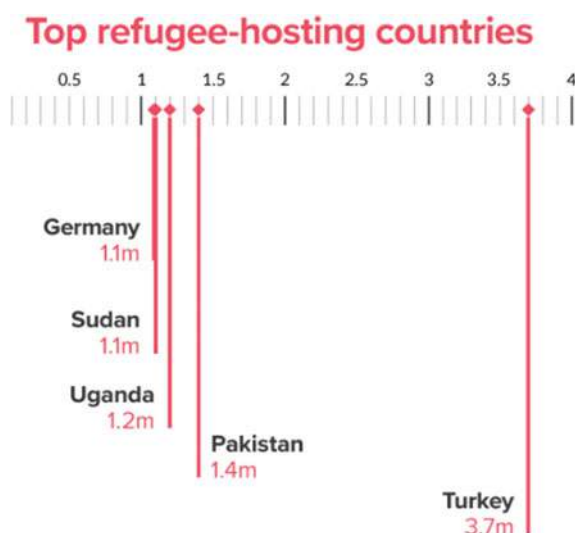
Erdogan 2019).[1] The Law on the Foreigners and International Protection (2013) and the secondary legislation, notably the Temporary Protection Regulation (2014) also adopted the principle of geographical restriction. From the very beginning of the process, this massive influx was expected not to remain long but to return home after the war ended (Kirişci 2014; Erdogan 2018a, b). Another crucial notion is "temporariness" arising from their legal status, which hindered the long-term policies (Erdogan 2018b) (Figs. 1 and 2).

The second aspect is the demographics in terms of magnitude and profile, which also affect the planning of the policies and services. Significantly, the number of foreigners under international protection in Turkey was merely 58 thousand in 2011, prior to the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, whereas the numbers are currently over 4 million coming from Syria and other countries. These figures dramatically constitute more than 5% of the 82 million population in Turkey. The process started as an emergency to meet the very basic needs of the thousands of people at the borders, evolved to seeing them as "guests", and finally became an integration and social cohesion process after nine years. Due to the magnitude and speed of the influx, a somewhat inevitable flexible settlement policy was applied. Syrian refugees settled in the cities of their choice; currently, only very little numbers, 1.8%, are in the camps (DGMM 2020). Another significant demographic indicator is the education profile of Syrians hosted in Turkey. According to self-reported registration data, 33.3% of the Syrians stated that they are illiterate, while the rate of literate yet non-

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[1] International obligations of Turkey in terms of asylum-seekers and refugees are determined under the "1951 Geneva Convention" and the "1967 Protocol relating to the Legal Status of Refugees". As a party to the Geneva Convention, Turkey declared that it would impose a "geographical restriction" exception in the contract with a declaration dated 29 August 1961, i.e. it would not accept incomers from outside Europe for whichever reason as "refugees".

DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE SCOPE OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION BY YEAR
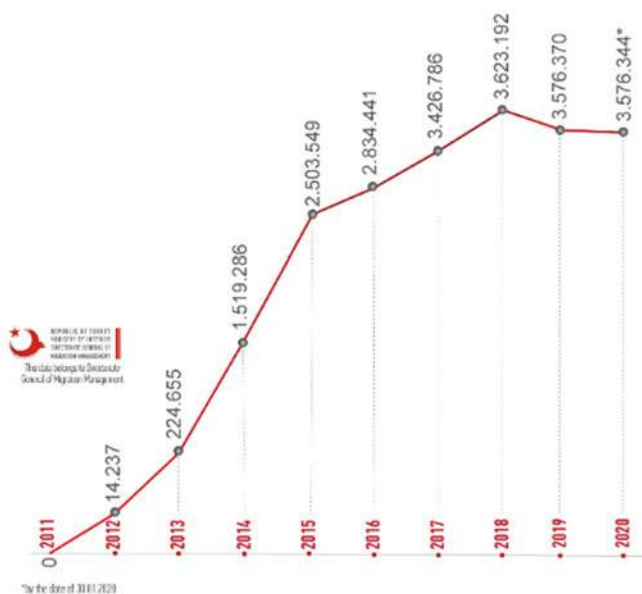

Fig. 2 Numbers of Syrians under temporary protection
Source (Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) 2020)

graduate Syrians is 13% (Ministry of Development 2015). According to the data of the DGMM and the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the number of Syrian children at the compulsory schooling age group in Turkey, i.e. between the ages 5–17, is 1,234,000. At present, 61.41% of them have been enrolled in Turkish schools. More than 1,694,000 Syrians, which makes 46.4% of their population in Turkey are under 18, and 778,044 people are between 15–24 (DGMM 2020). Gender imbalance is another demographic indicator affecting education policies, as the male population (54.1%) is quite a bit higher than the female population (45.8%); when it comes to accessing education, the female population is highly disadvantaged. The above demographic scale of Syrians in Turkey underlines education as a crucial component of the integration policies to be tackled not to create lost generations.

Fig. 3 Higher education
institutions in Turkey
Source Data compiled from
CoHE statistics, 2019
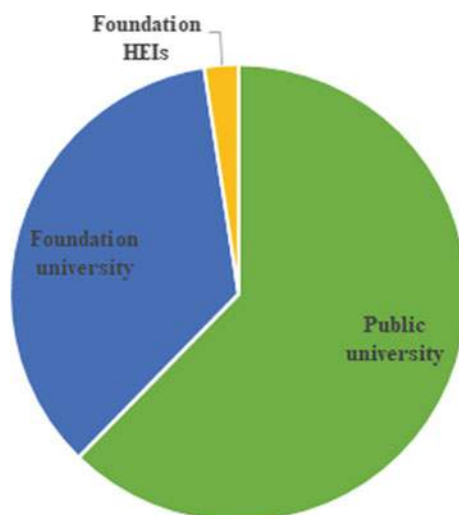
2 Two Syrian Students' Access to Higher Education in Turkey

Although Syrians do not hold the official/legal refugee status, they can benefit from all public services in Turkey, including health and education, free of charge. Therefore, Turkey's inclusive policy providing higher education to Syrian refugees can be acknowledged as a good example for other EHEA countries. Starting with some brief information about the current status of higher education in Turkey will be useful in understanding the policies developed for Syrian students in higher education. In Turkey, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) has been the responsible authority to coordinate, plan, supervise, and govern higher education since 1981. There are 207 higher education institutions, and more than 7.7 million students in the three-cycle system (Figs. 3 and 4).

Access to higher education for Turkish students is highly competitive and is tracked through a central exam applied annually. Demographic indicators, as well as the structural difficulties, create challenges in planning higher education. To give an example, 2,381,412 students took the exam in 2019, and 857,240 (36%) were placed in a program (CoHE 2019). In spite of the enlargement of the system with the new higher education institutions established in the last decade, supply and demand imbalance remains one of the main challenges in Turkish higher education system. The youth unemployment rate (15–24 age) has reached 24.5%, therefore accessing top universities became more important both for prospective students and their parents. Access of the international students is organized individually by HEIs, according to the related regulation prepared by the CoHE.
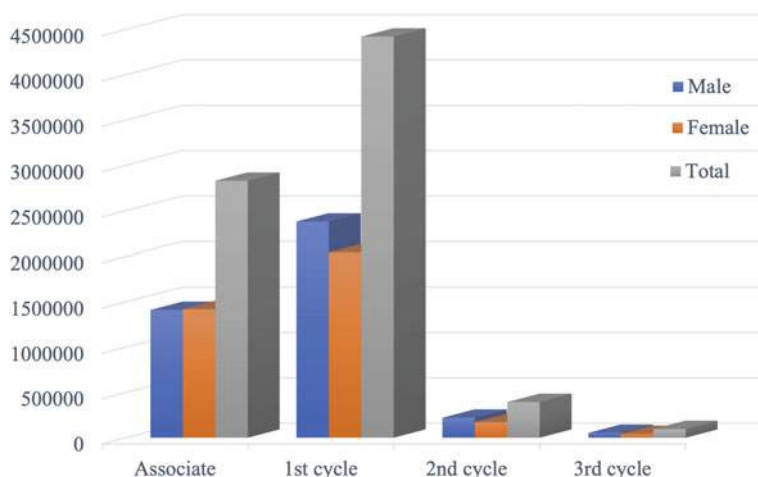
Fig. 4 Numbers of Turkish students (2018–2019)
Source Data compiled from CoHE statistics, 2019

In response to refugee youth in need of access to higher education, the CoHE implemented flexible new tools and policies immediately after the influx in 2011 and has revised the regulations each year according to new needs (Yıldız 2019).

These tools can be listed as follows:

1. Special Student status: On September 3rd, 2012, the CoHE approved a new regulation for the 2012–2013 academic year for Syrian students and Turkish citizens who had to interrupt their education while studying in Syria. According to this regulation, seven state universities,[2] mostly close to the border region, were given the opportunity to accept Syrian students as "special students". This status did not allow students to receive a degree but facilitated those without any documents to take courses which may be transferred in due course (Habertürk Newspaper 2014; Erdogan 2018a, 87; Yıldız 2019, 81). In order to include students without documents, the statements of students were taken into account.

2. Transferring the credits: In the following year, a new regulation was created in which, before the 2013–2014 academic year, those who had started associate, undergraduate and graduate programs (except in Medicine and Dentistry) in Syria and Egypt could transfer to higher education institutions in Turkey:

   - Students are able to transfer to the first year and the final year if they have all the necessary documents for the transfer,
   - Higher education institutions should ensure that the transfer applications do not exceed 10% of the OSYS (Student Selection and Placement System) quota of the department applied to by the students in the relevant year,

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[2]These Universities are Gaziantep, Kilis 7 Aralık, Harran (Ş anlıurfa), Mustafa Kemal (Hatay), Osmaniye Korkut Ata, Çukurova (Adana) and Mersin.

- It was decided that the students who did not have the required documents for transfer could take courses in the seven mentioned universities as "special students", and those who provided their documents could transfer horizontally (CoHE 2014).

3. Opening Arabic programs: On November 9th, 2015, "It is decided that universities (above mentioned seven universities plus Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University) can open programs in Turkish and/or foreign language with the approval of the Executive Board of Higher Education for the students coming from Syria" (Milliyet Newspaper 2015). Thus, it was made possible to open programs in Arabic or other languages in accordance with the needs and suitability of Syrian students in these universities.

4. Tuition fees removed: Tuition fees have been determined by the Council of Ministers annually; and for Syrian students in the public universities are paid for by the Turks Abroad and Relative Communities Presidency (Official Gazette 2014). It allowed Syrian students to be exempted from tuition fees as another tool to facilitate their access to higher education.

5. Financial support: The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), a public institution provides and coordinates the financial support allocated by different international organizations, such as UNHCR, DAFI, and NGOs.

Currently, the following four requirements are asked from the Syrian students to get access to university: identification number issued for the Syrians under temporary protection by DGMM; proof of having completed Grade 12; results of the Foreign Students Examination (YOS) administered by each university, and proficiency for language test. Students who continued their university studies in Syria but could not complete due to war can apply to transfer their credits to any Turkish university.

Syrian students' access to higher education in Turkey has remarkably increased each year. The number of Syrian students in around 100 public and 50 foundation universities in Turkey was 14,747 in the 2016–2017 academic year; 20,701 in 2017–2017 and reached 27,034 in 2018–2019. According to unpublished statistics in October 2019, following the similar trend of the previous years, the number of Syrian students increased to 33,000 students.[3] They are enrolled in 153 different Turkish universities, 46.4% of these students are registered at 10 universities and 65% in 11 cities in the region. While Gaziantep University based in the border city hosts 11.2% of all Syrian university students, Istanbul as a city hosts 21.8% of them (CoHE 2019) (Fig. 5).

The inclusive and proactive response of Turkey to integrate Syrian youth into higher education can be regarded as a success story when taking into account the number of students and the various tools developed for their access. Nevertheless, there are also difficulties, challenges, and areas for improvement. One of the areas for improvement is the lack of data shared about their academic fields, backgrounds, success rates, life conditions, integration with students and other members of Turkish

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[3]According to a presentation made by the CoHE representative at UNHCR Higher Education Working Group.

Fig. 5 Increase of numbers of Syrian university students in Turkey
Source (Ministry of National Education, Directorate General Life Long Learning Report 2020)

society, and future perspectives. Therefore, Elite Dialogue Projects (ED I and ED II) aimed to make modest contributions to overcome the lack of data and academic discussions in this topic.

3   Three Elite Dialogue Project Findings

What is the experience of Turkey as the country hosting the largest refugee population and also with the largest refugee student population in higher education? Based on the findings of our Elite Dialogue projects in 2017 and 2019, we can share the good practices, experiences, and challenges of Syrian students in Turkish higher education.[4] The main objective of the ED projects is to draw attention to the shaping of integration policies based on the views of refugees and to highlight the critical role of qualified groups in the integration process. The Elite Dialogue-I (ED-I) project was carried out in 2017, and the Elite Dialogue II (ED-II) project "Dialogue with Syrian Refugees in Turkey through Syrian Academics and Postgraduate Students" funded by EU Hopes-MADAD was carried out from January 2018 to March 2019. In this paper, the findings of the ED-II student survey will be analysed in comparison to the results of ED-I whenever appropriate.

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[4]The findings of a part of ED-I student survey was published by the authors in 2018 as "Access, Qualifications and Social Dimension of Syrian Refugee Students in Turkish Higher Education", in The European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies, eds. Curaj, Adrian, Deca, Ligia, Pricopie, Remus, Springer.

3.1 *Methodology of Research*

The research was carried out using quantitative and qualitative research methods on three main axes: examining reports and official documents, conducting four thematic workshops in different cities with Syrian academics working in Turkish universities, and a survey with Syrian students.

The research had two main aims:

1. To present the conditions, challenges, and expectations of the Syrian university students and academics among the Syrian refugees (under temporary protection status) in Turkey.
2. To make policy recommendations for the future through the opinions of the qualified groups among Syrian refugees for comprehensive and long-term policies, starting from the idea that the tendency of Syrians to remain in Turkey has increased.

ED-I and II Surveys tried to have a representative sample for the research. The content of the questionnaire to be applied to students was inspired by EUROSTUDENT projects, aiming to determine the socioeconomic profiles and academic achievements of university students in the European Higher Education Area.[5] Therefore, the results may contribute to the future implications for the EHEA.

The questionnaire, which was based on four topics (post-war vulnerabilities, family background, academic qualifications, socioeconomic conditions) in the ED-I, was enlarged for the ED-II and designed to obtain data regarding the following seven topics: Basic Demographics, Educational Background; Immigration Background: Support Network, Diaspora, Duration of Stay, Secondary Education; Satisfaction with Different Aspects of Education in Turkey; Vulnerabilities: Trauma, Housing, Income; Livelihoods: Scholarships/Work; Economic Integration Attitudes/Future Prospects; Social Integration Attitudes: Prejudice, Social Distance, Institutional Trust; and Policy Recommendations. The majority of the questions stayed the same though some changes and additions were made as a result of our experience in the ED-I. For this reason, it is possible to make comparisons for the same questions in both rounds of the surveys. Following the preparation of the questionnaire, it was tested in a pilot scheme. A mixed field model was applied. The questionnaires were prepared on paper and given to university students in the provinces visited for the workshop, and they were also invited to participate online with "SurveyMonkey" by using students' communication groups and the snowball survey method. In the sample selection, quota-based interventions were made considering the real distribution of the participants, according to the cities and universities. As a result, a highly representative sample was obtained. The survey allowed for the collection of valuable data on Syrian students and the observation of trends. However, although a part of the survey was delivered to the students in print, it should be mentioned that it was generally carried out via "SurveyMonkey". The error rate of the survey is estimated to be about

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[5]For Euro-student projects: https://www.eurostudent.eu.

5%. Therefore, our evaluations and analysis should be taken into consideration with these limitations.

In order to ensure that the sample is representative, a stratified quota sampling based on the number of Syrian students in different provinces was adopted. Furthermore, throughout the field study period, the sample was regularly crosschecked against the actual distribution of students across the different provinces where the universities are located. Data for this was obtained from the Higher Education Council data, and a high level of overlap is targeted. To this end, where the sample falls short of the actual share of the Syrian students, academics, students, and NGOs were mobilized to assist with the offline interventions, and the project's social media account was promoted in these target provinces using online interventions.

3.2 Vulnerabilities, and Challenges of Syrian Students

In Turkey, 27,034 Syrian students are enrolled in 153 universities out of 207 universities in total. A total of 1,058 students in 46 cities participated in ED II survey, and 747 students answered more than 70% of the questionnaire.[6] The results of the 747 students who completed the whole questionnaire have been evaluated in our finding. Different from the rates of Turkish students, which is 52.5% male and 47.5% female; the gender imbalance rate is high in Syrian university students. The gender distribution of the respondents is similar to the Syrian student population in the universities; 562 respondents (75%) were male, and 185 (25%) were female. The actual rates of Syrian students in Turkish universities are 17,096 (63.23%) male and 9,938 (36.76%) female. The research sample also tried to reach students from all cycles: about 3% were enrolled in short cycle programs, 88% of the students were undergraduate, and the remaining 9% were pursuing graduate studies either in masters or Ph.D. programs. This is consistent with the Syrian student distribution in Turkish universities (92% undergraduate and 8% postgraduate).

In the ED-I, those who stated that they were enrolled at a higher education institution before coming to Turkey was 45.47% (226 students out of 497). In the ED-II, this rate increased to 48% (507 students) of the respondents that participated in our survey. Of these students with past university enrolment, 12.2% (62 students) attended for one year, 16.3% (83 students) finished two years, 13.2% (67 students) completed three years, and 15.5% (79 students) completed four years of studies in Syria. Among these students, 70% indicated that they could not transfer any of their credits, while 20% said they partially transferred their credits, and 10% stated that they fully transferred their credits. These rates need to be investigated further in order to understand the experiences and difficulties of the students during the transfer period. Since the process is done without official documents, reliability and validity become crucial for the recognition and participation to the programs.

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[6]The number of surveys conducted in the ED-I study was 470 students in 36 provinces.

Table 1 Paths to access higher education

Path	Number of respondents	%
Direct transfer from my HE Institution in Syria	92	12.43
Applied to the university quota	391	53.11
Took the YÖS exam	211	28.65
Entered as a special student	34	4.59
Other	47	15.41
Total	740	

Source ED II questionnaire

One of the most important indicators is to discover the routes they followed in their admission process. This is a new question for the ED-II. Significantly, 53% applied for the international student quotas offered by universities, which have been increased after the mass influx of Syrian refugees in Turkey, following a regulation implemented by the Council of Higher Education. This result is critical in terms of quality, as the students were accepted without taking the YÖS exam. Almost 29% took the more competitive Foreign Student Exam (YÖS) prepared by the universities they applied to, 12% directly transferred from their institution in Syria, and about 5% started as "special students" again as a result of a tool developed by the CoHE and continued to the full degree program. This data clearly indicates the diversity of access procedures implemented by the Syrian refugees and the positive impact of the facilitating regulations centrally planned by the CoHE and implemented by the universities.

Regarding the distribution of their chosen field of study, about 40% are enrolled in various engineering programs with civil and computer engineering being the most popular departments within this field. About 30% are enrolled in administrative and social sciences, including political science and international relations, and 18% are enrolled in health sciences, including medicine, dentistry, and pharmaceutics departments. Significantly, comparing the results of the ED-I and II, participants studying both engineering and health sciences seems to have increased, which can also be interpreted as a positive sign; since it will be useful for the Syrian students if they return Syria to reconstruct their country. On the other hand, the results have created a discussion amongst the Turkish public that Syrian students are taking the place of some Turkish students, as these fields are highly competitive among Turkish students who have to take the central exam to get access to universities (Table 1).

With regard to marital status, about 20% of the respondents indicated that they were married while the remainder is single. This is a rather high percentage compared to Turkish university students and may result in more responsibilities for running a household with a potential impact on their success in higher education.

In order to note any problems encountered while they were trying to access higher education, they were asked a specific question regarding problems/challenges accessing HE. The following table not only illustrates the distribution of different challenges

Table 2 Important problems/challenges accessing to HE

| Category	ED I (%)	ED II (%)
None/No problems	19.00	20.85
I could not access information on universities and programs	14.25	10.29
I had difficulty in paying for the expenses related to higher education	24.80	28.74
I had difficulty preparing application and registration documents	15.04	14.43
I had difficulty because of the language problem	18.85	11.61
Other	10.82	15.30

Source ED I and ED II questionnaire

but also compares them across the two waves of the ED Project. According to their answers, only 20% of the students in our sample have not experienced any difficulties accessing education, which is almost the same with the ED-I findings, whereas 29% had problems meeting the costs associated with higher education, 19% faced issues due to the language barrier, 14% in securing documentation required for application or admission, and 10% had issues accessing information regarding different universities and their programs. This result points to the need and importance of scholarships, as the rate increased from 24.80% in the ED-I. Having difficulty with language, on the other hand, decreased in the ED-II, which is a positive sign both for the integration into society and also the academic success of the students. Accordingly, for both waves, the financial costs still constitute the most important challenge regarding access, followed by obtaining required registration documents as well as language barriers. The information deficit seems to have lessened, but other problems, such as the financial needs, persist (Table 2).

In the ED-II, a new question was added to the survey in order to ask about the difficulties faced after the students started their studies. Difficulties with learning Turkish appear to be the highest ranked one since 38% of Syrian students stated this. Considering that this is an obstacle for both the academic and social adaptation of the students to their new environment, it is no surprise that it comes out as the most important challenge for Syrian students where they need assistance. This challenge is followed by grades, the registration process, and course comprehension. Areas where the students faced the least amount of challenges are administrative staff, academic faculty members, and fellow students, which demonstrates that students have comparatively low challenges with their social environment despite the language problem. The top four difficulties are directly related to their inability to learn academic Turkish, and it affects their comprehension of the courses, their exam grades, and their communication and problem-solving abilities (Figs. 6, 7 and 8).

Fig. 6 Study fields of the participating students *Source* ED I and ED II questionnaire
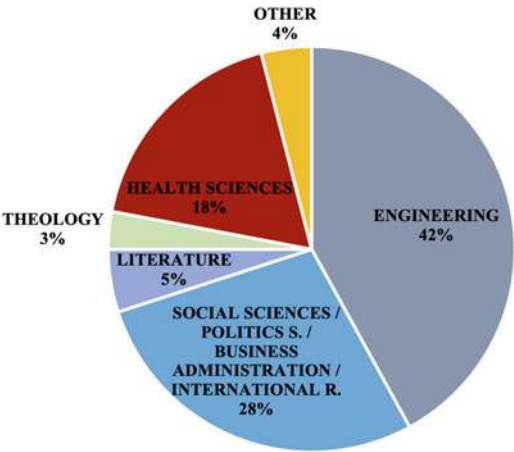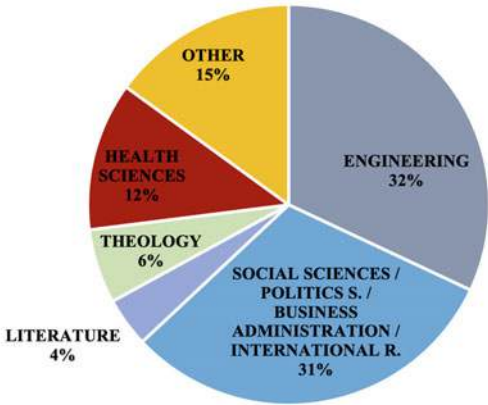
A module on students' satisfaction with various aspects of life and education at their respective institutions has been incorporated into the ED-II student survey. The results regarding their perceptions of their universities are displayed in the following graph, where 1 indicates no satisfaction and 5 indicates high satisfaction. Accordingly, students are most satisfied with the infrastructure of their universities, the quality of education in their respective departments, and the support they receive from academic advisors. While still above average in terms of overall satisfaction, the students seem to be less happy about the accommodation conditions, the course
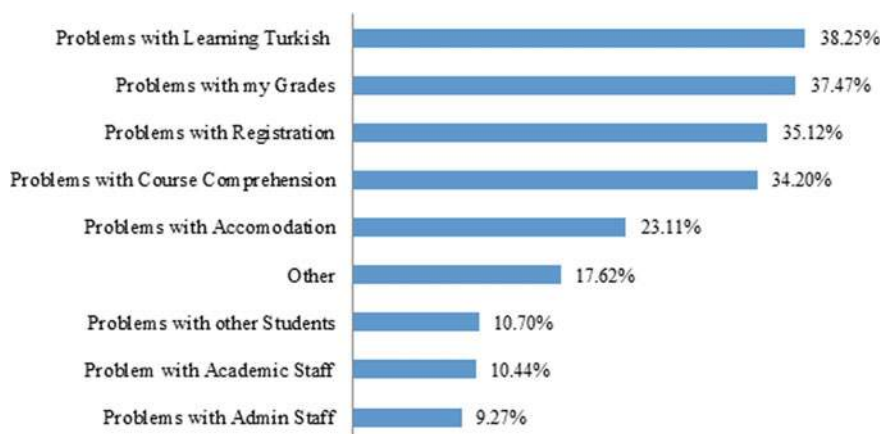
Fig. 7 Problems faced during studies
Source ED II questionnaire
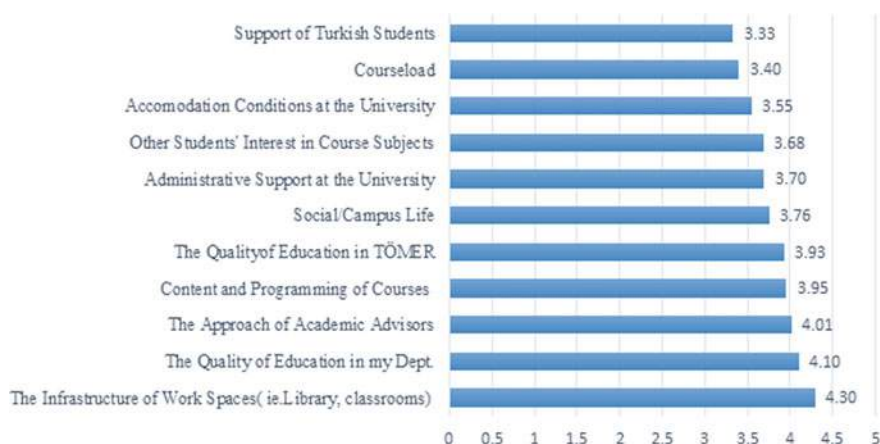
Fig. 8 Satisfaction with various aspects of life and education
Source ED II questionnaire

load per semester, and the level of support they get from fellow Turkish students. When we crosscheck these results with the ones in the other questions, we can estimate that since they have to work in order to earn their living and since they have insufficient language proficiency, the course load becomes heavier for them.

Another indicator that they selected as the lowest in their list is support by the Turkish students. This indicator is tested in another question where Syrian students were asked about their relations with the local students. About 405 indicated they have good relations while a remarkable 33% identified their relations as either poor or medium. When we compare the findings of the ED-I and II, it seems that relations have improved in two years. This finding is a good indicator of social cohesion and indicates that there is more and better inter-group contact from the perspective of

Table 3 Relations with Turkish students at the university

| Options	ED I (%)	ED II (%)
Poor	19.79	9.50
Average	20.32	23.74
Above average	8.97	15.08
Good	24.54	33.80
Very good	26.39	17.88

Source ED II questionnaire

Syrian students. However, strikingly, the poor and very good relations have decreased in the second research sample. It can be evaluated that the more students get to know each other, the more they have realistic perceptions rather than exaggerations as time passes (Table 3).

Financial matters are one of the most controversial issues for Syrian university students in Turkey. Unlike other international students, Syrians are exempt from all tuition fees in state universities in Turkey, and this creates discontentedness in the general public. The high number of scholarships offered to students in higher education through governmental and international agencies is pointed out as an example of good practice in Turkey and is internationally acclaimed. The central part of these grants distributed by the YTB is provided by the Prime Ministry funds, some from European Union funds, and some from the DAFI funds managed by the UNHCR; and, the number of scholarships granted is increasing. Additionally, international organizations, such as SPARK, facilitate Syrian students' access to higher education through scholarships granted under similar conditions in line with similar criteria. When asked about their source of income as an indicator of their economic well-being, more than 56% of students indicated that they are supported by their families. A very high percentage of the students –about 40%–indicated that they work full time or part time to support their studies, whereas only 11% stated that they get scholarships. Comparing these results with the ED-I, there is a significant difference. In the first wave of the research, the students who stated that they work was about 25%, and the scholarship percentage was 18% (Erdogan and Erdogan 2018). This result indicates that the number of students who work to support their studies has doubled. Moreover, the rate of those receiving scholarships has decreased dramatically. This decrease is due to the increasing number of students and indicates that more funds are needed for the future. However, despite all of these scholarships, the number of students receiving scholarships is deficient, and as determined in our research, increasing the scholarships is a critical need for them to continue their education. In our opinion, the absolute number of recipients may not have dropped, but as the number of university students has increased, their percentage may have decreased. Between the two waves, a considerable number of university students became Turkish citizens, which makes them no longer eligible for these scholarships. This finding is reflective on the income sources pattern in that more students work now as compared to the first wave of the survey to support themselves (Fig. 9).
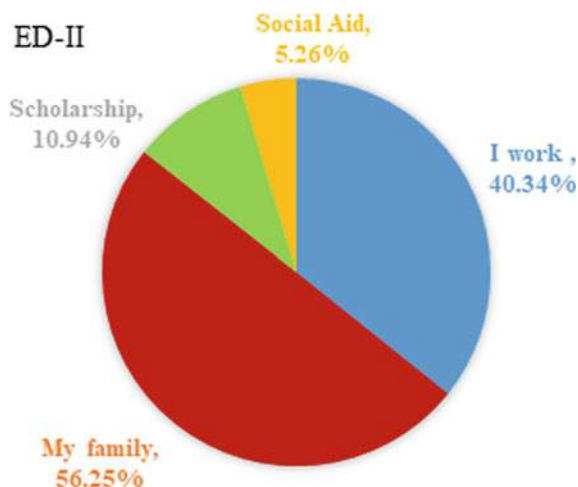
There are various sources of vulnerabilities that can have an impact on students'
education and social integration. ED-I attests to the fact that Syrian university students
suffer from various sources of trauma, therefore ED-II aimed to further explore
this issue. To this end, an index has been constructed, compiling various sources of
trauma inflicting events. In preparing this index, similar indices implemented in other
contexts have been considered, and then students were asked about their experiences
with these different kinds of trauma. The striking results are illustrated in the below-
mentioned table. Accordingly, more than half of the students have experienced fear,
loss of a friend or relative, interruption with schooling, rapid impoverishment, having
to stop studies and having to work, forced relocation, dissolvement of the family,
and direct psychological trauma. In order to have an idea about the substance of this
trauma, we asked them about their losses in the war. Only 13.8% of our respondents
have not lost someone they know during the civil war in Syria, while 60% lost a
distant or close relative, and 25% lost a friend. Multiple responses were allowed for
the aforementioned trauma index, and it became apparent that many students have
experienced multiple trauma inflicting situations.

When asked about their future perspectives like their intentions to return to Syria,
a much-debated issue both nationally and internationally, 34% of students indicated
that they have no intention to return to Syria, whereas only 6% indicated high inter-
est in returning even if the war continues. Another 6% is interested in returning
even if their desired regime is not established in Syria. Nevertheless, a bulk of the
respondents, 55%, indicated that they would return only if their desired regime is
established, which is a rather difficult task to meet for every refugee. This finding
alludes to the need for future plans for the Syrian students not only in Turkey but also
in the EHEA since according to another survey question, they tend to have further
studies in Europe (Table 4).

Table 4 Trauma experiences

Experiences	Number	Percentage (%)
Forced relocation	585	77.28
Rapid impoverishment	549	72.52
Education interruption	533	70.41
Direct psychological trauma	476	62.88
Fear	470	62.09
Dissolvement of family	438	57.86
Loss of a relative	404	53.37
Loss of a friend	396	52.31
Having to work	367	48.48
Loss of a known person	358	47.29
Permanent physical disability	38	5.02
Total	757	

4 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Since 2011, millions of Syrian people have had to leave their country and seek shelter in neighbouring countries and in Europe. Forced migration or displacement creates multiple vulnerabilities while trying to settle in a new environment. Socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological vulnerabilities hinder them from participating actively in society. Higher education is one of the main ways that refugees and displaced people cling to hope for a better life. Their access to and participation in higher education has been a challenging route for many reasons both for themselves and also for the higher education systems and universities in their host countries.

Turkey has a unique place in regard to Syrian refugees. It hosts the largest refugee population in the world with 3.6 million Syrians and 500,000 asylum seekers from other countries, such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Turkey has a young population with the 5–17 age group comprising 21% of the population, but the Syrian population is much younger as its rate is 30%. Turkey is also the country with the largest student population in the European Higher Education Area. The incomparable magnitude of the situation, among others, plays a crucial role in developing new integration policies. In spite of the ongoing difficulties and challenges, the past nine years proved a success story in protection, social-cohesion, and integration of these newcomers.

Turkey has been suffering from some challenges, such as a supply and demand imbalance in higher education. Demographic factors, shortcomings of the higher education system, and the unemployment rate among university graduates have been some long-term challenges for Turkish higher education. Moreover, a common misconception in public opinion, that Syrian refugees are admitted to Turkish universities without fulfilling the requirements, adds new challenges for future policies. Both the

sheer number of migrants and also the emergency of the situation during this migration flow necessitated some action to be taken in the area of higher education. In a country like Turkey, where there is high competition between students to pass the nationwide university selection exam each year, encouraging Syrian students to access higher education, seems to be an area for discussion.

This paper is based on the fieldwork of research conducted in the context of the Hopes-MADAD project entitled "Elite Dialogue II- Dialogue with Syrian Refugees in Turkey through Syrian Academics and Students" in 2019 and the previous phase of the project, Elite Dialogue II. The main research subject is which types of vulnerabilities Syrian university students face, and how they can integrate into society in Turkey. Research on the higher education practices of vulnerable groups in general, and of Syrian students in particular, is largely missing in Turkey, while the international research and literature is rather Eurocentric and does not represent the vast scale of Turkish experience.

The number of Syrians living in Turkey has exceeded 3.6 million, thus the main argument of the research team was that a large portion of this population would remain in Turkey. Moreover, the education level of Syrians living in Turkey is very low compared to both Turkish society and to the Syrians who moved to Europe. Therefore, it is important that university students and academics help with developing new policies, establish healthy communication with the Syrian community as a whole, and play a bridge role in the adaptation process in the host country. "Elite" Syrian groups are vital for future integration policies as "role models," "pioneers," and "bridges." They might also be role models for their community and good examples for the host community to develop positive communication channels.

The number of Syrian students who are studying at 153 public and foundation universities in Turkey exceeded 27,034 in 2019. Half of these Syrian students are those who had to interrupt their education and come to Turkey, and the other half consists of high school graduates who passed the university entrance exam for international students (YÖS) and other exams successfully and now attend university. Syrian university students represent the largest group among the 148,000 international students in Turkey (CoHE 2019). This is undoubtedly an important achievement and investment both for the Syrian community and for Turkey. On the other hand, since accessing higher education for Turkish citizens is a very competitive process, Syrian university students in Turkey are often the centre of public opinion discussion topics.

Although ED research focused on Syrian students in Turkey, after analysing the data, we have the following observations and recommendations to define the problem areas and challenges and to suggest possible solutions for the future in Turkey and in the EHEA since the topics and challenges have indispensable commonalities. Moreover, it will be a timely recommendation for the EHEA, which is wider than the EU, to state that perspectives of non-EU countries should be taken into account to achieve more inclusive regional higher education area.

Our findings indicate that the immense influx of Syrian refugees compelled a number of immediate actions in Turkish higher education as well as in other services. Thus, Turkey is not only the country hosting the largest refugee population but is also facilitating the biggest refugee student rate (5%) in higher education in the world.

Both the government and citizens are carrying the burden of accepting and hosting 4.2 million refugees. For a country, whose demographic and economic indicators are already challenging, integrating more than 27 thousand students into higher education is a great success. Nevertheless, the needs and challenges faced by the local people were complicated and have dramatically increased since the influx started in 2011. The social dimension for Turkish university students seems to be neglected due to the immediate needs and vulnerabilities of the refugee population. This creates hot debates in public (Erdogan 2018a).

The main difficulties Syrian students face in accessing and continuing higher education seem to be language insufficiency, financial deficiency, and multiple vulnerabilities. Academic and financial support for language learning is required for their academic success, for their career development, and also to integrate into society. A clear, rapid impoverishment is reported by the students after the war started in Syria, after they fled their country, and at present. Therefore, more than half have to work to continue their studies. Only 11% of the respondents stated that they receive any scholarships, which is compatible with the actual numbers. Efforts should be made to provide, diversify, and increase scholarships for Syrian students from international sources. Different from regular international students, refugee populations have experienced various traumas during this process and are in need of psychological counselling.

All difficulties intermingle with each other and affect future perspectives. Both in our research and also in the actual conditions, employability remains a big challenge for the future. Considering that Turkey has a youth unemployment rate of more than 25%, this rate will be bigger for the Syrian refugees after their graduation. It is highly likely that young Syrians will go to other countries if they cannot find jobs in Turkey after they graduate.

Representation and participation of Syrian students in decision-making processes seem to be lacking in practice. For the efficiency and sustainability of the policies and reforms, their voices need to be heard for future policies. It is important to collect reliable, updated, and detailed data about the Syrian students to develop new policies. Moreover, a reliable communication strategy is needed to inform both Turkish society and the international community correctly and simultaneously. This may help diminish the misunderstandings or negative approach of the public towards the Syrian community in Turkey and may help a more positive integration process starting from the higher education students.

Research shows that the tendency of Syrians in Turkey to stay permanently increases each day (Erdogan 2018b). Turkey applied a very positive approach accepting and responding to the large influx of Syrians. Despite the legislative limitations, as Syrians are not refugees but under temporary protection status according to Turkey's geographical limitation put in the Geneva Convention in 1951, inclusive policies allowed Syrians to benefit from facilities in health, education, and socioeconomical public services. Higher education is facing new challenges due to the changing social dynamics of Europe and around the globe. Higher education is a significant indicator of integration for newcomers. ED Projects, based on this view, argue that Syrian academics and students will play an important role in establishing positive

communication between the refugees and the host country. Through the experiences of Turkey in the last nine years since the Syrian refugee crisis began, findings of the ED projects may contribute to more inclusive policies and comprehensive outreach and in the EHEA for the forthcoming decade. To go beyond the previous Ministerial Communiqués, clear statements, concrete measurements, decisive implementations, and sustainable policies are necessary for the new decade to include the new vulnerable groups in addition to the existing under-represented groups.

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Networked in or Networked Out? What Can We Learn from Diverse Learners' Experiences of Progressing with and Completing Doctoral Studies?

Maeve O'Regan

1 Introduction

Discourse on student success has tended to emphasise academic attainment and retention (York et al. 2015). However, influences such as globalisation, increasing diversity of student populations and the potential of digital technologies to support the student experience require redefining and expanding how success is understood in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide (York et al. 2015). The current paper is examining student success in the context of a sample of students' experiences of accessing academic and personal support during doctoral candidature.

This article focuses on a preliminary study which investigated if full and part-time doctoral candidates reported differences in terms of access to programme-based information and academic and personal support networks during the doctoral studies.

The current paper explores how HEIs might harness both face-to-face and online resources to enhance access to programme-based and social support to meet the needs of different learners. The findings from this study can provide insights to policymakers and practitioners on supporting a diverse body of students within higher education in Europe, not just within the doctoral process, but at different stages within the Bologna Qualifications Framework.

2 Context

Educational reforms in higher education in Europe have been largely influenced by the Bologna Process which has helped to increase transparency, accountability and standardisation within undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within HEIs in

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Europe (González Geraldo et al. 2011). In a review *"The European Higher Education Area (EHEA): 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report"* (European Commission et al. 2018)*,* globalisation, e-learning and increased diversity of student enrolments were identified as significantly influencing higher education policy and practice and the quality of the student experience.

Policy initiatives at a national level, for example, the National Strategy for Higher Education in Ireland for the year 2030 (Department of Education and Skills 2011), have identified the importance of providing flexible, online and distance learning options to support diverse learners needs, including distance and part-time students and learners who are in employment.

Varwell (2018) recommends broadening the scope of student engagement in quality assurance processes which tends to be represented by full-time undergraduate students, to ensure that a more diverse body of student voices are heard, and that online and postgraduate students are included as partners in quality and that student engagement reflects the full experiences of an institutions student profile.

In summary, greater diversity of student populations (e.g. part-time, mature, international and online learners) and changing patterns of access and entry to higher education have presented challenges to policymakers and practitioners to create more flexible entry pathways and modes of study within educational programmes, such as part-time and online learning options.

3   Access and Progression to Higher Education for Non-traditional Students

> Lifelong learning is slowly emerging as a new vision for education enabling individuals to continually update their skills to meet the constantly evolving market demand (European Commission et al. 2018, p. 193).

Discourse on educational policy and practice has been critiqued as tending to focus on the experience of the traditional, young full-time students in higher education, including learners within the doctoral process. Researchers (Hopwood 2010) recommend exploring the student experience from multifaceted perspectives, such as external personal and social networks, family and employment responsibilities and other time and personal commitments

Traditional access into tertiary education is being challenged by students postponing entry into Higher Education in favouring of entering the workforce or taking a gap year after finishing secondary level education, potentially to capitalise on employment opportunities or as a result of limited financial support to undertake studies (European Commission et al. 2018).

3.1   *International Students*

An international student is defined as a person who has left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study (OECD 2019). According to

reports (European Commission et al. 2018), the majority of international students participate in education programmes at postgraduate and doctoral level. International students have reported challenges in accessing research networks and opportunities to disseminate research in English language publications, which is the standard language of publication within academia (Curry and Lillis 2010). The role of research communities has been identified as enhancing academic progression and the doctoral student experience (Pyhältö et al. 2009) however, certain groups of students have been found to experience challenges to accessing research networks. Part-time, international and non-science based (e.g. Arts, Humanities and Social Science (AHSS) students have been found to have less access to research networks than their full-time and science-based peers (Deem and Brehony 2000).

3.2 Doctoral Candidates

Doctoral policy is governed by the Salzburg principles (European University Association 2016) which acknowledge the difference between doctoral programmes and other levels of study within the first and second cycles within the Bologna process (European Commission et al., 2018), namely the production of original research and knowledge within an innovative research environment (European University Association 2010). Loxley and Kearns (2018) have found that doctoral qualifications have increasingly become the entry-level requirement to practice across a number of academic and industry settings.

Supporting doctoral candidates is a core strategy within higher education policy in Europe and aligns with goals to develop researchers to foster innovation and generate new knowledge and contribute to academic, economic and social reform (European University Association 2016). There has been an 8% increase in doctoral holders over the period from 2013 to 2017. There were 276,800 doctoral holders in 2017 across OECD countries.

3.3 Part-Time Doctoral Candidates

Literature on the experiences of part-time doctoral is sparse with the body of research focusing on the full-time doctoral student's experience. Although generally overlooked in current research studies (Neumann and Rodwell 2009), part-time doctoral candidates can provide valuable insights on the experience of navigating an academic programme at the highest level of the Bologna qualifications framework despite potentially limited ongoing access to the academic institution during candidature compared to full-timers (Watts 2008).

Age is a factor which influences part-time study and, according to statistics (European Commission et al. 2018), there are over twice as many learners within an older rather than younger age group enrolled in part-time programmes across virtually all European Higher Education Area (EHEA) systems. The changing nature of student demographics has prompted researchers, educators and policymakers to acknowl-

edge the role of learning support and communication mechanisms beyond the context of learning and socialisation within the classroom-based setting.

4 Doctoral Research Environments

Despite the fact that there are now doctoral schools in most EHEA countries, only a quarter of doctoral candidates follow their programme in a doctoral school (European Commission et al. 2018). While doctoral schools can provide structure, guidelines for supervision and quality of provision, at times they can be concentrated within certain programmes or units rather than embedded within doctoral programmes and structures across the university (European University Association 2016). One of the goals of the doctoral process is to create inclusive research environments (European University Association 2010) to promote the generation of original knowledge research by a diverse body of doctoral candidates (European University Association 2016). Researchers have highlighted how research communities of practice can foster inclusiveness and sense of belonging for doctoral candidates (Christensen and Lund 2014). However, doctoral candidates in certain disciplines (e.g. science-based) and enrolled full-time tend to have greater access to research communit

Researchers have identified the attention given predominantly to supporting doctoral candidates in Medicine and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) disciplines and recommend addressing the needs of doctoral candidates in the Social Sciences (European University Institute 2017). The development of coherent and transparent admissions policies that recognises the needs of individual learners and different dimensions of research talent (European University Association 2016) can help support doctoral candidates in making the transition from dependent to independent researcher (Lovitts 2008).

5 Defining Student Success—The Role of Socialisation and Academic Networks

The term student success has been described as an ambiguous and multifaceted concept, primarily based around measures of student academic attainment and retention (York et al. 2015). Academic performance and retention can be useful ways to evaluate student success. However, levels of integration and quality of interaction between the student and the academic environment, faculty and peers can also influence student performance and decisions to stay or drop out of the institution (Angulo-Ruiz and Pergelova 2013).

Socialisation of the student into the academic institution has been identified as influencing the quality of the doctoral student experience and academic performance (Jones 2013; Weidman and Stein 2003). The importance of the classroom has been highlighted as providing the opportunity and setting for students to engage in learning

activities and meet academic staff and peers, particularly for students who work or attend courses on a part-time basis (Tinto 2012).

Leander et al. (2010) recommend that researchers move beyond the tendency for discourse within educational research to focus on the role of the school or classroom as a bounded system to explore the role of technologies in transferring knowledge and information and connecting people across time, space and place, for example, across both local and global settings.

5.1 Face-to-face Support Versus Digital Technologies and Online Resources

The value of online and distance learning options is gradually being recognised as providing a way to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse body of students participating in higher education worldwide (Leander et al. 2010). A review of progress with the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms (European Commission et al. 2018) has identified the potential of digital technologies in enhancing the transparency of learning outcomes and course workload, providing flexible learning paths and meeting the needs of under-represented groups, such as distance and part-time students.

However, results from the Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES) UK suggests that students prefer face-to-face rather than online communication and feedback (Slight 2017). Researchers (González Geraldo et al. 2011) note that while technologies such as wikis, podcasts, blogs and emails can support learning, digital media should complement rather than replace face-to-face interaction and communication. Berry (2017) recommends further research into identifying social structures to support online students and suggests that universities extend existing technology and online support to enhance learning and social opportunities for online and distance-based learners.

6 Introduction to the Current Research Study

The current research study is an ongoing Ph.D. project (2016–to date) comprising of two phases, a preliminary exploratory stage and a main study. The overall aim of the research is to explore how a sample of part-time doctoral candidates experienced access to academic and personal support networks within the academic institution during doctoral candidature. The research also explores if part-time doctoral candidates demonstrated agency to influence academic progression and completion of studies, for example seeking help for others, within and outside the academic institution via face-to-face and online communication mechanisms. The findings from a preliminary stage in the research are presented here. This phase of the research highlights similarities and differences, predominately between full and part-time doctoral candidates (who participated in the study) and draws some conclusions on students'

experiences of accessing face-to-face and online doctoral programme information and support networks.

6.1 Preliminary Phase of the Research (Full-time and Part-Time Doctoral Candidates)

The initial stage of the study (2017–2018) was conducted to investigate if there was merit in exploring the part-time learner's experience of progressing through studies as significantly different to the full-time candidate's journey in terms of access to academic and social support networks within the academic institution during doctoral candidature.

This phase of the research was conducted in a single research-intensive university in Ireland, and participants included full and part-time doctoral candidates at different stages of the research process and from different disciplines. Based on the results from the preliminary study, the research tools (questionnaire and semi-structured interview process) were developed and refined to explore the experiences of candidates who had completed doctoral studies on a part-time basis within the university sector in Ireland.

The main phase of the research is currently in progress, and initial perspectives on this phase of the study will be briefly discussed at the end of this paper.

6.1.1 Conceptual Framework and Research Design of Study

The research design for the (preliminary and main) study draws on Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005) and theories of Agency. Actor-Network Theory acknowledges the role of non-human (Latour 2005; Law 1992; Sayes 2014) as well as human sources of information and knowledge transfer, for example, via documents and technology-based communications. The role of distributed actors and networks is addressed by other researchers, for example (Hopwood 2010) in terms of the multifaceted nature of the doctoral students' world, social networks and sources of knowledge (e.g. academic and personal contacts, documents and books).

According to Nespor (2002), some actors, for example students, are often relegated and decontextualized rather than viewed as agents of change, which is assumed to take place within the institutional context. González Geraldo et al. (2011) highlight the unique opportunity that the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has to improve higher education systems in Europe and recommend ensuring teachers and students are included in consultations on reforming education and promoting student success. The role of the student in demonstrating agency such as seeking support and taking action to progress with studies is identified as a key aspect of the student experience (McAlpine et al. 2012).

6.1.2 Theories of Agency

The role of individuals in shaping and being shaped by their social context is developed by Archer (2003) who suggests that the individual constitutes a self who can interact socially and act reflexively to shape their external circumstances and reality. The ideas proposed (Archer 2003) combine both psychological (agency) and social (structure and culture) influences on human behaviour and advancement.

Her theories seek to redress this imbalance by exploring how cultural and structural factors are perceived by individuals, and, in turn, responded to in terms of personal agency. Thereby, addressing deficits identified in other learning theories which have been critiqued as either too focused on the individual or the environment (Mälkki 2010) without looking at the dynamic interaction between both influences. Archer (2003) states that individuals are dynamic agents in their own lives, are not passive and can respond reflexively to shape their own lives and personal projects based on an evaluation of the constraints and enablers experienced through interaction with the social (structural and cultural) world.

Student agency, motivation and personal resourcefulness have been identified as key to persistence and completion of the Ph.D. (McAlpine et al. 2012). Kahn (2014) identified the importance of reflexivity and responsibility and recommended that the student act as an agent mediating internal and social aspects of the learning environment.

6.1.3 Rationale for Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The combination of Actor-Network Theory and Theories of Agency provided a way for the researcher to explore aspects of the external (e.g. academic environment and social interaction) and individual (student agency and actions) influences that can shape a student's journey. The inclusion of the online and document-based aspects of information as well as human sources of communication provided a way to explore multifaceted dimensions of the student's world across time, space and place rather than just within the context of face-to-face interaction, for example, in the physical campus or academic environment.

7 Methodology

A mixed methods research design was used in this study. The researcher developed a questionnaire, influenced by Actor-Network Theory to explore participants' experiences of accessing face-to-face and online doctoral programme information and support from the academic institution during candidature. The interview process was influenced by socio-psychological theories of agency (Archer, Hopwood, McAlpine) which accept that the person is part of a social system rather than just a single individual entity and finds a way to look at social and psychological (external and internal aspects of the students) world which influence academic progression and

quality of the student experience. The interview process sought information on any enablers or barriers participants had experienced (environmental or personal) during the doctoral process and explored if participants demonstrated agency, for example, drawing on their own resources or help from others to progress with studies.

Participants for both the preliminary and (ongoing) main research phase were recruited via snowballing sampling methods (Creswell 2012). This involved the researcher asking respondents to pass on details of the project to their own networks to recruit a wide sample of participants beyond the researcher's own personal contacts.

The questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics (Pallant 2005), and the interview responses were examined using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) to identify common and individual themes within and across the participants' responses.

Eighteen doctoral candidates (11 full-time and 7 part-time) from a single university in Ireland took part in the preliminary research phase. Four additional participants were interviewed (academic staff and postgraduate representatives) to provide context and an additional perspective on support for doctoral learners. Of the 18 doctoral candidates who participated in this phase of the study, 15 were from Arts, Humanities and Social Science (AHSS) and three were studying within the Health Sciences (HS). There were 15 female and 3 male student participants within an age range of $25 - 55+$ on starting their doctoral studies. Two-thirds of participants (12) were over 35 years of age on starting their studies. Participants include early, mid-stage, completing and completed doctoral candidates.

As previous research studies have highlighted the potential disparity between science and non-science-based students in terms of opportunity to participate in research network, the researcher was particularly interested in the experiences of AHSS doctoral candidates. However, as this was an exploratory phase of the study, the researcher endeavoured to recruit participants from as broad a sample, from as diverse a range of disciplinary fields as possible. Participant recruitment will be addressed in more detail in this paper.

8 Limitations

The preliminary research was conducted in a single research-intensive university in Ireland which may lead to a potential bias in terms of the findings, which may reflect specific cultural and structural aspects of the institution, not generalisable to other universities. Based on the findings from initial research, the main phase of the study (currently in progress) will expand the study to include part-time doctoral candidates (who are the main focus of enquiry in this Ph.D. study) who completed studies within other universities in Ireland.

The main study will focus on the experience of completed part-time doctoral candidates as the findings from the preliminary study showed that completed or completing candidates (both full and part-time) had a greater sense of what worked and what didn't (retrospectively) at each of the doctoral processes than those who

were at early or mid-stages of the research journey. Researchers recommend further studies into the experiences of completed doctoral students (Devos et al. 2017).

The majority, fifteen of the eighteen participants, were studying in an Arts, Humanities and Social Science field. While the aim of the study was to explore the experiences of non-science based doctoral candidates, the low number of participants from Health Sciences (3) and lack of representation of participants from the science-based disciplines may have influenced the findings from the study. Further studies could explore in more depth differences experienced by students from various disciplines (science and non-science based) in terms of accessing doctoral programme information and support networks during candidature.

Four (full-time) international (EU and non-EU) doctoral students took part in the study. Although the goal of the study was to look more broadly at full and part-time doctoral candidates' experiences, rather than differences between domestic and international students, responses from international learners provided valuable insights into the experience of non-traditional learners. Themes such as difficulties accessing academic and peer-networks, lack of familiarity with the research culture and barriers to accessing doctoral programme information (face-to-face and online) were highlighted particularly by non-traditional learners (e.g. part-time and international students.). These themes require further exploration (beyond the scope of the current research) with a larger sample of participants.

An interview conducted with an academic staff member in a science-based discipline who participated in the study indicated that there tended to be very few part-time doctoral candidates in the Sciences (or Health Sciences) due to the often team-based structures of the research environment and nature of funding (e.g. student research is often financed by an external research agency.) The focus on participants from AHSS may also have led to a bias towards higher levels of female than male participants. According to statistical data (Higher Education Authority 2018a, b), there are more females than males enrolled both full and part-time in AHSS disciplines at doctoral level in Ireland.

9 Key Findings

The findings indicated that there are similarities and differences between individual students in terms of enablers and barriers to accessing face-to-face communities and research networks within the academic institution. However, full-time candidates tended to have greater access to academic and personal support networks within the academic institution than their part-time peers (O'Regan 2018).

9.1 Employment

70% of both full and part-time participants reported undertaking employment while studying. Part-time participants tended to be in full-time employment prior to starting

the Ph.D. and often continued working full-time while undertaking studies. Limited financial support for part-time doctoral candidates, as well as the need to meet personal financial commitments (e.g. mortgage, family and living expenses), were cited as reasons for enrolling on a Ph.D. on a part-time basis.

> The 6 years part-time Ph.D. process is a challenge, but it would have been unrealistic to change to full-time. It wouldn't have made sense financially in terms of my other commitments (quote from part-time participant.)

Full-time participants tended to work on a short-term and casual basis during the Ph.D.. The financial commitments associated with undertaking doctoral studies, including the need to earn income to supplement funding doctoral scholarships, were cited by full-time participants as the main reason for working while studying. The high cost of living and restrictive budget for travel and living expenses was cited as a source of stress, particularly by full-time learners

> I am barely keeping my head above water (quote from full-time participant)

9.2   Access to the Academic Institution

In line with existing research findings, part-time respondents tended to work on a continuous and often full-time basis while studying. For some part-time learners, this presented challenges in terms of accessing supports, training, seminars and peer networks from the academic institution during the predominantly 9 am–5 pm working day.

9.3   Infrastructure and Links Between Administrative and Academic Departments

Both full and part-time respondents reported a lack of clarity on how administrative, financial and academic functions related to each other. Participants reported seeking support, often on a face-to-face basis, usually from supervisors to follow up on queries regarding the status of research funding applications, fee payments and expenses claims. Lack of transparency of systems and difficulty navigating, or sourcing information online was cited by participants as a barrier to accessing information and created a dependency on informal networks of academic staff and personal contacts familiar with or working in the university system.

9.4   Face-to-face Versus Online Information Sources and Support Networks

In general, both full and part-time participants tended to access doctoral programme and process information informally, *"over a cup of coffee"* or through *"knocking on doors within the academic department"* or through a small network of personal contacts within the university. Participants tended not to refer to more formal web sources or wider formal or official sources of information from the university. As one participant commented on the formal information relevant to the doctoral process available in document-based and online form was:

> It's there somewhere -but it's hard to find (quote from full-time participant).

The reliance on face-to-face informal networks and a dependence on *"word of mouth"* to source information could potentially result in doctoral students accessing inaccurate or incomplete information, or missing out partially or completely on information, support and training relevant to doctoral progression and quality of experience.

9.5   Access to Academic Staff and Peer Networks

The tendency to depend on face-to-face information from a small sample of sources also acted as a barrier in terms of accessing academic information and social networks for some participants. These included participants who were new to the institution, part-time and non-traditional learners seemed to have greater difficulty navigating the doctoral process and taking ownership of their own success and progression than learners who were full-time or had completed a previous qualification in the university.

> I found it hard to know who to go to for academic information and personal support when experiencing difficulties with the Ph.D.. My fellow Ph.D. students and grown up children were invaluable in helping me to navigate the system based on their own experiences of Higher Education (quote from full-time participant, new to the institution and mature learner.)

Part-timers tended to know other part-timers, and due to often limited shared time to interact within the academic institution, part-time networks often disbanded over time. Accessing a social network of peers was often dependent on a fellow Ph.D. student (usually full-time and located within a shared study space in the university) acting as a catalyst and encouraging people to mix socially and go for coffee. Full-time participants also reported the importance of peer groups which was often dependent on working in a shared space that encouraged interaction with others.

> You could be lucky or unlucky with your peer group or what type of study space you occupied in terms of meeting others and mixing with fellow Ph.D. students (quote from a full-time international participant).

9.6 Access to External Research and Professional Networks (Face-to-face and Online)

Students who had difficulty accessing academic information and support networks from formal communication and information channels (face-to-face and online) often demonstrated agency in accessing and developing their own face-to-face and online networks outside the university. International (who tend to be full-time) and part-time doctoral candidates who had research careers or worked in the higher education sector (for example, in their own country) prior to starting the Ph.D. cited the benefits of having academic and personal colleagues to seek support from. They tended to draw on support from these colleagues (for example, via email) rather than seeking face-to-face and online support from the academic institution. A supportive work-environment, line manager and organisational culture of supporting employees who are undertaking doctoral studies has been identified as a motivating influence on part-time doctoral candidates who are balancing studies with employment. (O' Regan 2019).

> My previous experience as a lecturer and researcher helped with my expectations [of the Ph.D.] (quote from full-time international participant).

> Talking to colleagues in my home country helps. Most studied in other countries, so they know what it's like. My friends and family provide the support I need (quote from full-time interactional Ph.D. participant.).

9.7 Access to Online Doctoral Forums and Discussion Boards

Participants, in particular part-timers, discussed referring to external online Ph.D. forums, discussion boards and thesis writing support groups in order to progress with doctoral studies. These findings suggest that there is a network of dynamic communication and support being developed in terms of face-to-face and online interaction between a broad community of Ph.D. learners which is taking place independently of the formal infrastructure and communication networks operating within the academic institution.

> I receive information on the Ph.D. from my supervisor and from people I know in other universities and my online life (quote from part-time participant).

> I'm part-time and far away. Even if I was full-time I'd find my "tribe" online outside of the Ph.D. community within the academic institution (quote from part-time participant.).

9.8   Agency and Help-Seeking Behaviour

Both full and part-time participants demonstrated agency and help-seeking behaviour to progress with doctoral studies, such as using strategies to manage time, seek contact with supervisors and access training, information and support to progress with doctoral studies where possible. Full-time candidates tended to benefit from frequent and ongoing access to the campus environment to participate in research training and activities and develop research and personal support networks with peers and supervisors.

Part-time candidates reported more limited access to research networks and activities within the academic institution but demonstrated agency by using time on campus as effectively as possible. This included use of resources, such as the Library, attending training and events, seeking guidance from supervisors and building up peer networks with other part-time students, and where possible full-time candidates.

> I tended to be as self-directed as possible, focusing on the academic rather than the social [Ph.D.] process, except for conferences and the monthly Ph.D. seminars- which I attended (quote from part-time participant).

9.9   Isolation

The issue of isolation and loneliness was mentioned by some respondents (both full and part-time)—despite being physically on campus often had no one else to talk to. Some participants commented that were not naturally extroverted, so felt they were at a disadvantage in terms of access to information and academic and personal support networks. Participants mentioned resilience as important in terms of needing to manage self, motivation and expectations and keep working often in the absence of much formal doctoral structure or social support to guide them. The theme of *"insiders"* and *outsiders"* was discussed. Respondents who described themselves as outsiders tended to be first-generation Ph.D. students (first in their family to undertake doctoral studies), part-time and some international students and those without the previous academic experiences within the university.

> If you want anything here you need to be an extrovert and I'm not (quote from part-time participant).

10   Discussion and Conclusions

In general, full-time participants found it easier to access academic and social support within the academic institution than their part-time peers. The tendency for participants to seek information and support relating to the doctoral process on a face-to-face basis from collegial networks comprising of supervisors and peers rather than

referring to college or departmental website was reported by both full and part-time participants. Dependence on access to informal face-to-face networks within the academic institution may be a barrier to accessing accurate and timely information for students.

The findings from this preliminary stage research study illustrate the multifaceted lives of a diverse body of doctoral students, including full-time, part-time and international learners. Access to supportive individuals, resources, research networks and support services within the academic institution provided students with opportunities for academic, personal and professional development. The sense of community and well-being that the campus environment provided, especially a place (e.g. desk) within a community of fellow doctoral students and the time and space to engage in different activities for personal and professional development was highly valued by full-time participants.

Results from this research study highlight the importance of access to the physical and research environment of the academic institution providing the time, place and space for students to engage in research activities and access supportive networks and opportunities for personal and professional development.

The findings from the study indicate the need to provide doctoral programme information and social support for students, either with limited access to the academic institution (potentially due to managing other employment and family roles in tandem with studying) or with potential barriers to accessing social support on campus. The results suggest that *"one size does not fit all",* and different students can encounter various barriers and enablers to accessing programme-based information and participating in academic and personal networks during doctoral candidature.

In conclusion, the findings of this study support existing research on the role of socialisation of doctoral students into the academic norms and collegial culture of the faculty and academic institution as influencing doctoral student progression and quality of experience. The challenge for academic institutions may be to provide an equivalent experience for diverse learners who may have more limited physical (e.g. part-time) and social access (e.g., part-time and international learners) to the HEI environment.

This may lead to HEIs developing a combination of face-to-face and online learning supports to cater for students with various personal, academic, situational and lifestyle circumstances which can impact on student success, both in terms of academic progression and completion and quality of the student experience.

11   Recommendations

The recommendations given by participants to enhance doctoral programme information and personal support are summarised as follows:

– **Web-based and online support to compliment face-to-face learning opportunities:** all learners, but in particular students with limited access to the campus

environment would benefit from greater access to online information and guidelines to help mediate, manage and navigate the doctoral process. Researchers recommend exploring the role of online communication and digital technologies to complement face-to-face interaction and promote socialisation and interaction for "hard to reach" students (e.g. part-time, commuting or distance learners).

– **Transparency and standardisation of expected outcomes and forms of assessment across each stage of the doctoral process:** Examples included initial and annual progress reports, requirements and available offerings for students in terms of training and credit bearing modules, record-keeping in relation to the student's progress and guidelines on mid-stage and final Viva/Thesis assessment and submission process.

– **Training for supervisors (in particular new supervisors):** on institutional procedures, milestones and forms of assessment during the doctoral process as well as information on the different administrative, financial, academic and student supports available to the student during the doctoral journey.

– **Promote s sense of community and a positive research culture within departments and across the academic institution:** For example, a *"meet and greet"* where new doctoral students can meet academic and administrative staff and other postgraduate and doctoral students to find out about the different research activities and interests being undertaken by colleagues.

– **Transparency and coherence between administrative, financial and academic functions (face-to-face and online)** to allow students to access information and take ownership of the doctoral process without depending on informal personal networks (e.g. supervisor or peers for information and support). For example, registration process, claiming expenses and funding (especially when the student funding is coming from an external research agency), appeals process and formal guidelines and expectations of the student, supervisor and the academic institution during the Ph.D..

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Advancing Learning and Teaching in the EHEA: Innovation and Links With Research (Coordinated by Michael Gaebel, Thérèse Zhang and Romita Iucu)

Advancing Learning and Teaching in the EHEA: Innovation and Links with Research

Michael Gaebel, Thérèse Zhang, and Romita Iucu

1 Learning and Teaching in the European Higher Education Area Context

Policies, institutions and practice—How are we changing (or not changing)?

Education, a core mission of universities, is frequently depicted as being resistant towards change regarding teaching methods and forms of provision. As Hooker put it, back in 1997, "the nineteenth-century model of teaching at higher level still holds sway and teaching as not changed much since. The last 15 years have seen progressive developments in many higher education institutions, but the basic model has not altered significantly, at least not in the majority of institutions. Yet the context in which higher education takes place has changed—and changed dramatically" (Hooker 1997).

Is this assertion still true in the modern-day context of the Bologna Process, which, as a continent-wide intergovernmental process, triggered considerable structural reforms across the 48 countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the past 20 years?

In the area of learning and teaching, European or national-level policy discussions may be perceived as more or less advanced than realities at higher education institutions, and different from individual academics' daily practice in their classroom. As a matter of fact, over the past years, learning and teaching have emerged as a topic of interest and as a priority, both at institutional and policy levels.

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At policy level, learning and teaching have become a central topic of discussion when looking towards the future of the EHEA. Whilst the first years of the Bologna Process focused on structural reforms, the Yerevan Communiqué of 2015 marked a shift towards recognising the importance of learning and teaching. With the 2018 Paris Communiqué, the Ministers responsible for Higher Education in the EHEA further emphasised the ongoing transformation of learning and teaching, with a focus on the need to develop participatory and collaborative approaches with the higher education sector and with other stakeholders. The Communiqué pointed to student-centred learning, the diversity of learning methods, flexible learning, better recognition for teaching in academic careers, pedagogical training, increased involvement of students in research or innovation activities and proposed to add innovation in learning and teaching as another hallmark of the EHEA. Several recent and current national initiatives should also be noted, with the common aim to enhance learning and teaching and stimulate a dialogue on teaching enhancement, building on good practices (Bunescu and Gaebel 2018).

The Bologna Process is not the only European policy arena where learning and teaching have recently profiled as a priority. For the European Union, the Renewed Agenda for higher education issued by the European Commission in 2017 also addresses the higher education institutions' contribution to innovation from the perspective of enhanced learning and teaching, with announced measures such as reviewing funding and incentive systems for better rewarding good teaching and increasing possibilities to exchange on the development of pedagogical and curriculum design skills (European Commission 2017). Furthermore, the university consortia selected under the EU's new European Universities Initiatives, launched in 2018, are expected to offer innovative, student-centred curricula which enable seamless mobility and push towards better synergies between education, research and innovation.

At the level of higher education institutions (HEIs), the European University Association (EUA)'s Trends 2018 report, which is based on an extensive survey on learning and teaching at HEIs across the EHEA, showed that diverse and interesting experiences and developments are taking place (Gaebel and Zhang 2018). The findings also confirmed that, while the dynamics for change and transformation come from learning and teaching practice, their sustainability and success depend on institutional and, to some extent, on system-level strategies and support. This is acknowledged in the Paris Communiqué, which highlights exchange and collaboration among European HEIs are an important catalyst for change, with a specific reference to EUA's annual European Learning and Teaching Forum launched in 2017 as a platform for collaboration in learning and teaching.

At individual teachers' level, the Trends 2018 report demonstrated that "those with responsibility in teaching" encompass a broad range of staff with different profiles, ranging from full professors to practitioners in specific fields and researchers. Teaching also relies on teaching support staff, staff providing technical support and student services. Teaching enhancement, in the form of initial training in didactics and pedagogy as part of doctoral training or as continued professional development is increasingly emphasis ed at (national) system level, but its actual development and implementation lie mostly with the higher education institutions. While teaching per-

formance is commonly evaluated, more suitable evaluation instruments are still being explored, and, importantly, evaluation results have little or no impact on academic career progression. In other words, across the EHEA and with a few exceptions, good teaching currently receives no or very little recognition. Institutions identify the lack of recognition for teaching in individual career progression as one of the top obstacles for improving learning and teaching.

In conclusion, further enhancement of learning and teaching is a relatively complex endeavour which requires that policy, institutional and individual levels operate closely together. The 2020 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference addressed "Advancing learning and teaching: innovation, links with research, and cooperation with the European Research Area (ERA)" as one of its thematic sessions, and papers attached to this theme highlighted several interesting aspects of this cooperation.

The 2020 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference: three directions to explore

Four papers are published under this theme:

– Mihaela V. Cărăuşan, in ***The integration of experiential learning in higher education institutions—an assessment of the Romanian universities***, advocates for a better integration of experiential learning at Romanian higher education institutions. Her analysis of experiential learning as a game-changing pedagogical approach to address traditional teaching in higher education is based on a literature review as well as a comparative analysis of official documentation for study programmes at several Romanian universities. The paper offers a reflection on the overall relevance of, and need for, a renewed approach to university pedagogy.

– With ***Recognizing student activism: Analysing practices in recognising informal learning in the EHEA***, Marita Gasteiger and Janine Wulz advocate for more systematic recognition of student engagement as a form of informal learning across the EHEA. From surveys conducted among student representatives at both institutional and national levels in 10 EHEA countries, the authors identify best practices, challenges and lessons learnt on recognition of informal learning.

– In ***Closing the circle. Research and policy making in education,*** Simona Iftimescu, Georgeta Ion, Carmen Proteasa, Romita Iucu, Elena Marin and Mihaela Stingu address the mechanisms of research uptake and utilization in the planning, implementation and evaluation of education policies in Romania. The paper is based on a survey among civil servants in the Romanian national administration. The authors analys e organizational factors likely to affect research uptake, such as the research culture among policy makers, engagement with researchers, and the political, managerial and financial context that impact on research transfer. As a conclusion, the paper emphasis es the growing need to enhance partnerships between policymakers and researchers, based on high-quality research, transparency and social responsibility.

– Finally, for their paper ***Assessing students' perspective on teaching and learning. The case of national students' surveys,*** Ştefan Marius Deaconu, Roland Olah and Cezar Mihai Haj conducted an extensive study on the impact of national student surveys on learning and teaching, with a focus on the cases of Norway, Romania

and the United Kingdom. The authors analyse which structures are required and how stakeholders are involved in developing and coordinating national student survey process, and the selection of topics addressed in the questionnaires. The paper concludes on how such surveys document students' perceptions of education reforms and can contribute to evidence-based decisions on learning and teaching.

The topics explored in these papers point to three directions, which would qualify as trends in the EHEA policy discussions as well as at European higher education institutions:

– the multiplicity of changing approaches and practices in learning and teaching
– the complex relation between teaching and research, including the contribution of research to evidence-based teaching and education policies
– the importance of teaching as core to the academic practice, and its scholarly and professional recognition.

All three trends may entail significant changes and paradigm shifts for the future of higher education learning and teaching. The following sections offer a brief analysis for each of them.

2 Changing Approaches in Learning and Teaching

Student-centred learning (SCL) has been a goal of the Bologna Process since its early years. However, until 2012–2015, this did not lead to discussions on didactics and pedagogy but focused on structural reforms such as ECTS implementation. Besides, the concept of SCL remains difficult to grasp in practice and across European higher education institutions (Gaebel and Zhang 2018: 53–54; Loukkola and Dakovic (eds.) 2017), although the European policy level has been promoting it for years.

In addition to increasing students' academic performance and retention, this also brought up more pedagogical aspects such as student motivation, active learning and the role of the university teacher as a learning facilitator (Christersson et al. 2019). As Hannon (2009) already put it, "far from the role of teacher becoming redundant as learning becomes democratised, it is likely that the skill set of the professional educator will shift towards expertise in pedagogy: understanding with precision how people learn, and how learning opportunities need to be designed to facilitate this process." In this regard, and although teaching may still be perceived mostly as an individual activity and responsibility, the Trends 2018 report showed that teaching, nowadays, should also be looked at as a collective process and responsibility. Individual teachers do play an important role in deciding what teaching methods to use; yet, they also rely on collaboration and support, including from pedagogical coordination at faculty, department or study programme levels (Gaebel and Zhang 2018: 56–58). This is crucial, considering that the curriculum should open up to different learning methods, based on a learning outcome and the constructive alignment approach.

Another aspect is to examine how experimentation and innovation change approaches to learning and teaching. As Henderikx and Jansen (2018) put it, there is

expectation across the EHEA on "a time when the new ideas on models of learning, on interdisciplinarity, integrated learning, team pedagogy, on deep learning, etc., will be mainstreamed". The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also addressed the importance of innovative pedagogies, provided a conceptual framework to cluster them and cited examples of practices such as experiential learning (Panigagua and Istance 2018).

Furthermore, changing approaches to learning and teaching also respond to changing skills needs, demographic developments and increased diversity of the student population. The assumption is that lifelong learning would become more common—although it may take various shapes, depending on the institutions' missions, profile and their national and regulatory environments (Smidt and Sursock 2011). This entails adequate relations and recognition mechanisms between formal and informal learning experiences gained throughout lifetime and further attention towards to inclusiveness of the classroom—to cite these points among others. Inclusive education should address not only equal access but also the overall student learning experience,[1] which ranges from learning environment design to behaviour patterns among student populations or adequate assessment for learning outcomes.[2] In turn, and provoked by changing institutional practice, European policy circles recently started paying more interest to pedagogy, with a focus on innovation in learning and teaching. The Paris Communiqué of the Bologna Process, for instance, provides concrete examples of approaches such as work-based learning and makes a plea for enhancing pedagogical training for teachers (Paris Communiqué 2018).

From the 2020 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference, two papers address these changing approaches to learning and teaching, from two different and complementary angles:

– In *Recognizing student activism. Analyzing practices in recognizing informal learning in the EHEA,* Gasteiger and Wulz take the case of student activism to address how recognition for informal learning take place at European higher education institutions. The co-authors advocate for EHEA countries to develop national policies and regulations in this regard, with due attention to the diversity of learning experiences that can be recognised as informal learning.
– In *The integration of experiential learning in higher education institutions. An assessment of the Romanian universities,* Cărăuşan provides a theoretical and analytical contribution to the use of experiential learning in Romanian higher education. The paper shows that a paradigm shift in pedagogy is much needed, for education provision to better prepare students for competences needed beyond university.

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[1]See, for instance, The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2019). 'Making a difference'. A student view of excellent teaching, and Understanding and enabling student success in Irish Higher Education, Dublin, National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

[2]See, for instance, Hannon, 2009.

3 The Complex Relation Between Research and Teaching

The Bologna Process primarily targets education and has mostly left out research as another core mission of universities. However, in the two last Communiqués (2015 and 2018), better synergies between education and research were highlighted as a priority for the EHEA. Learning, teaching and research should be interconnected and mutually enriching, and this connection is essential to stimulate innovation and creativity in the learning experience and to advance knowledge.[3] As a recent empirical study shows, when research is integrated into the teaching activity, students are more motivated and interested in how to develop research and, generally, have a better perception of their learning environment (Milescu 2019).

However, the nexus between teaching and research is complex to explore, with different understandings of concepts such as research-based and research-led learning. The implementation of practices connecting teaching and research may also vary depending on disciplines and perceptions among academic staff. Jenkins, Healey and colleagues proposed several definitions in this regard, based on different types of engagement between students and research, and different positionings of the teacher, ranging from the teacher being at the centre of a process focusing on understanding research findings (research-led teaching), to a focus shift on the students' systematic exploration activities (research-tutored teaching) (Jenkins et al. 2007).

Even equipped with definitions from literature, HEIs and individual teachers may struggle in finding an overall coherence between different approaches. The links between research and learning and teaching can be weak even within research-intensive institutions with limited or no institution-driven, strategic approaches for the integration of research and education missions. Differences can also be noted in the type of opportunities offered to students for engaging with research, ranging from bachelor programmes integrating such opportunities to initiatives targeting selected students at graduate level only. In several higher education systems, frameworks for research and teaching have been set up in such a way that academics tend to separate their activities as researchers in labs and teachers in the classroom (Dakovic and Loukkola eds. 2017: 4–8).

Finally, another aspect of the nexus between education and research is how research may inform learning and teaching, and data derived from research contributes to nurture the teaching culture. According to the Trends 2018 report, two-thirds of institutions surveyed across the EHEA conduct systematic research on learning and teaching, through academic research in education sciences (for half of the institutions), institutional learning and teaching centres, and other initiatives (Gaebel and Zhang 2018: 20–21). However, additional studies would be needed to assess the actual impact of such research.

Under the 2020 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference, a paper addressed the interconnection between research and teaching, both from the policy perspective:

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[3]As phrased under the Ten European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (EFFECT project) (2018). http://bit.ly/EFFECTproject.

– In *Closing the circle. Research and policy making in education*, Iftimescu and co-authors analyse the factors for interaction between educational researchers and policymakers and make a case for a more fluent communication among them. The paper underlined the importance of trust in education research as a critical factor in understanding the dynamics of research uptake in policy making. The results of the authors' survey demonstrate that, even without strong national regulations requesting evidence-based decisions, policy makers highly value the contribution of research in informing decisions in education policies. Among other conclusions, the paper advocates a stronger emphasis on knowledge management in public administration and partnerships between those in charge of knowledge production and those who use it. Iftimescu and co-authors show that, although a fundamental mission and core activity at universities, research is still not sufficiently used for informing decisions regarding the education provision, at national and institutional levels.

4   The Importance of Teaching as Core to the Academic Practice

As Sir Roderick Floud put it, "there is no contradiction between the imperative of good teaching and the imperative of research which critiques, refines, discards and advances human knowledge and understanding. A good teacher, like a good graduate, is also an active learner, questioner and critical thinker. The good teacher aims to help the student be confident in handling the subject as it has developed so far, to be courageous in openness to new ideas (...)" (Standing Committee for the Social Sciences 2015). However, for such good teaching to happen and for teachers to lead pedagogical change, better recognition is needed for teaching in the academic world. Indeed, HEIs identify the lack of recognition for teaching in career progression (Gaebel and Zhang 2018: 62) and, more generally, the imparity of esteem between research and teaching as a key obstacle for improving learning and teaching. The issue has also been repeatedly highlighted by the twelve thematic peer groups of universities organised by the European University Association from 2017 onwards.[4] As a core function of higher education, teaching should be recognised as a professional and academic activity to be actively promoted through recruitment, staff development (including continuing professional development) and promotion schemes. Staff members with teaching responsibilities should benefit from support in fulfilling their role and in developing their skills and practices to meet changing circumstances.[5] The EU High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher education (2014) also underlined the growing importance of improving learning and teaching and making more visible the educational research towards improving teaching abilities, for

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[4]https://www.eua.eu/issues/20:learning-teaching.html (02/03/2020).

[5]As phrased under the Ten European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (EFFECT project) (2018). http://bit.ly/EFFECTproject.

instance through teacher development programmes. "We have almost 4 000 higher education institutions in Europe, of all shapes and sizes", the EU High Level Group noted. "These institutions, for all their differences, share a crucial task and a crucial responsibility—to teach our young (and also our not so young) people, and to teach them to the best level possible."

The Trends 2018 report noted that teaching enhancement is often emphasised at the system level, but its actual development and implementation lies mostly with the higher education sector, with 77% of HEIs surveyed providing optional teaching enhancement courses, and two-thirds also encouraging and supporting good teaching through other means, such as portfolios, self-evaluations, peer feedback, team-teaching, and, more generally, encouragement for scholarship of learning and teaching (Gaebel and Zhang 2018: 71–76). Most HEIs also confirmed that national and international initiatives, supported by governments or by the higher education sector itself, are very useful in the development of teaching enhancement—although only approximately half of Trends 2018 respondents indicated that a national-level learning and teaching strategy prompted them to introduce or increase teaching enhancement and that they cooperate on teaching enhancement through participation in national initiatives.

Several papers under the 2020 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference relate to the professionalisation of teaching in higher education and mention the importance of training and continued professional development for teachers. In particular, *Assessing students' perspective on teaching and learning. The case of national students' surveys* describes and analyses how a national student survey contributes to making teaching standing out as a core mission and obligation of higher education institutions. Deaconu and co-authors also emphasised the importance of national (and European) attention into teaching, and how, ultimately, results from such national student surveys can contribute to informing and shaping education policies.

5 Conclusions: Advancing Learning, Teaching... and Its Interconnection with Research

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to innovate learning and teaching, to enable students to acquire the necessary professional and civic skills and to respond to the society's demand for qualified graduates and global citizens. In order to so, the European and national policy level, the institutional level, and the individual practice level need to better connect and engage together in a shared commitment towards enhancing learning and teaching. Research on education policies and practices also takes an important role in contributing to this dialogue. The Bologna Process Researchers' Conference is one opportunity for establishing this connection, at the interface between policy making, research and practice.

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The Integration of Experiential Learning in Higher Education Institutions—An Assessment of the Romanian Universities

Mihaela V. Cărăuşan

1 Introduction and Research Methodology

The role of university education in the United Nations Sustainable Agenda has been underlined since 2002 (Johannesburg Plan). Further, Rio +20 has reinforced the need to develop a partnership with higher education institutions (HEI) to sustain an education and research system that supports local efforts for sustainable growth, and connectivity with public decision-makers. Moreover, the European Union supports the Member States in their efforts to provide education and training for all citizens— "Education for everyone" (Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights). At the same time, the OECD offers a new vision in the Education Strategy 2030 and draws attention to some guiding principles on the future of education system and the use of specific elements to the process of experiential learning: Anticipation-Action-Reflection. In all these policy statements, the partnership between education and community is emphasised, and all call HEI to action and reflection for the integration of academic goals within the civic ones, to better connect with the society's needs. The HEI partnership for better development of the communities should start from the academic area, and it requires the entire education process to better adapt to new development areas. This adaptation process also includes the development of new learning and teaching practices, which could help HEI to engage with the policy goals mentioned by the documents above.

The current curriculum used in most of the Romanian universities is a traditional lecture-centric which, according to the literature (Karayan and Gathercoal 2005), is one of the most time-efficient and cost-efficient ways of delivering higher education. However, as Boyer (1987) emphasised, the lecture-centric approach alone is limited

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in its ability to meet some of the key goals identified and commonly pursued by higher education institutions. Based on these two points of view, our paper focuses on the uptake of experiential learning at Romanian HEI, with a focus on:

1. the evaluation of obtained competences within the curricula of HEI;
2. the experience learning methods;
3. the links between academic skills (administrative sciences and management) and the 2030 labour market;
4. the capacity of HEI to implement and validate experiential learning.

Our analysis does not aim to provide a quantitative analysis against these points but to illustrate how important experiential learning is for future jobs, and to observe the degree to which today's competences in administrative sciences and management meet the requirements of the 2030 labour market.

The paper starts with a discussion on the concept of "experiential learning" (Kolb 1984; Cantor 1995; Wingfield and Black 2005) and the importance of its recognition by HEI. Experiential learning, indeed, needs to be validated at the societal and academic level. From there, the paper argues how experiential learning methods can be used to complement a lecture-centric approach at HEI.

The study presents a review of the curricula of fourteen faculties of public administration and management from Romania and explores the extent to which these include the same competences. Furthermore, it explores the challenges to which competences should answer to the new labour market requirements. We seek to answer the following research questions:

– What are the experiential and other non-formal learning instruments used by HEI?
– To what degree do educational competences respond to the labour market requirements?
– Do academics of Romanian HEI integrate the new technologies or training methods required by future generations into the teaching and training syllabuses?

To address these questions, we draw on the features identified by Kolb (1984), who presented all the necessary elements from the experiential learning cycle that HEI should examine in the change of goals process. Kolb's fundamentals helped us to identify the research terminology and to provide an overview of the particularities of the Romanian higher education system in two fields of studies: public administration and management. Because we noticed a higher level of employability of the administrative sciences alumni in the private sector and a high level of appreciation of their knowledge, the paper focuses on these two fields of studies, which compete for the same segment of the labour market. To conduct a competences analysis, we attributed one point for each Kolb's concept/action identified in each skill, the score gathered placed the field of study on the radar graphics, and we compared the results based on this. We extended the research to the new technologies: their

role was emphasised by publications such as the World Economic Forum (2018), the Digital Economy and Society Index Report (2019), and the PWC report on the Workforce of the Future, shaping 2030 (2019). Also, our paper is granting particular attention to digital technologies, as Romania has one of the lowest levels in Europe of competencies in new technologies, with 26% of Romanians not having at least basic digital skills required in most jobs, and 51% of Romanian internet users having no software-related skills. Romania has the lowest ICT usage rates amongst internet users, second lowest—36% (DESI Report 2019—Human Capital). Moreover, we conducted a few interviews with professors from different faculties to elicit their opinion on the use of new technologies in classrooms. We then conclude with the HEI's role in validating experiential learning.

2 The Power of Experiential Learning

Dewey (1938), Lewin (1952) and Piaget (1967), Cantor (1995), Fenwick (2000), Marlin-Bennett (2002), Gosen and Washbush (2004), among others, contributed to the development of experiential learning. The most referenced author is David A. Kolb (1984), who established the cycle of experiential learning focused on experience, reflection, conceptualization and action. The four innovative elements are united in grasping and transforming the learning experience (see Fig. 1). Kolb considered that several factors could influence the learning styles. Among them, we can identify those to which higher education institutions (HEI) should pay more attention: specialization, career choice, adaptive competences. The learning discovery of Kolb opened the discussion on the traditional lecture-centric learning and increased the universities' awareness of the labour market demand.

Even if experiential learning is simply defined as learning by doing (MTA Learning), Kolb (1984:38) defined as a transformative process: "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" or as "engagement of the education beneficiaries". Cantor later completed the second definition of Kolb with the engagement of "learner directly in the phenomena being studied" (Cantor, 1995:1). Experiential learning is the learning process by which specific adaptive methods are used for acquiring skills, competences or behaviours based on the experience of the learner and not the one of the teacher/trainer/professor. For this reason, most of the time, the person who assists the learning process must act as a facilitator, expert, evaluator and coach at the same time.
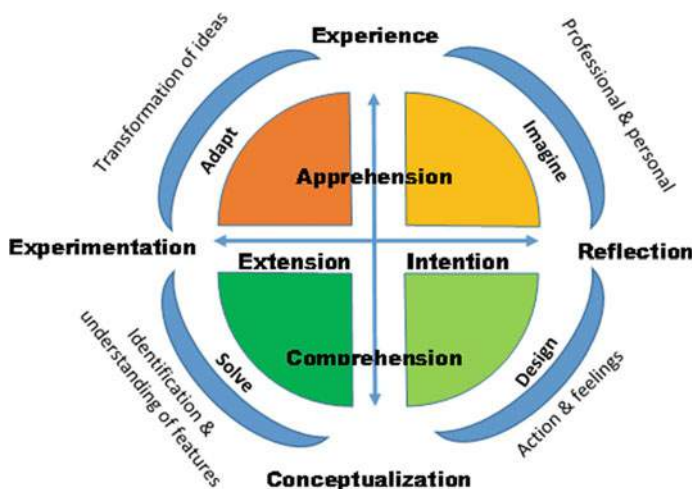
Fig. 1 Experiential learning cycle *Source* Adapted after Kolb (1984)

With experiential learning, HEI can tackle a wide range of skills and behaviours. The organisation of the future and the demand of workforce are not anymore anchored in the traditional learning process. In the theory of future organisations, the new type of organisations are exponential (Ismail 2014), and their needs can be fulfilled only by people who can engage with the experiential learning cycle. The impact of experiential learning in areas such as leadership, change management, virtual, cross-functional and cultural teams, organizational effectiveness, goal setting, and time and stress management has been well acknowledged and studied in the last 20 years (Retallick and Steiner 2009; Domask 2007).

The competences provided by public administration studies need to adapt to the new technology requirements, and for doing this, HEI should invest more in experiential learning methods. These could help students understand how they can use theoretical knowledge and improve their work with the help of new technologies. In this way, we could mitigate the usual blame addressed to education provided by HEI: that "theory has nothing in common with practice". Experiential learning could include field-based coursework, internships, service learning, guest speakers, site visits. HEI need to offer graduates to acquire new skills which would give them better opportunities in the labour market—and this cannot be achieved only through passive learning in front of a computer. Kolb's idea on the role of experiential learning in the labour market was confirmed by Fink's (2003) remark on learning "significant learning is based on the engagement and promotion of active learning". Also, Brookfield (1995), Silverman and Casazza (2000) believed that learning results are obtained through critically reflective practice. Therefore, we consider that transformational change of either public or private organisations for the future can only be reached in a manner that rewards work experiences.

3   Future Challenges for Lecture-Centric Teaching

Since 1978, Keeton and Tate shaped the contrast between content-story and life experience, between the linear learning and the spirally one based on practice. If in the lecture-centric (LC) system the learner is always in touch with a professor, in the experiential learning (EL) one is directly in touch with the studied realities, not just the simulated ones, and a mediator/coach takes the professor's role.

As Brown (2009:3) mentioned, experiential learning "utilize the previous experience to compile document-supported descriptions of learning outcomes acquired from the workplace and personal experiences", and the learner is directly in touch with the realities studied. The process of learning transforms a linear one-to-one into loops, and it provides a different approach to the same issue. Besides, experiential learning reduces the difference between theory and practice.

The figure below is not intended to represent all lecture-centric (LC) and experiential learning (EL) methods, but the similarities and differences between them and how they complement each other. The education system should not be categorised as experiential or not, and experiential learning does not remove the traditional lecture-centric education, the linear one. The "fish bones" representation offers a comparative perspective and emphasises the movement in the learning process (Fig. 2).
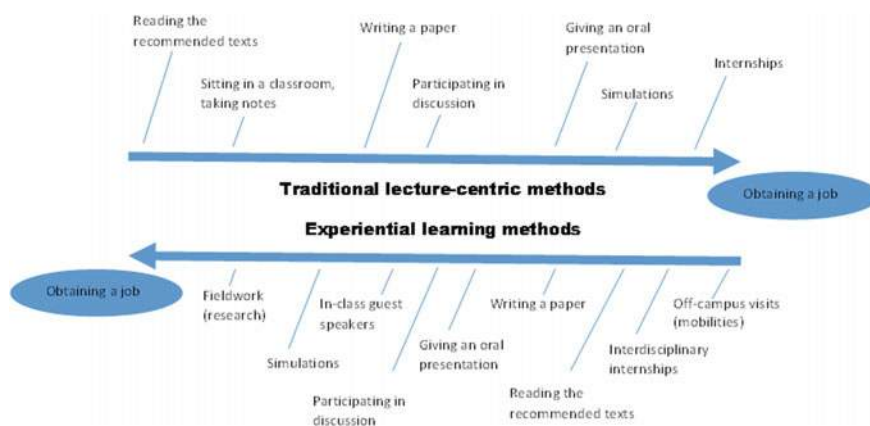

Fig. 2 A comparative spectrum of traditional lecture-centric and experiential learning methods *Source* Author

All the methods mentioned on the linear learning are the most used ones in the subjects' syllabuses of fourteen faculties (see Appendix 1 with the list of universities) in administrative sciences and management. The most commonly used instruments in the syllabuses are lecture, static presentations (PowerPoint), students' presentations, open discussions, case studies or simulations of possible situations identified by professors based on their experience. While syllabuses refer to formal learning methods such as traditional lecture-centric methods, they do not include other methods associated with the experiential learning process, such as non-formal[1] (fishbowl, green card, forum theatre, photo-voice, debates, bees' nest, story-telling and others) and informal instruments (volunteering activities, seminars/conferences/guest speakers, job shadowing, and social media engagement). However, the core aim of future HEI, as it concerns teaching and learning, should be to combine multiple forms of educational approaches, all of which are experiential in one way or another, and to directly expose students to actual practices in their respective fields through different methods. The students are required to present their study plan, and the faculty members facilitate/assist him/her in the process.

4   Educational and/Vs Professional Competences

Experiential learning is a powerful way to help people identify changes required to their skills, attitudes and behaviours (MTA) to access professional competences. If the educational competences are those acquired in the process of learning different subjects, the professional ones denote the capability to perform professional duties, generally, and with acceptable quality. Graduates' educational competences are described in the Diploma Supplement of Romanian HEI as attitudes, skills and knowledge, which they can apply for successful working. As it concerns the professional competences, e.g. the ones for civil servants (graduates of public administration), include not only their theoretical level of knowledge, ability to use specific terms and concepts, but also knowledge and skills in different fields such as psychology, law, management, economics, sociology, and personal qualities (being decisive, dedicated, and hard-working). All these help them to reach a certain proficiency level. Starting from Simonton's (2003:230) idea of competence as "any acquired skill or knowledge that constitutes an essential component for performance or achievement in a given domain", the question: "competent for (doing) what?" is essential to any HEI.

Since 2000, the European Commission (Memorandum of Lifelong Learning) stated that learning is "valued" in formal, non-formal or informal settings. It is important to note that Lifelong Learning (LLL) also encompasses training or preparation for the world of work, adaptation, prevention, promotion, maintaining and providing skills, abilities and knowledge necessary to the labour market. Experiential learning

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[1]For a detailed list of non-formal methods, please access https://www.nonformalii.ro/ for the ones used in Romania or https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/ for the European ones.

values learning in a different setting and can be the solution that assesses the professional and personal experiences and can bring closer theory and practice, in any field of study.

Experiential learning could be better valued at the master, postgraduate studies or lifelong-learning (LLL) programmes. LLL reflects societal changes of a structural and socio-economic nature and governments' concern about creating a new workforce, able to adapt to rapidly changing work patterns and the demands of a knowledge-based society (Pouget and Osborne 2004, 60).

The contribution of experiential learning to educational goals is difficult to prove, and quantitative assessments are not well emphasized in academic literature yet (Lowenthal and Sosland 2007; Wingfield and Black 2005; Gosen and Washbush 2004). Even so, its importance in the learning process of future generations was highlighted in the OECD Learning Compass 2030. The OECD framework offers a broad vision of the students' future competences and develops a common language and understanding that is globally relevant and informed.

Jessup's (1991:26) distinction between job competence and professional competence is the one that helps us to understand better "the concrete experience" of Kolb. Job competence refers to the job attributions 'limited to a particular role in a particular company', and professional competence refers to the repertoire of skills, abilities, knowledge that a person owns following education and/or experience learning. The necessary steps to implement experiential learning in HEI to reduce the mismatching with the labour market requirements were not yet determined. The word competence is somewhat fraught, if inescapable, in the theoretical and academic landscape against which people's experience is accredited or validated (Pouget & Osborne, 2004:57).

In our research, we have noticed that the skills/competences identified in the Diploma Supplement of fourteen faculties from nine Romanian Universities differ, to some extent, from one to another.
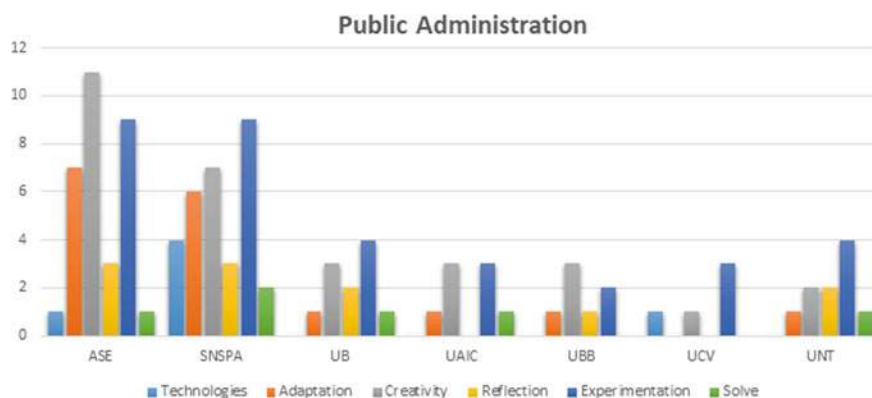

Fig. 3 Comparative study of the score gained by each Faculty of Public Administration
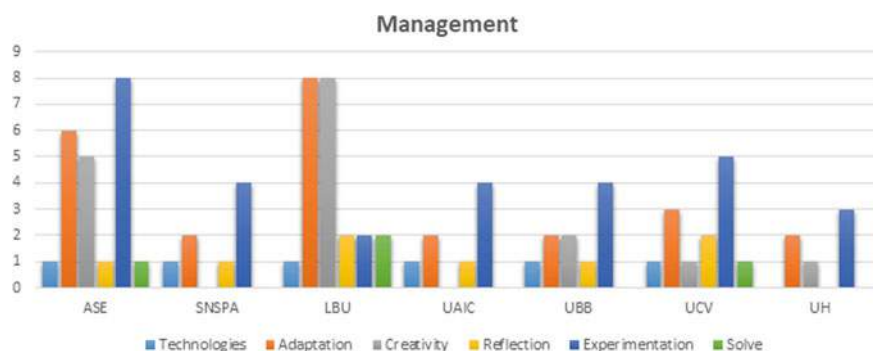
Fig. 4 Comparative study of the score gained by each Faculty in Management

According to the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), each faculty has the autonomy to establish professional and transversal competences for its study programmes while the core subjects, for each field of study, are set by the accreditation standards. Furthermore, faculties experience different capacities in responding to the new requirements of the employment market (see Figs. 3, 4 and 6). Consequently, the autonomy level of each faculty to establish different competences for the same subject is very high, even if they train their graduates for the same jobs.

5 Validation of Experiential Learning in Romanian Higher Education Institutions

Recognition of experiential learning or any other tools used in the educational process is not possible according to the evaluation criteria of ARACIS. Active learning does not belong to any standard evaluated by the Agency, and the level of promotability of one subject or the entire study programme is not assessed in connection with this. Within Kolb's learning cycle, we identify some elements such as adaptation, design, reflection or experimentation, but none of them is mentioned in the Romanian accreditation standards. This concerns us because Romania has one of the highest dropout rates for tertiary education among European Union countries (5th place, with 15.7%).

Moreover, the most frequently awarded degree in 2017 was management and administration; across the EU-28, some 203,000 people in this field graduated with a bachelor's degree and 150,000 with a master's degree. These numbers are higher than the equivalent share of tertiary education students still in the process of studying within these fields.[2]

An overview of the curricula of the fourteen faculties on administrative sciences and management indicated that the educational skills/competences mentioned in the diploma supplement do not include advanced skills on new technologies, the skills

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[2]The data are from EUROSTAT—Early leavers from education and training, 2017, accessed on https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tertiary_education_statistics.

of adaptation or creativity in the decision making process. Based on the research's results, presented in Figs. 3 and 4, each faculty reaches a different degree of development for each educational skills/competences required by the future employment market. Taking these into account and because we could not identify the elements of Kolb's system, we extended the research to different activities and concepts based on the causality connection. In this way, we have determined for advanced skills on new technologies concepts like technologies, data or databases use. For Kolb's idea of adaptation, we started from the idea that this is a process of transformation of knowledge into actions to gain experience, and we searched for operations such as evaluation or assessment.

Furthermore, we related creativity with processes like design, development, and plan of action or interpretation. Likewise, in our quest to identify also the other two specific competences—reflection and experimentation, which were also not identified, we extended the research for experimentation to synonyms' concepts like analyse, measure, utilization, use, apply, and for reflection to observation or point of view. For each concept/action identified in each skill, we attributed one point, the gathered score placed the field of study on the radar graphics, and based on this, we could compare the results (see Figs. 5, 6 and 7).
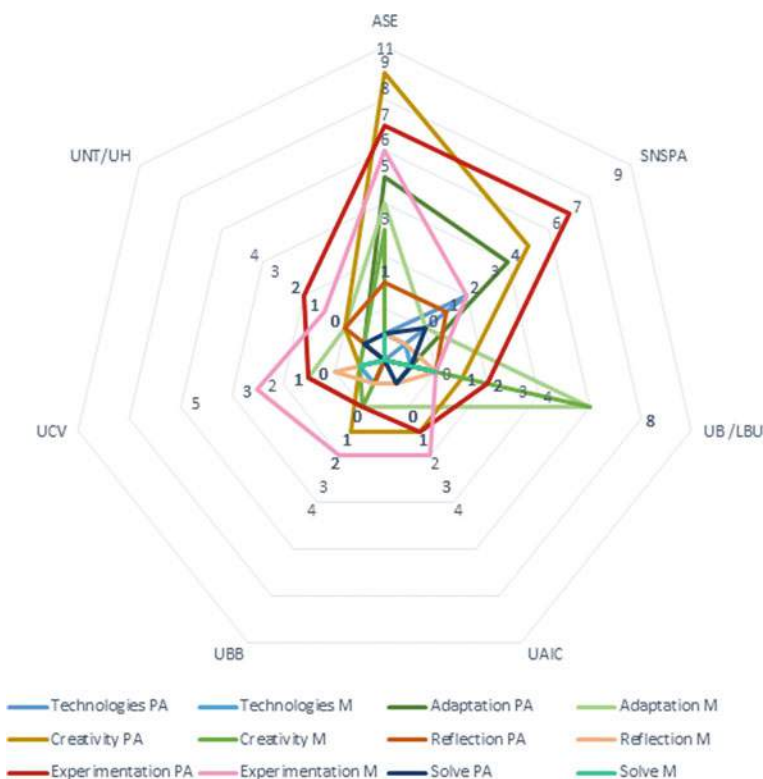
Fig. 5 Comparative study of the score gained by each University in both fields of studies
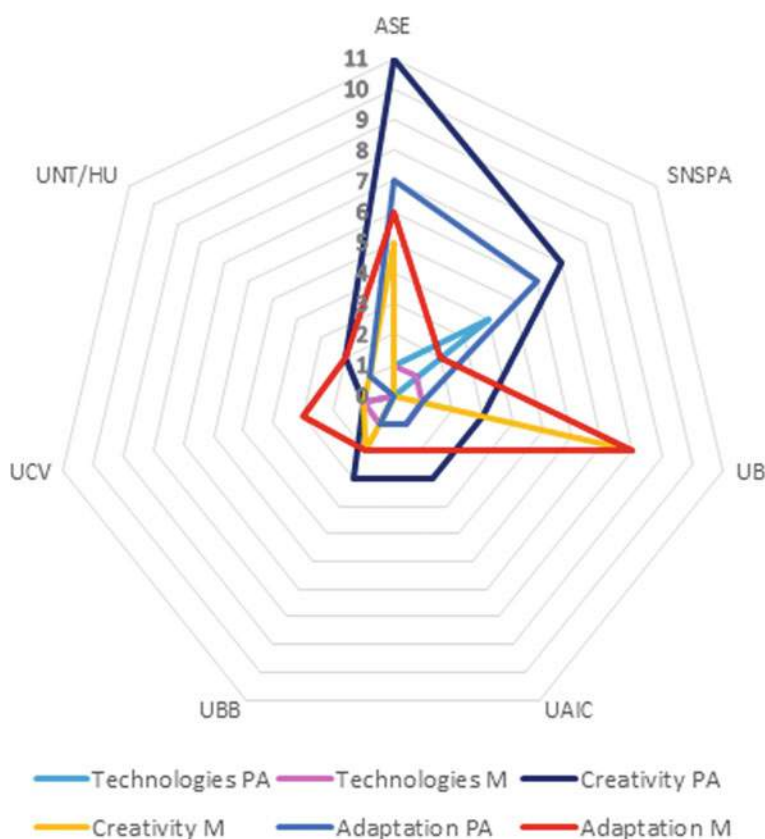
Fig. 6 Comparative study of the score gained by each University in both fields of studies on the necessary skills for the future employment market *(new technologies, adaptation, creativity)*

In this comparison, we can observe that, in both fields of studies, none of the reviewed universities has a constant development of the concepts used in experiential learning. Also, the highest level reached in one field of study at one university is not at the same level for the other, e.g. for creativity in public administration, the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE) obtained 11 points, but for management only 5. Further, we can observe that public administration is better prepared to use concepts related to experiential learning; the average score is with 0.33 higher than the one for management.

We had to extend the research to the related concepts because, for example, the most common competence related to new technologies is: "the ability to use modern informatics technology for editing and processing information and accessing databases necessary". This competence is given by the IT subject, which is mandatory in public administration curricula, even so not all the programs have it (see Fig. 7). With the results obtained in Fig. 5 and the following ones, we can confirm the unreadiness of Romanian universities to answer the labour market requirements, especially on new technologies.
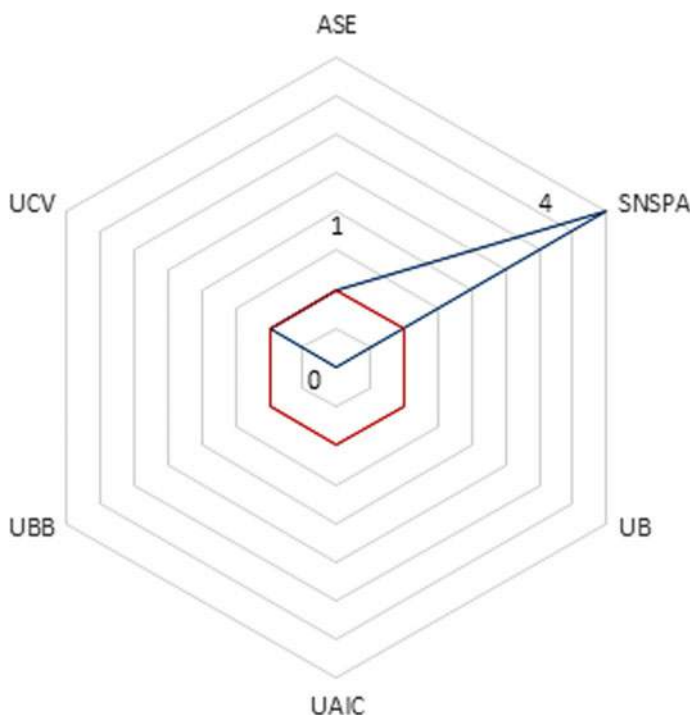
Fig. 7 Comparative study of each University in both fields of studies on the new technologies

From all the competences in the two domains, administrative sciences and management, we selected the one on new technologies because is the most practical one, and its organisation can be off the campus and based on non-formal or experiential tools. None of the professors uses computers in classes for the learning process, except the IT and the final research project. Moreover, in subjects' syllabuses, requirements are limited to a computer and video-projector for the teachers' presentations (PowerPoint), white/blackboards or flipcharts and writing instruments. In the professors' interviews, some answers are eloquent for the use of new technologies in HEI: e.g. "the computers' room is closed, only the guy from IT has the key" or "the IT professor has its office in the computers' room, so we cannot enter". Besides, on the technical abilities, OECD (2018) mentioned Romania within the countries with a high degree of mismatch between educational competences and job ones (30%). This mismatch could be a real threat for graduates, taking into account the job requirements of future exponential organisations.

6 Concluding Remarks

Experiential learning is about experiences in action and not just knowledge. All the Romanian HEI praise on their web page the experience of their professors and/or practitioners, but none of them presents the methods used, the ones that differentiate them from the others. Moreover, no admission web page from Romanian HEI indicates the goals, the educational competences or the learning outcomes. The results obtained in our research did not provide a clear answer to our research question about the readiness of the academics to accept experiential learning methods as a pillar of the learning process. For a substantiated answer to this, we would need to study further the academics' response to experiential learning in these two fields of study–although a number of them already mentioned that they had no request to use experiential learning, and have no training to do so.

Experiential learning in Romania faces challenges that other educational systems may not face. Implementing experiential learning needs investments to overpass the current reluctance of professors. As the review of the subjects' syllabuses and literature in education science demonstrated, the lecture-centric method may appear as the most time-efficient one for those who teach. Working towards student learning outside the classroom requires more time for preparation and training. Currently, the most commonly used methods are the static ones, and even if some of them could be used together with experiential learning methods, none of the syllabuses presents them in this way.

Because the labour market perspective starts with the new technological realities and moves forward in demanding professional competencies, the Romanian educational system should learn how to provide them. This high degree of imbalance between the required job competencies and the educational competences should force HEI to act and to pay more attention to the goals they want to accomplish. Moreover, they have to think more about the results—*educating professional alumni*.

Appendix 1

See Table 1.

Table 1 The list of studied Universities and Faculties

No.	University	Acronym	Faculty/Field of study
1	The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest	ASE	Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Public administration/Bachelor in public administration Faculty of Management, Management/Bachelor in Economics
2	National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest	SNSPA	Faculty of Public Administration, Public administration/B.A. in Administrative Sciences Faculty of Management/BA in Economics
3	"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi	UAIC	Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Public administration/Bachelor of Administrative Sciences Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Management/Bachelor of Economics
4	Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca	UBB	Faculty of Political, Administrative And Communication Sciences, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences Public Administration/Bachelor in Administration Sciences Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Management/Bachelor in Economics (in Romanian or English)
5	University of Craiova	UCV	Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, Public Administration/Graduate in administrative sciences Faculty of Economics and Business administration, Management/Bachelor in Economic Science
6	University of Bucharest	UB	Faculty of Business and Administration, Public Administration/Bachelor of Administrative Sciences
7	"Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu	LBU	Faculty of Economic Sciences, Management/Bachelor of Economic Sciences
8	"Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest	UNT	The Faculty of Social and Administrative Sciences, Public Administration/Bachelor of Administrative Sciences
9	Hyperion University from Bucharest	UH	Faculty of Economic Sciences, Management/Degree in Economics Sciences

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Recognizing Student Activism. Analysing Practices in Recognizing Informal Learning in the EHEA

Marita Gasteiger and Janine Wulz

1 Introduction

The importance of recognition of non-formal and informal learning was first mentioned in the London Communiqué of 2007. The ministers of the EHEA countries agreed on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as an "essential component of the EHEA, both internally and in a global context" (EHEA 2007, p. 3). The Communiqué supports the idea of informal learning achievements being relevant to the area of formal learning and commits to a broader understanding of learning and education in general.

However, policies enabling the recognition of informal learning in higher education have not been successfully implemented in all European countries yet (ESU 2018, p. 59). This paper aims to develop a better understanding of the implementation of policies and practices for recognition of informal learning in the EHEA. To gain insights into practices, challenges and barriers, the case of the recognition of informal learning from student activism within formal curricula was chosen as an example because of the already implemented practices and regulations in several countries.

This paper will, therefore, answer the questions of how informal learning is recognized in different EHEA countries, how student's activism is recognized as informal learning and what can be learned from the experiences of student's representatives for recognition of informal learning in general. The experiences of student's representatives are discussed (1) on national level as a source of information regarding the implemented policies and frameworks in their countries and (2) as a source for

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insights, experiences and practices within their institutions. Activism and engage-
ment of students can be observed in multiple ways, taking place within formal repre-
sentation and outside, involving various formats of self-organisation and protest. This
paper is focussed on the specific experiences of student activists in representative
roles, as in student unions or in higher education governance bodies.

The following chapters will discuss the recognition of informal learning in the
EHEA, the understanding of student activism as informal learning and the results
of a qualitative study undertaken in cooperation with national student unions. Two
surveys—one on the system level and one on the institutional level—will provide
insights in policies and practices of recognition in different countries as well as indi-
vidual experiences of students' representatives. The paper will summarise identified
best practices, barriers and challenges and will provide recommendations for the
improvement of recognition practices in the EHEA.

2   Informal Learning Policies in the EHEA

The relevance of informal learning has been growing over the last two decades.
It is closely linked to the changing world of learning and working. Learning is
considered an ongoing, lifelong process, careers and jobs are changing over life and
so do trainings, along with fast-changing technologies which require a steady learning
process. However, learning cannot only be understood in relation to employability.
Meeting social and environmental challenges at societal and individual level requires
the development of new competences and, therefore, learning in diverse settings.
Learning processes can start, proceed and conclude outside of formal institutions,
through non-formal provision of learning, and also informally—as learning on a
daily and unintended basis.[1]

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning achievements is on the Euro-
pean agenda for more than a decade, often linked to the recognition of prior learning,
aiming for two main functions. First, making learning outcomes, competences and
skills acquired in informal learning processes visible, transparent and comparable
in- and outside the higher education systems. Second, broaden the access to higher
education and enhance the mobility with the vocational sector and the labour mar-
ket. Following these goals, the European Commission in 2001 articulated for the

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[1] Based on Cedefop definitions of 2008, the terms of different forms of learning will be used as
follows:
Formal learning "occurs in an organised and structured environment [...] and is explicitly desig-
nated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the
learner's point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification (Cedefop 2008, p. 85).
Non-formal learning "is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in
terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional
from the learner's point of view." (ibid., p. 133)
Informal learning is "resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not
organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most
cases unintentional from the learner's perspective." (ibid., p. 93).

first time: "There is a clear need here for the formal sector to recognise and value non-formal and informal learning" (European Commission 2001, p. 4). Moreover, the development of proposals "on the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning as well as on the transfer and mutual recognition of formal certificates and diplomas" (ibid.) was formulated as a priority for action. In this light, the recognition of competences gained outside from formal learning is considered crucial for "building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education" (Cedefop, 2019, p. 4). Creating links between formal, non-formal and informal learning environments is also considered a tool to "enhance access to education and training to a number of individuals that have acquired knowledge through formal, non-formal and informal learning but never had the chance to enrol in higher education" (ESU 2009, p. 126).

The relevance of recognition of informal and non-formal learning became vivid in the light of the increasing youth unemployment resulting from the economic crisis in 2008 hoping that "the validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability [...]" (Official Journal of the European Union 2012, p. 1). Moreover, the Bologna Working Group on Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning developed a "Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area to 2020", considering recognition of prior learning as an opportunity to broaden access to higher education and stating the objective to "work towards the development of flexible and transparent progression routes into higher education and the introduction of clear mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning based on a learning-outcomes approach for qualifications and the implementation of qualifications frameworks".

Already 2009, the Leuven Communiqué explicitly demanded "basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes regardless of whether the knowledge, skills and competences were acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning paths" (EHEA 2009, p. 3) to be included into national policies. Also, the Modernisation Agenda published in 2011 aims for developing

> clear progression routes into higher education from vocational and other types of education, as well as mechanisms for recognising prior learning and experience gained outside formal education and training, especially by tackling challenges related to the implementation and use of national qualification frameworks linked to the European Qualification Framework. (Council of the European Union 2011, p. 7)

In 2012, the European Council recommended the member states to "have in place, no later than 2018 [...] arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning" (Official Journal of the European Union 2012, p. 3), which was followed 2015 by the "European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning" (Cedefop 2015) and the "European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning", which states that "Member States are gradually placing validation of non-formal and informal learning higher on their policy agendas" (Cedefop 2016, p. 18f).
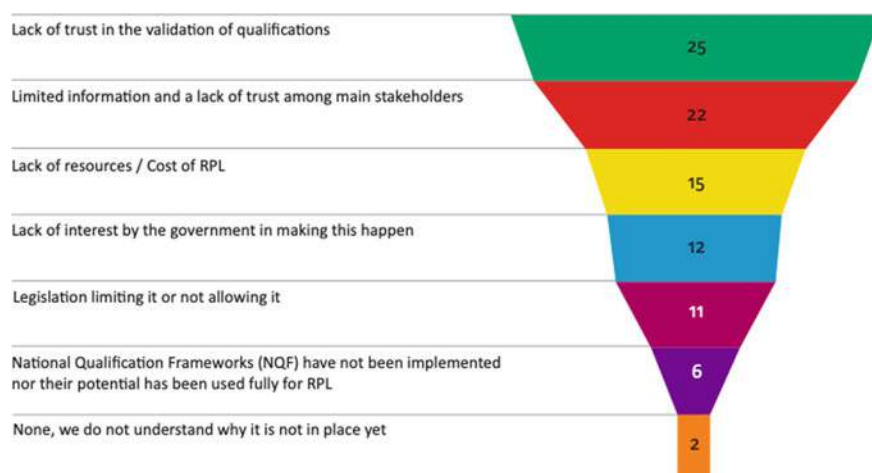
Fig. 1 Main barriers to recognition of prior learning (ESU 2018, p. 61)

Over the past years, the aim for recognition of prior learning, including informal learning, was reformulated various times in diverse policy documents. However, the results after one decade of initiatives are disenchanting. The Inventory in 2016 documented that the deadline in 2018 was not met (ibid.), and the European Students' Union (ESU) criticized in "Bologna with Student Eyes"

> Only 63% (27 out of 43) of the respondents reported having established procedures for recognition of prior learning or that such procedures are in a mature stage of development. This means, that such procedures are effectively non-existent in almost 40% of the higher education systems [...]. It is even more worrisome that according to the perspective of student unions, the situation has not changed at all since 2015 [...]. (ESU 2018, p. 59)

The European Students' Union identified several areas being challenging for the establishment of procedures for recognition of prior learning. The main concern is the lack of trust among institutions as well as stakeholders and the lack of established procedures for recognition, validation procedures. This is closely linked to the lack of trust in other organisations and institutions as well as lack of trust in validation procedures, if there are any established. One could argue, that the lack of trust is also deeply rooted in academic traditions and the lack of interest of established institutions as well as policy-makers to open up the academic ivory tower (Fig. 1).

3   Learning from (Students') Activism

Engagement within social movements in general and specifically students' activism is broadly documented as a source of learning (see Biddix 2014; Harrison 2017; Kuh 1993; Quaye 2007; Rosas 2010; Schugurensky 2000). Informal learning from civic

engagement and voluntary work is based on a high level of individual involvement in meaningful activities and results mainly from "doing". Given the diversity of activities, individual learning is diverse in its approaches and outcomes. Learning occurs by "applying oneself" in activities, by engaging in collective experience, thereby creating new knowledge, skills and competences (Hefler et al. 2017, p.57). Individuals become empowered actors through participation and gain influence over their social environment (Benedicto 2015).

Learning by participation is the most dominant form of informal learning in social movements or organisations, as the student movement. Informal learning occurs as a by-product when striving for the particular goals of the civic organisations, at individual as well as collective level. By reflective practices, learning can be made explicit and passed within social movement organisations allowing for horizontal social movement learning (Schugurensky et al. 2010). Learning in social movements is situated in the specific context and environment of a community; it is part of social interaction and the social world. Activists learn in spaces and places, in communities of practice in social processes through time and opportunities to observe and interact with others. Learning in social movements is a passionate and social process (Hefler et al. 2017, p.55).

Engagement in student movements can be considered being civic engagement, including both paid and unpaid forms of political activism (Michelsen et al. 2002). Research on learning from student activism can be found in diverse fields, including voluntary work, civic engagement and youth work as well as research on social movements. Student engagement has been proven to be a driver of social change for decades and, therefore, needs to be seen as a specific social movement as well. This can be observed in students' movements during the last decades as well as recent activism for environmental causes.

Student activism or student engagement in the context of this study is understood as the totality of activities carried out by students' representatives formally elected or appointed on behalf of the student union. This includes not only committee work, lobbying and counselling but also campaigning, protest measures and internal organizational work to the same extent. Student activism within student unions was chosen as an example because of a relative comparability of activities and learning achievements in student unions and the availability of research in learning from volunteering. Given the complex nature of learning in the students' movement as well as the diversity of competences acquired, the challenge of recognition has been met differently in several countries.

4 Methodology

This paper aims to answer the question of how recognition of student engagement as informal learning takes place in HEIs within the EHEA. It identifies best practices, challenges and lessons learnt in order to perform the recognition of informal learning in the EHEA in general. Questions of transparency in recognition of informal learning

in student activism, the legal basis of recognition and ways of implementation as well as student representatives' experiences are discussed.

Analysis was undertaken based on two surveys in 11 countries in the EHEA. The first survey was undertaken in summer 2019 based on an online questionnaire and addressed student representatives at national level. The results of 11 national student unions were summarized in 11 country reports on legal conditions and practices of higher education institutions' recognition of informal learning of student activists. The countries participating in the first survey are **Austria, Belgium** (French community), **Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro** and **Romania**. These country reports provide an overview about different starting positions in the countries analysed, and enabled first insights in the range of approaches student representatives are facing.

A second survey was undertaken in summer 2019, aiming for responses from individual student representatives at institutional level, sharing their experiences on formalities, barriers and practicalities within implemented policies of recognition of prior learning in student activism. The online questionnaire was distributed among student unions in Europe, receiving answers from 80 students' representatives from **Austria (4 answers), Denmark (3 answers), Estonia (1 answer), Germany (35 answers), Italy (2 answers), Montenegro (5 answers), Malta (1 answer), Poland (1 answer)**, **Romania (25 answers) and Switzerland (1 answer)**. Two answers did not specify a country. Student representatives have backgrounds in medical and health studies (14 students), engineering and IT (19 students), social studies (15 students), cultural studies and philosophy (20 students), arts (5 students) and economics (4 students). Three students did not specify their field of study. The majority (65%) of students is enrolled in a Bachelor programme, 25% students are enrolled in a Master programme, and 10% are in other programmes (e.g. law or diploma programmes). Most of the participants are involved in student activism for more than four years (36. 7%) or two to three years (29. 1%). The share of those active for one to two years (24. 1%) or less than one year (6. 3%) is significantly lower in the survey.

Israel, Belgium and **Lithuania** participated at national level only (first survey), whereas **Poland** and **Switzerland** participated only at institutional level (second survey).

5 Recognition of Student Engagement as Informal Learning in National Regulations and Policies

This chapter presents the results of the survey based on the answers by 11 student unions at national level. One representative of the national student union (in most cases the president or the international officer of the union) participated in a qualitative survey, resulting in a brief country case study. Responses reflect mainly on already implemented policies, on the one hand, and legal constraints and opportunities, on the other hand. Within student unions, diverse people are involved in the
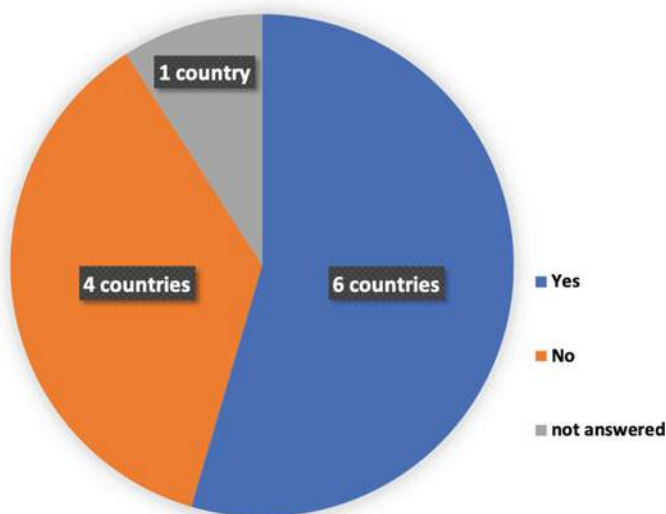
Fig. 2 Are there any legal regulations on recognition of informal learning in higher education at national level?

topic of recognition of informal learning, this includes presidencies and executive committees, international officers and specialists on policy or legal counselling.

5.1 Legal Regulations and Policies on Recognition of Informal Learning on National Level

The recognition of informal learning at national level is based on legal regulations in the majority of the countries (**AT, BE (fr), DE, DK, LT, ME**; see Fig. 2). This aligns with the result from "Bologna with Student Eyes", in 2018, where 63% of all EHEA countries had established a mature procedure regarding recognition of prior learning. Four countries have not implemented legal regulations for recognition procedures of informal learning yet, despite the many public declarations at European and national level. However, having no legal regulations at national level does not necessarily result in no regulations at all, since there are regional or institutional regulations in place in some countries (Fig. 3).

Legal regulations, in theory, should go hand in hand with implemented policies. However, there are still four countries **(EE, IL, IS, RO)** participating in the survey which didn't implement policies regarding the recognition of informal learning yet. In some countries, this non-implementation is due to the division of responsibilities:
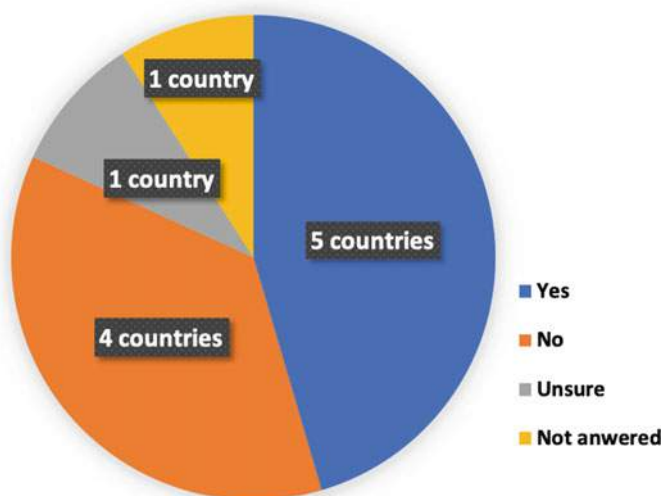
Fig. 3 Are there any policies on recognition of informal learning in higher education at national level?

Higher education and its legal basis is not a national responsibility but a regional one in some countries such as **Germany**, where regional Länder have autonomy in regulating educational policies. When the legal basis is missing completely, HEIs are dealing with the topic either on their own or not at all.

5.2 Legal Regulations and Policies on Recognition of Informal Learning on University Level

The poor legal situation at national level in several countries provides flexibility and opportunities for HEIs to recognize informal learning at the institutional level. At the same time, high flexibility leads to a diversity of procedures and diverse requirements for recognition or dimensions of what is recognized.

Legal regulations at university level include constitutions, statutes, standing orders or instructions. In many cases, national and institutional legislation go hand in hand: Whereas national (or regional) laws establish a general legal framework for recognition, institutions themselves decide about concrete procedures, involved resources and responsibilities within the university. Often, institutions are required to transpose and implement national policies within their strategic documents. This is represented in Fig. 4: 6 countries said earlier that there are legal regulations on the national level,
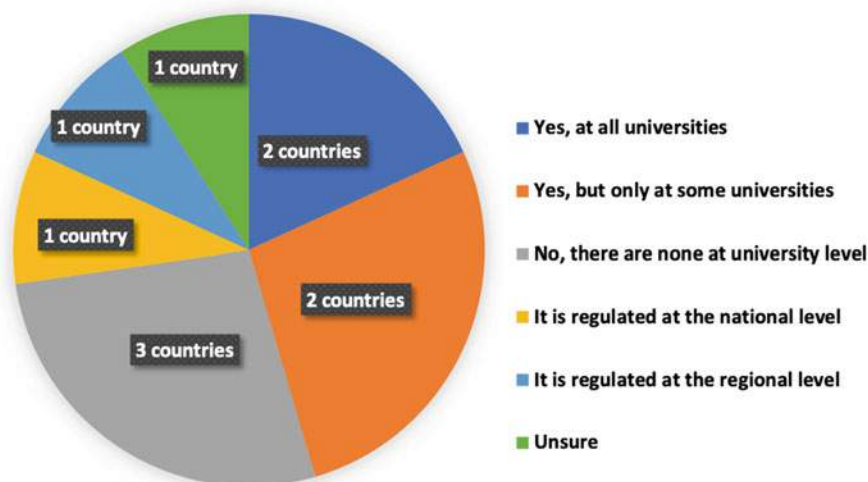
Fig. 4 Are there any legal regulations on recognition of informal learning at university level?

Belgium (fr), Denmark, Estonia, Israel and Lithuania answer that all or at least some universities have their own regulations. Nevertheless, in Malta, Romania and Italy no legal regulations are in place, and in other cases, recognition is regulated outside the institution at regional or national level **(Austria, Germany),** or there is a lack of clarity **(Montenegro)**. Non-existing legal regulations on the national/regional and institutional levels often result in a lack of policies, leading to non-transparent procedures and uncertainty among the students' body (Fig. 5).

Countries where all or at least some universities have policies on recognition of informal learning are still the minority (**BE (fr), ET, IL, LT, MT**). In some cases, the topic seems to be regulated exclusively on the national or regional level **(Germany)**— which makes it hard for HEIs to adapt procedures to their own conditions.

5.3 Recognition of Student Activism as Informal Learning

The recognition of student activism as informal learning based on transparent regulations is still not state of the art in most of the countries. In many cases it is based on individual cases or on informal regulations. Intransparency and incomprehensible decisions result in insecurity, student representatives are by their position and their responsibility of advocating for students exposed to possible arbitrariness. Especially this group needs to be capable to take up their position without being afraid that their requests of recognition might be rejected or delayed. A certain distance is, therefore,
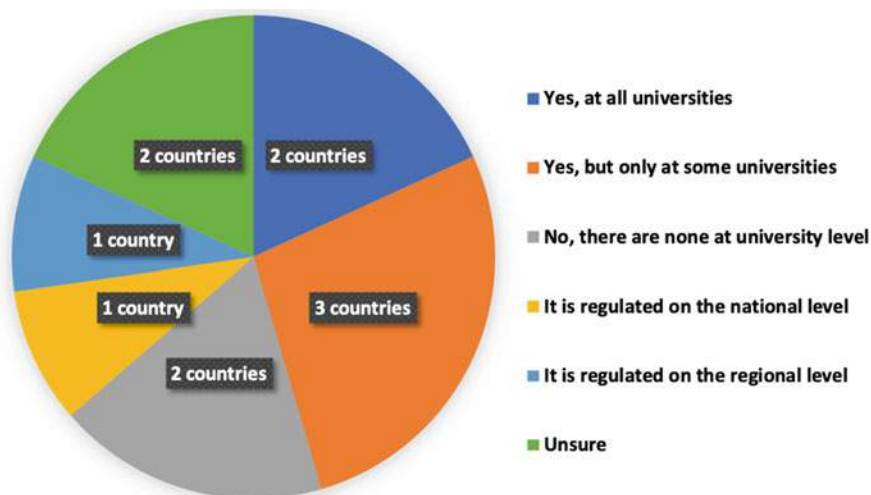
Fig. 5 Are there any policies on recognition of informal learning at university level?
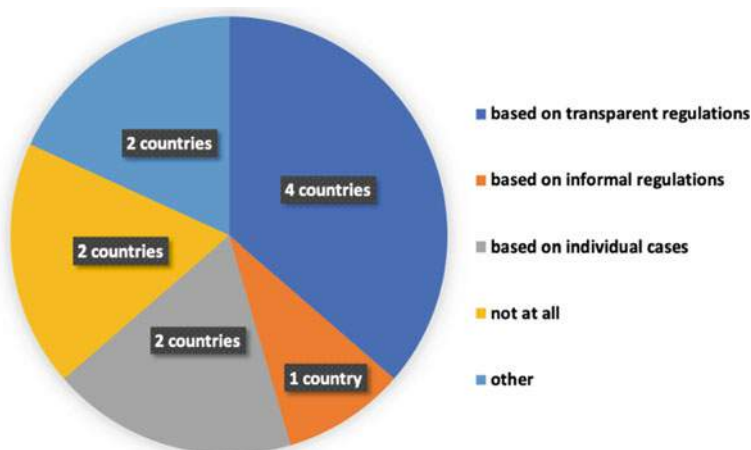
Fig. 6 Is student activism recognized?

needed if it comes to recognition of student activism. This can't be ensured as long as the procedure is founded on informal regulations or individual cases (Fig. 6).

Student activism as informal learning is recognised in different ways among countries and institutions. While countries like **Austria, Germany, Denmark** and **Israel** have legal regulations for recognition in place as in terms of providing a certain amount of ECTS, others do not recognise student activism at all **(MT)**. Sometimes,
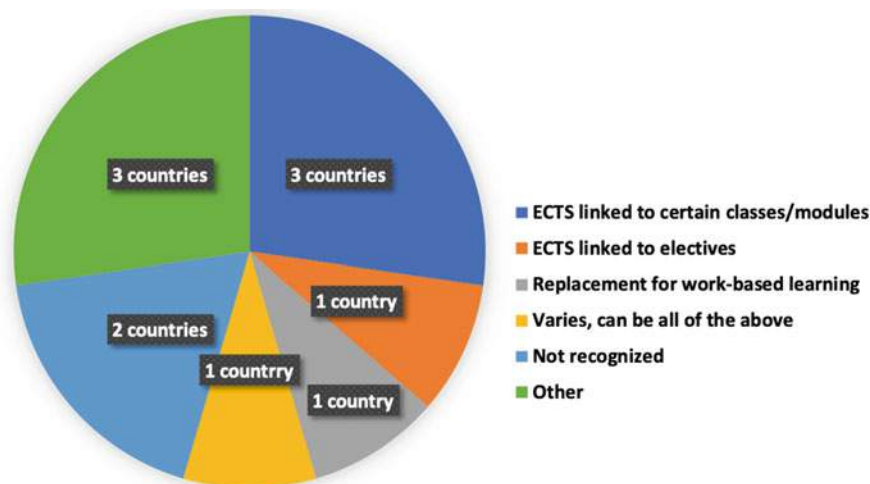
Fig. 7 In what way is student activism recognized in the curriculum?

for example in **Belgium (fr)** or **Austria,** the term "student activism" or "student representative" covers only a few positions within the student union (e.g. chair or member of the senate). Thus, the broad definition of student activism in this paper, as the totality of activities carried out by formally elected or appointed representatives, is not shared in all countries yet. The responsibility for providing evidence on the learning from activism is often directed to students—without guidance and transparency of what is expected. "It is difficult to prove what the student has learned from student activism," writes one respondent. Sometimes, activities need to be validated by a verification from the Students' Union. Out of the broad variety of practices on recognition of student activism, only a few of them can be considered transparent and adequate.

5.4 Ways of Recognition of Student Activism

Figure 7 shows that different approaches within the EHEA exist in order to provide opportunities for recognition of student activism.

Whereas in **Austria, Israel and Lithuania** ECTS acquired for student activism are linked to specific classes or modules in the curriculum, ECTS from student activism in **Germany** are usually linked to electives only. Thus, the recognition of ECTS depends on the availability of elective courses within the curriculum. In **Italy,** student activism can be recognized as replacement for work-based learning (e.g.

mandatory internships). There is no recognition within the curriculum for student representatives in **Montenegro, Belgium, Malta and Romania**—but in **Malta and Romania** a remark appears on the transcript and Diploma Supplement.

In **Estonia,** several kinds of recognition are established, ECTS can be acquired from student activism and are recognized for work-based learning modules and specific classes in curricula. In **Denmark**, student activism can be recognised by replacing mandatory ECTS to be achieved within a certain time period. This is restricted to certain positions within the student union and other members of the national youth council. However, while activities reduce the student activists' mandatory workload, their work is not recognised for courses within the curriculum.

Countries and/or universities which enable the recognition of student for acquiring ECTS and linking them to the curriculum do often limit the use of ECTS to certain modules or electives only. This is the case in **Germany, Austria, Israel, Lithuania** and—as an exception—also in **Romania**. Also, in **Estonia,** students' representatives can only get a certain amount of ECTS through their activism. As there is no official or guaranteed recognition in **Malta, Montenegro, Belgium and Italy,** limitations are not a topic there.

5.5 Student Unions and Their Role in the Recognition of Informal Learning and Student Activism

Student unions are important stakeholders advocating for the recognition of informal learning. Most student unions at national level are involved in the question of recognition of informal learning at policy level. In countries with established regulations for recognition of informal learning (at institutional, regional or national level), the topic is considered less relevant in everyday business for student unions, as for example in **Austria.** In **Estonia,** mainly local student unions are dealing with recognition and in **Montenegro,** student union is currently striving for regulations and procedures regarding recognition of prior learning on the national and the institutional level (Fig. 8).

When it comes to student activism and its recognition, student unions engagement is more common. With the exception of **Lithuania, Italy** and **Germany,** all respondents are—at least rarely—dealing with the topic of recognition of student activism. In **Germany,** the opportunities for the national student union to interfere are limited because of the regional responsibility of higher education (Fig. 9).

Activities taken up by student unions regarding the recognition of informal learning and recognition of student activism range from negotiations with the relevant authorities to support for local unions and activities such as campaigning and protesting: In **Romania, Israel and Malta,** student unions are involved in national policies (e.g. negotiating laws). In **Denmark,** they are active not only in national policy negotiations but also on the institutional level. In **Montenegro,** the student union is only involved at the university level. The **Estonian** student union provides education
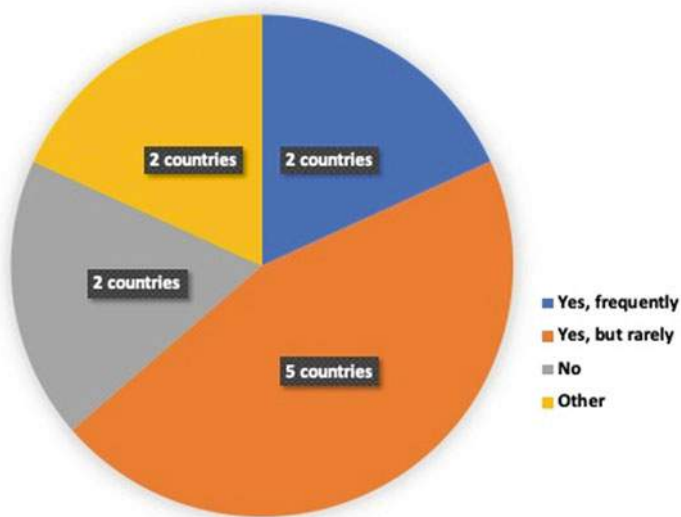
Fig. 8 Is recognition of informal learning an issue the student union is dealing with?
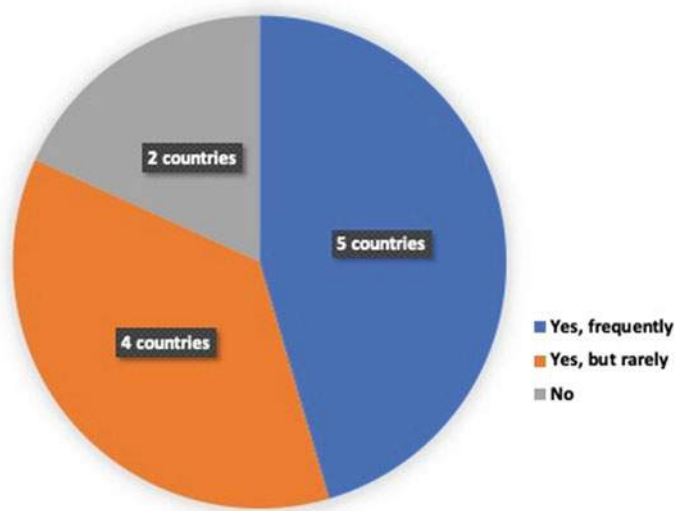
Fig. 9 Is the recognition of student activism an issue the student union is dealing with?

and support for their local unions—as it was shown already earlier, they are dealing with the topic more on the institutional than on the national level. Legal support is provided by the **Austrian** student union, whereas in **Belgium,** direct activism and campaigning are more prevalent. Only in **Germany, Italy and Lithuania,** student unions are not performing any activities regarding recognition of informal learning or recognition of student activism.

6 Practices and Insights from Local Students' Representatives

This chapter presents the results of the survey filled in by local students' representatives at various institutions all over the EHEA. It shows barriers, challenges and best practices when it comes to procedures of recognition of student activism from a student perspective (Fig. 10).

6.1 *Recognition of Activism at the Institutional Level*

Regarding how student activism is recognized on the institutional level, the variety of answers is broad. The largest share got student activism recognized as replacement for work-based learning, followed by ECTS linked to a specific class or module. A smaller percentage got student activism recognized as ECTS linked to electives; some respondents stated to have activism recognized for more than one element (e.g. a seminar and a mandatory internship).

The collected data shows—as already on the national level—a broad variety of practices to recognize student activism: Respondents also listed mentioning of activism in the transcript as a way of recognition. Nevertheless, there is still one-fifth of the respondents who were not able to have their learning from activism recognized.

The number of representatives having experiences with recognition of activism at the institutional level nearly equals those not having dealt with it yet (Fig. 11). This does not necessarily mean that it is not possible for them—only that they don't have any experiences with the topic. "Other" includes answers besides an official recognition from the institution: At some HEIs, it is just not possible to get student activism recognized, in some cases student activism is connected to limited financial benefits like paying fewer student fees after a certain time of being active in the students' representation, or getting grants for a longer time—which is different from recognising student activism as (informal) learning.
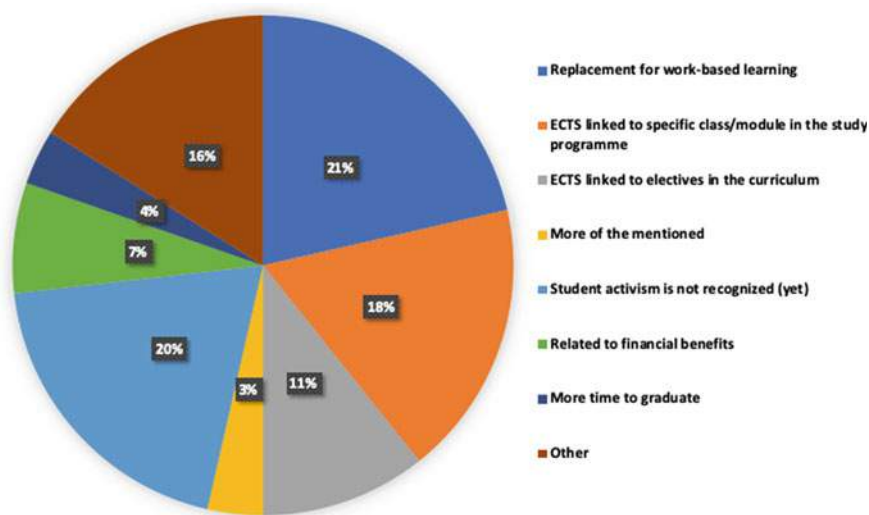
Fig. 10 What is/was your activism recognized for?
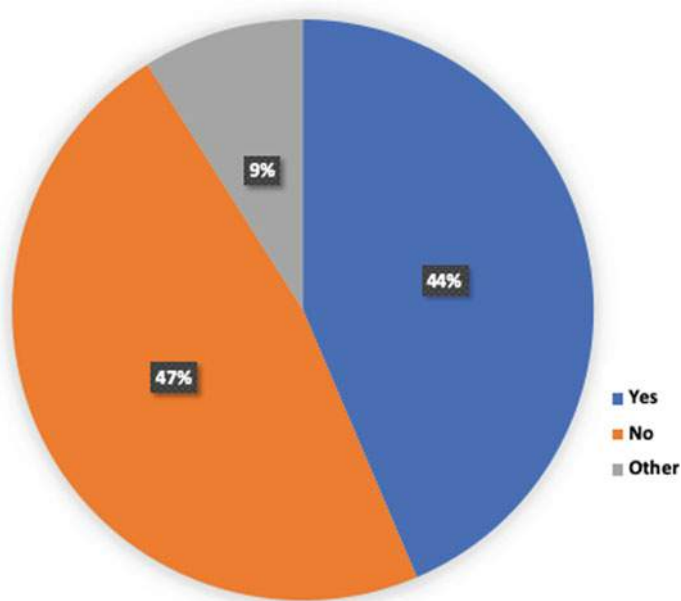
Fig. 11 Do you have experience with recognition of student activism?
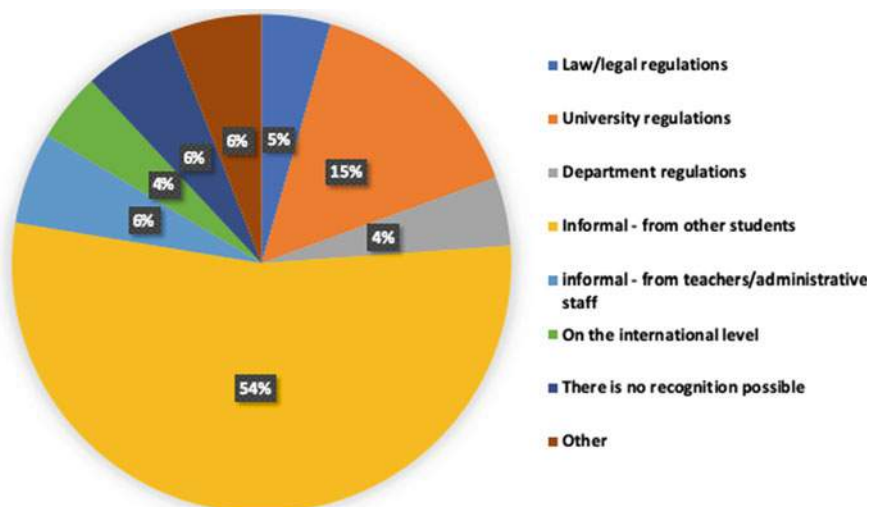
Fig. 12 How did you learn about opportunities for recognition?

6.2 Information and Procedures at HEIs

Students representatives describe a high level of uncertainty related to procedures and information about recognition of student activism or informal learning. The above figure shows the struggle for receiving reliable information on recognition procedures (Fig. 12).

54% of the respondents gathered their knowledge from peers and colleagues in an informal way. Only 24% were able to retain information directly from the legal, university or department regulations. Informal information coming from peers or staff leads to legal uncertainty and intransparent procedures. However, in many cases, informal information is the only information available (Fig. 13).

The high extent of intransparency related to recognition is worrisome. The advocacy of student representatives is limited due to the lack of fundamental knowledge on existing procedures and criteria. Only 22% find information regarding recognition easy available at their institution. This is often related to a lack of existing regulation for the recognition of student activism. While surveys confirm that there is information on the implementation of procedures of recognition of national level (see 5.1), implementation at institutional level is even less (55%). The transparency of information cannot be directly linked to the policies in place. Countries as Romania and Italy, lacking from national policies and legal frameworks, are considered at least partly transparent in their universities information towards students. Countries with legal regulations at national and university level, as for example Denmark, are only considered partly transparent, while Germany, with regulations at regional level, is
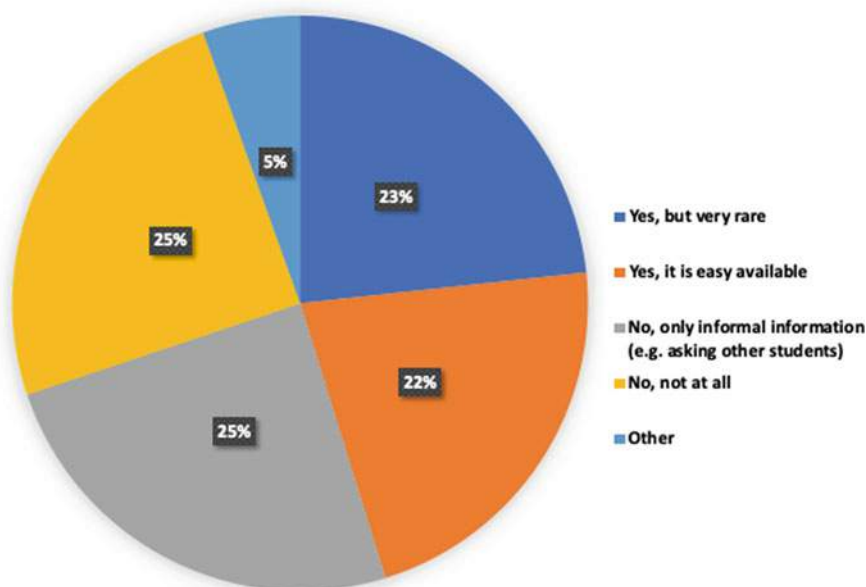
Fig. 13 Is there information on recognition available(e.g. information on ways of recognition, previous decisions)?

considered very diverse by students, as some report easy to find policies while others lack from information.

Procedures of recognition of student activities are diverse. In many cases, students' representatives apply for recognition using a standardised form at the beginning of their engagement or at the end of the semester. In some cases, reports or confirmations from the student union for their activities or projects are required. Formal procedures leading to recognition within the curriculum have similar structures among countries.

A formal request for recognition has to be issued by the national student or the local student union. Documents required include confirmations from the local student union, activity reports, certificates or proof of accomplished projects. These documents are checked by the responsible unit at the institution, and a decision is taken. Positive decisions directly lead to official recognition, ranging from certification of confirmation engagement, position or activities to recognition in the form of ECTS. The decision is mostly taken by individual staff members in an administrative position, this could be at departmental or faculty level; in some cases the study coordinator or the admission office are in charge. In one case, a committee consisting of teachers and other students' representatives discussing and evaluating the request for recognition is described. Figure 15 doesn't include the most common informal procedures of recognition. Students' representatives are not only dependent on informal information coming from administrative staff (i.e. not publicly accessible or even
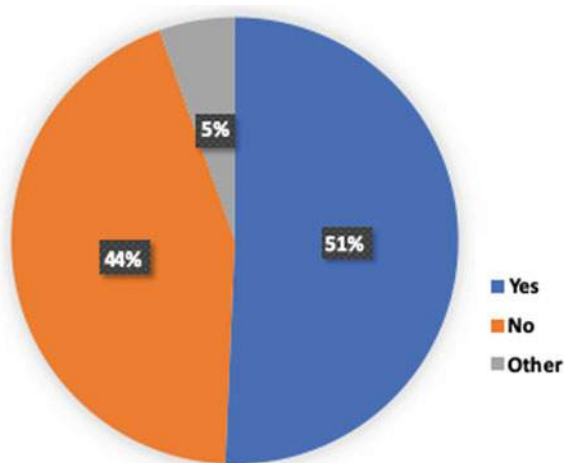
Fig. 14 Is there a specific procedure for recognition of student activism? (e.g. forms, timelines, signatures,...)
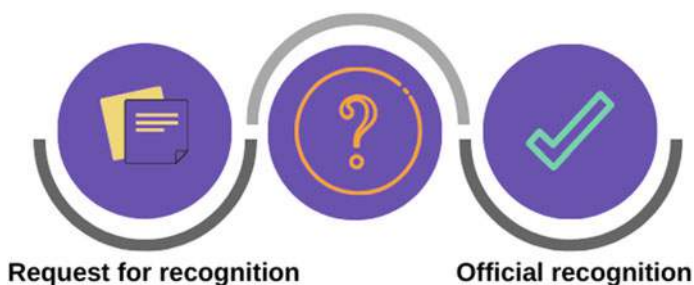
Fig. 15 Decision about recognition

not written information) but also on decision-making procedures carried out by one individual.

6.3   Experiences with Recognition Procedures

Despite the diversity and intransparency of procedures, a majority of students considers their attempts for recognizing their learning from student activism as informal learning successful. Nevertheless, one-third of the respondents was not successful in

Fig. 16 Have your attempts for recognition of student activism been successful?
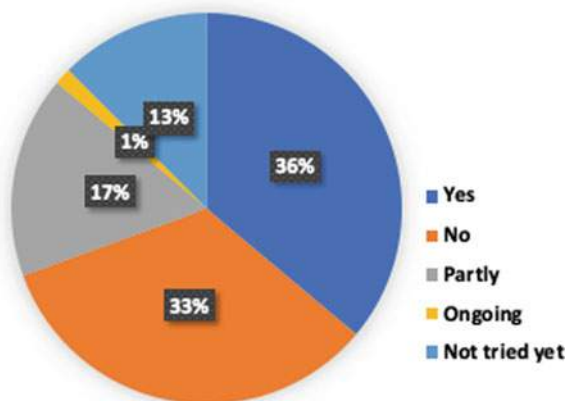
their attempts. Personal impressions from students' representatives collected in this survey show concerns of their institution not wanting them to get student activism recognized: *"The university is very strict on this thing (they don't really want us to have more credits for volunteering) and no local organisation on my university could get past the requests they made."*

Survey results suggest differences among countries in how successful attempts for recognition of students' activism are. In **Romania**, 18 (out of 22 attempts) were successful, and in **Austria,** 3 out of 4 students report successful recognition procedures. In **Germany**, half of the students (14 out of 31 attempts) were not successful in recognizing their activism. For other countries, the numbers of respondents are too low to consider trends (Fig. 16).

Further personal impressions point out that possibilities to get student activism recognized are very important to students' representatives who cannot do it yet due to missing procedures and regulations (Fig. 14). The procedure of recognition is described as positive only by 14% of the respondents, as easy by 20%, whereas nearly half of them claim it to be negative, complicated or stressful (Fig. 17).

Further personal experiences and insights from students' representatives show the bureaucracy of the process is an issue for students' representatives as well as their dependency on the responsible unit from the university. Some of them also mention that the recognition doesn't reflect the real workload done within the students' representation. Also, strict deadlines, long waiting times and complex processes were mentioned as challenging.

In general, about half of the student representatives who attempted to achieve recognition for their student activism were successful. Successful cases were reported from **Austria, Germany, Italy, Malta, Romania** and **Switzerland**, while negative experiences were reported from **Germany, Italy, Estonia, Montenegro** and **Romania**. Partial achievements were experienced in **Romania** and **Germany**. Due to low
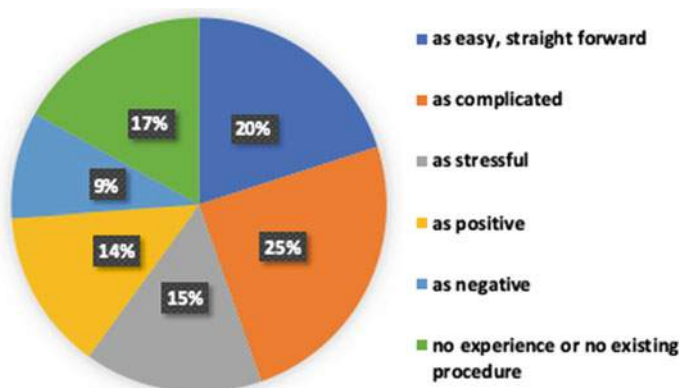
Fig. 17 Would you describe the procedure of recognition ...

numbers of respondents in some countries, there can only be a trend suggested. This trend concludes that attempts for recognition of student activism are only partly linked to policies and legal regulations in place. Countries with legal regulations and policies in place **(Germany, Austria, Malta)** have high numbers of at least partial recognition of students' activism. However, there are also cases of recognition in countries without legal frameworks and policies in place, as **Italy** and **Romania**. The high percentage of (partly) successful attempts (16 out of 20 in Romania) could be explained since student activism is neither recognised in the curriculum nor in the acquisition of ECTS but in a remark in the diploma supplement only.

7   Conclusions and Findings

Within this paper, the recognition of representative student activism as informal learning in higher education is studied. Results draw on two qualitative surveys, conducted 2019 in 11 countries among student unions and individual student activists.

Three steps of recognition of student activism as informal learning can be identi-fied from this survey. Successful attempts of recognition of student activism depend on the policies and frameworks in place to support these steps.

In a first step, a formal request is issued by a student, usually by providing doc-umentation or proof for their student activism. The procedures of recognition are often intransparent for students, only about one-fourth of students found informa-tion provided by universities, while more than half of the students rely on (informal) information provided by their peers. The transparency of information accessible for

students cannot be directly linked to the policies and regulations on recognition of student's activism in place at national or university level.

The second step is made by a decision-making body at the university. These bodies differ a lot among institutions. They can include one or more people, however, student representatives are rarely mentioned as being involved in this process. This results in processes that are often informal and regulated on a case by case basis by individual members of faculty or administration, especially when it comes to recognition of informal learning within specific courses (e.g. classes involving working experiences or internships). About half of the students reports on procedures for decision-making in place at their institution. A country analysis suggests that procedures are more likely to be in place in countries with national frameworks and university policies, however there are cases to be excluded (e.g. **Romania**) from this trend.

The third step is the proceeding from decision to official recognition. This is where ECTS points are linked to specific elements of the curriculum, or the participation in student activism is mentioned in the Diploma Supplement. About half of the students reports successful experiences with recognition of their activism. A trend suggests that countries with policies and legal frameworks in place do have higher rates of success of recognizing students activism; however, it seems that this cannot be generalized amongst regions (especially in **Germany**) and institutions.

The main findings of this study can be summarized in the following way: The legal basis for recognition of student activism as informal learning is highly diverse among countries. Countries do have regulations at national and institutional level (**Belgium (fr), Denmark, Lithuania**), only at national level (**Austria, Germany, Montenegro**) or only at university level (**Estonia, Israel**). No regulations could be found in **Romania, Malta** and **Italy**. However, the regulations and policies in place do not necessarily reflect their transparency towards students and the accessibility of recognition procedures. Overall, the diversity of regulations and procedures are hard to overlook for students. Experiences from individual representative student activists range from smooth and transparent procedures to informal and hardly understandable processes. Often, students depend on informal networks, as other students or administrative personnel, to receive information related to application procedures and decision-making. This results in negative experiences, understanding the recognition of informal learning as complicated and stressful processes. Also, students express their impression of institutional lack of interest in recognizing student activism as informal learning. Student unions in most countries are working at national and institutional level to negotiate legal frameworks and policies for recognition within formal meetings as well as in protest and activism and providing information on procedures.

8   Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the feedback from national student unions, on the one hand, and on personal experiences from students' representatives within their institutions, on the other hand.

On the national level, legal regulations—as committed by the responsible ministers—need to be implemented in all EHEA countries. Non-existing regulations result in legal uncertainty and incomprehensible procedures for students' representatives. Student activism needs to be received not only as a learning process but also as an important contribution to higher education in general and to the specific institution in particular. The survey results shout out for the development of national policies and legal regulations. While representative student activism is a relatively clear field of activity to be recognized, informal learning and engagement involve an extensive diversity of learning outcomes to be recognised as informal learning. National policies and regulations need to take this diversity into account and ensure procedures to be embedded at institutional level that are transparent and reliable. It is recommended to develop these regulations in the light of the National Qualifications Framework, but also in relation to quality assurance policies. The European Framework for Quality Assurance in Higher Education could be used as a starting point for these developments.

The survey shows highly diverse and often in transparent procedures at institutional levels, resulting in negative experiences with recognition of informal learning. Thus, recommendations for institutions focus on the development of transparent and reliable procedures for the recognition of informal learning. This includes the development of institutional policies as well as the training of staff and academics involved in the process of recognition. Already existing procedures might be evaluated and improved together with staff and students' representatives in order to provide more reliable and less stressful or complicated procedures. Moreover, exchange of best practices and collaboration among universities and departments of the same field at regional and national level are highly recommended to avoid inter-institutional conflicts. Additionally, a transparent information system on recognition of informal learning is recommended at institutional level. This should include representative student activism, as well as other forms of student engagement and ideally be linked to policies of recognition of prior learning. Information needs to be understandable and accessible, including counselling for understanding complex matters of recognition. The process of request should be simplified and unified within the institutions, making use of existing tools for making learning outcomes and gained competences visible and comparable, such as the youth pass in youth work. Not only the decision-making process but also the decision must be transparent and understandable, including timely and written decisions and a structured process of appeal. Student representatives should be involved in the development of these institutional regulations and its execution.

Student representatives themselves need to continue (or in some cases: to start) their engagement in the field of recognition, not only aiming for better recognition

of their own activism recognized but also to open student activism for underrepresented groups: As student activism is hardly ever paid, only students with a strong social-economic background can afford to get involved over the years; Recognition of activism within the curriculum would enable new groups to partake. Students and student unions are valuable sources for gaining information on recognition procedures to be used in cooperation with the institution. However, the responsibility to implement transparent, reliable and quick legislation and policies belongs to legislators and institutions.

The example of recognizing student activism makes the lack of regulations and transparency for recognition of informal learning in many countries and institutions visible. While policies at European level take a clear stand in favour of the recognition of prior learning for decades, policy implementation at national and institutional level still have a way to go. However, stakeholders in many countries are aware of their responsibility towards transparent and fair recognition of informal learning and have started to develop perspectives and policies, which could be used as a starting point for an enhanced dialogue at European and national level.

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Closing the Circle: Research and Policymaking in Education

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1 Introduction

While the factors affecting the uptake of research findings in educational practice have been intensively analysed in the literature (Cain 2015 among others), few studies have focused on the field of policymaking, especially in countries with no strong tradition of using evidence in policymaking and those with a weaker research culture in public institutions. This study aims to address the factors contributing to research uptake in education policymaking, from the policymakers' perspective.

The existing literature points towards arguments supporting the role of research in policymaking (e.g. Temple 2003; Brown 2012) and the importance of research findings as a critical factor in any innovative change process in education (Levin et al. 2011). In addition, according to Oakley (2000:3), policymaking approaches involving the utilisation of research ensure that 'those who intervene in other people's lives do so with the utmost benefit and least harm'.

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Evidence-based practice is a field that has already been explored in depth in health sciences and is now starting to be explored in other fields. For instance, Oxman (2009) point to the benefits of health systems with policymakers adopting an evidence-informed approach, as systems that increase the probability of a more effective, equitable and efficient health policy. In contrast, the authors consider that 'poorly informed decision-making is one of the reasons why services sometimes fail to reach those most in need (…) and may also contribute to problems related to the effectiveness, efficiency (i.e., value for money), and equity of health systems' (p. 1). Along the same lines, but in the field of education, the findings of Cordingley (2013) and Mincu (2014) suggest that using research in decision-making is associated with better teaching and learning, schools and systems. Tregenza et al. (2012) and Godfrey (2014, 2016) found similar relations. However, despite interest in the benefits of research-based approaches in policymaking and practice, 'little effort has gone into understanding how, when, or why research affects education policy', and 'most discussion has focused on how to identify <best practices> or <scientifically based> methods and how to encourage' the use of research findings (Hess and McDonnell 2008, p. 534).

There are many agents involved in the process of research utilisation (in the production process, but also in the use of research findings), and their alignment and its implications have been investigated. This analysis brings into focus some explanatory models, which encapsulate the variety of elements involved in these processes (Landry et al. 2001b; Levin 2013; Brown 2012 among others) and the role of human resources in supporting them. However, the complexity and the nature of the relationship between research producers and users prevent us from gaining a full and straightforward understanding of the process. While a significant body of literature explores the role of the research production context (among others Cherney et al. 2012) and the use of research in practice (among others Mincu 2015; Ostinelli 2017), studies exploring the complex context of policymakers are still underdeveloped in the educational field (among others Gough 2004; Lavis 2006; Cain 2015). For this reason, our research aims to contribute to the understanding of the factors involved in the uptake of research by educational policymakers, namely those involved in the national public administration. The study focuses on Romanian educational researchers in higher education institutions (as relevant producers of educational research influencing theoretical development, policy and practice, including in teaching and learning) and their relation to policymakers. Also, this is an exploratory study, which investigates perceptions on research in general, without differentiating amongst various methodologies and approaches to research (i.e. action research, fundamental research etc.). In this context, we first analyse the most common models explaining the factors influencing research utilisation. Second, we explore how these factors are shaped by civil servants in education in order to explore the emergence of other factors, and propose suggestions for how research-based policy processes might be more effectively supported by both researchers, in particular those in higher education, and policymakers.

2 Configuration of Factors Influencing the Research Uptake in Policymaking

Definitions about evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) have emerged in the literature in recent years and range from an approach which 'helps people make well informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence at the heart of policy development and implementation' (Davies 1999:124), to understandings more associated with the concept of 'knowledge mobilization' (Cooper et al. 2009). The term describes the growing interest in studying the role that evidence plays in the policymaking process, which has been drawing interest for decades beyond the field of education.

However, there is little agreement about what the term EIPM really covers (Gough et al. 2011). The extent of what is considered 'evidence' is wide and can include expert knowledge, published research, statistics, stakeholder consultations, previous policy evaluations, other information sources and/or output from economic and statistical modelling. Thus, research is just one source amongst many (Nutley et al. 2007). To these elements, Wieser (2016) and Cain (2015) added both personal and professional experience in the construction of knowledge.

Independently of what shapes evidence-informed policymaking, the way evidence is configured depends on the articulation of different factors linked to individuals, groups and organisations (Ion and Iucu 2014). Many of these factors, which include political priorities, the availability of resources, contextual factors and information such as research, and other forms of evidence, play a direct role in the process of decision-making (e.g. Campbell et al. 2017; Davies 2004; Gough 2004; Nutley et al. 2007). Additionally, the relationship between evidence and decision-making is complex and involves not only different factors but also agents acting within various contexts. For example, in the evidence-informed policy and practice model, Levin (2013) proposes three contexts interfering in the utilisation of research: the context of the research production, mediators and research users. Levin (2013) and Tripney et al. (2015) conceptualise educational policymakers as 'end users' of research. Users function as constructors of knowledge and act in their own setting; they are not just passive recipients of the work of researchers (Levin 2009). In this context, we would argue that policymakers are a special case of mediators, who can potentially have a strong influence on ensuring that research findings are used in practice.

The literature has analysed different explanatory models for evidence-based policy and practice, integrating the different contexts mentioned before. Landry et al. (2001a) analysed different models in the literature, highlighting their potentials and limitations. The explanatory models of research utilisation cover a wide range of scenarios, and the authors discussed four major alternatives: *the science-push model, the demand-pull model, the dissemination model* and *the interaction model*. Each one addresses parts of the factors contributing to research use. Since we included some of the factors derived from these models in the research design of the present study, we will present a brief review of each one.

The *science-push model* puts the emphasis on the role of the researchers and research in focusing on aspects such as the quality and type of research (basic/ applied, general/abstract, qualitative or qualitative, particular or concrete, etc.) and contends that the utilisation process follows a linear sequence from the supply of research findings to utilisation by policymakers and practitioners. The model has been criticised mainly due to two aspects: the transfer of knowledge is not automatic, and raw research information is not usable in policymaking. These aspects encouraged the emergence of the *demand-pull model*, which focuses on the role of the final users (policymakers and practitioners) in research utilisation. In this model, the users become the major source of ideas for policy initiatives (Weiss 1979; Rich 1991, among others). The demand-pull model assumes that organisational structures, rules and norms are essential determinants of knowledge utilisation (Oh and Rich 1996) and that the critical factor causing the under-utilisation of research findings links to the political interest of users, which may be in conflict with the research data (Landry et al. 2001a). Criticized for its excessive instrumental use of research and for the omission of the role of the interaction between users and knowledge producers, the model led to the emergence of the *dissemination model*, which described the role of the transfer process as both formal and non-formal. The dissemination model promoted the need to develop dissemination mechanisms to identify useful knowledge and transfer it to users. The model stresses the importance of two determinants: the type of research results and the dissemination effort (Landry et al. 2001a). The model's lack of attention to the process of dialogue between producers and users and to the gap between the two contexts prompted the appearance of *the interaction model* (among others Huberman and Thurler 1992; Oh 1997). The variables considered in this model are related to informal personal contacts, participation in committees and transmission of reports to non-academic organisations (Huberman and Thurler 1992).

Due to the recent progress in the field of knowledge utilisation, there has been some criticism associated to all existing models. For instance, Estabrooks et al. (2006) and Cooper et al. (2009) argue that the variables proposed in the models are not sufficient to explain the complexity and variety of the real situations, scenarios and agents involved in the research utilisation process.

To overcome the limitations of the previous models, Brown (2012) added variables derived from a sociological approach posited by Dowling (2008), known as the *social activity model*. The contribution of this model is the understanding of the knowledge adoption as 'most likely to occur when both researchers and policymakers are actively seeking to engage with one other, employing corresponding strategies to enable this process' (Brown 2012:460). This model and its criticisms led to a new configuration of the variables. The alternative is called the *policy preference model* (Brown 2012) and is centred on two points:

– factors directly related to the evidence and efforts to communicate this evidence;
– factors that impact how the findings from any study are likely to be received by its audience.

From here, two categories of factors are derived (Brown 2012:460):

– internal factors: the nature of what is being communicated, clarity with regard to its presentation, the efficacy of the communication type and the level of proactivity, contextualisation and tailoring)
– external factors: factors inherent to policymakers and which constitute their knowledge 'mould', the perceived credibility of the source of evidence by policymakers, the perceived quality of the evidence by policymakers, general involvement by policymakers in research studies, and access to policymakers).

To these factors, Brown (2012) added factors linked to the preferences policymakers have for other research topics and the strength and nature of the relationship between the researcher and policymaker (Brown 2012).

3   The Context of Our Study

The connection between the different actors involved in educational public policy development is made through the Ministry of Education, working together with national institutions and agencies such as the Institute of Educational Sciences, the National Council for Curriculum and Evaluation, the National Centre for Evaluation and Examination, the National Centre for Vocational Education Development and the National Agencies for Quality Assurance in Education (higher education and pre-university education). The mechanisms for policy development in higher education are supported by the activity of the Ministry of Education, nine intermediary institutions, three national agencies, and 108 public and state universities.

The choice between different public policy alternatives needs to be supported by arguments based on studies and analyses, with clear information about the opportunity for addressing the issues concerned, the estimated budget, the estimated impact and evaluation criteria for each alternative, criteria for choosing the recommended alternative, and the related action plan. However, Romania is an example of a context where public policy is not coherently structured and regulated for utilising research to inform public policies. As a result, research uptake in policymaking is left at researchers' and policymakers' discretion.

In this study, we aim to detect and describe the configuration of the main factors that could influence the uptake of research for policymakers. Thus, our research explores the policymakers' perspective, placing it against the different explanatory models for evidence-based policy and practice.

4   Methods

The data comprised in this article are part of a project funded by the Ministry of Education through the Executive Unit for the Financing of Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation, whose main objective is to analyse the utilisation of

educational research in policymaking. The overall study (developed between 2015–2017) used a mixed methodology, comprising two surveys (one for policymakers and one for Romanian higher education academics and researchers), two sets of interviews with academic managers and with a selection of policymakers and governmental experts, as well as of a focus group with academics, university managers and policymakers. The current paper draws only on data gathered from the survey administered to policymakers working in public administration in the field of education.

4.1   Survey Structure

Research use was measured through 59 multiple-answer questions on a seven- to five-point scale, built on the policy preference model and its dimensions. These dimensions were considered as variables, related to internal factors linked to the quality and access to research data:

– the nature of what is being communicated
– the clarity in the presentation of research data
– access and availability of data
– factors linked to the preference of policymakers towards one or another research topic
– different sources of information

and external factors linked to the perceived relationship between policymakers and researchers:

– the perceived quality of the evidence by policymakers
– communication and dissemination
– the strength and nature of the relationship between researchers and policymakers
– policymakers' general involvement in research (i.e. agenda setting, collaboration with researchers, etc.)

In addition, two open-ended questions were added, related to:

– factors discouraging and encouraging policymakers to make educational policy decisions based on scientific evidence.

The independent variables used for this particular stage in the project are socio-demographic variables such as the respondents' role in the institution, overall professional experience, professional experience in their current position and the respondents' level of education, aiming to provide a better understanding of the context and particularities of research use at the decision-making level. The data analysis was carried out by clustering the survey questions around internal and external factors identified by the model. Then, data were analysed using the weightedvadjust average

for each item correlated with the independent variables. For the limited purpose of this paper, we will focus on the respondents' institutional role in correlation with the above-mentioned internal and external factors.

4.2 Sample

The survey[1] was administered in March 2017 to a self-selected sample of 54 civil servants from the main public institutions involved in the management of education in Romania. Most of the respondents (70%) work at the Ministry of National Education (with 4% of them employed at the Strategy and Public Policy Unit within the Ministry), while 8% work at the National Agency for Community Programmes for Education and Professional Development, 4% at the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education and 4% at the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education; 2% work at the Executive Unit for the Financing of Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation, and 12% work in other public institutions in the educational field.

Out of those who responded to the survey, the majority (40%) are experts in their field, while the rest are either in an administrative position (10%), work at an executive level (26%), have a research role (8%), or are in charge of planning (20%) and evaluation (12%) of policies. As the overall total percentage shows (116%), some respondents have, or identify with more than one role within their institution. All the respondents are considered to have a policymaker role, as they are involved, in different capacities, in formulating public educational policies within their particular institutional structure. The majority of the respondents have more than 10 years of experience in their current position (52%), while 8% have worked in their current position for a period of time between 6 and 10 years, and 40% reported having worked for 1 to 5 years in their current capacity. Out of the total 54 respondents, all have higher education degrees, with 8.16% having completed a bachelor's degree, 51.02% a master's degree, 38.78% a Ph.D., while 2.04% preferred not to answer this specific question.

5 Results

The results of this study are presented in relation to the respondents' institutional role and follow the identified clusters: internal and external factors influencing the uptake of research by policymakers and factors encouraging or discouraging the policymakers to make educational policy decisions based on scientific evidence.

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[1]The survey can be accessed at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3SXC225 (in Romanian).

5.1 Internal Factors Influencing the Uptake of Research by Policymakers

When it comes to the internal factors influencing the uptake of research, we will focus on the policymakers' perceptions on the nature and clarity of communication, access and availability of data, on factors linked to their preferences for research topics, and on the different sources of information they use.

With regard to *the nature of what is being communicated,* respondents appear to focus on the practical and applied side of research (M: 4.78/6). Respondents also place high value on *clarity in the presentation* of what is being communicated, as research results written in a clear language for decision-makers represent one of the factors receiving higher consideration (M: 4.56/6). The availability of results when a decision has to be made also appears to be an important factor influencing research use (M: 4.62/6), an aspect that encourages more communication and synchronicity between research and decision-making agendas in order to ensure research is relevant to current issues and readily available for decision-makers (Table 1).

With regards to *access and availability of data*, there are several outliers that could be further discussed. First, it appears the administrative staff tend to agree that the current methods of knowledge dissemination derived from educational research seem adequate (M: 5.00/6), even though they are least exposed to research results and usage while, by comparison, those more directly involved with research are more reserved on this (an overall average of M: 4.09/6). This is also reflected in the fact that administrative staff agree that the institution they work with has specific structures

Table 1 When you want to use results of academic educational research, which aspects do you consider a priority? (on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 represents 'low priority' and 6 represents 'high priority')

Statement Role within the institution	Results with direct implications on policies and practices are a priority	The results being readily available when a decision has to be made is a priority	Research results written in a clear language for decision-makers are a priority	Research which contributes to the existing theoretical knowledge is a priority	Impartial results of the research are a priority
Administrative	5	4.8	4.8	4	4.2
Expert in a certain field	4.65	4.5	4.58	4.2	4.7
Executive	4.85	4.69	4.54	4.54	4.46
Documentation/ research	5	4.75	4.75	4.5	3.5
Planning	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.3	4
Evaluation	4.83	4.5	4.33	4.17	3.67
Rating average	**4.78**	**4.62**	**4.56**	**4.28**	**4.08**

Table 2 Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements (on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 represents 'complete disagreement' and 6 represents 'complete agreement'

Statement role within the institution	Technology has greatly improved access to scientific evidence	Academic research is independent from the political agenda	I often use research evidence when I formulate/ initiate/ evaluate an educational policy initiative	The current models of knowledge dissemination derived from educational research seem adequate to me	The available resources are sufficient so that we can use research data
Administrative	5.20	4.6	4.20	5	4
Expert in a certain field	5.37	4.5	4.70	3.8	2.75
Executive	5.67	5	4.15	3.75	2.77
Documentation/ research	5.50	5	4.00	3.5	3.25
Planning	5.50	4.4	4.40	4.2	3
Evaluation	5.67	4	4.67	4.33	2.5
Rating average	**5.48**	**4.58**	**4.35**	**4.09**	**3.04**

that allow access and usage of scientific data, an opinion shared by their colleagues to a lesser extent, as shown in Table 2.

However, the majority of respondents disagree with the fact that the available resources are sufficient for them to use research data (M: 3.04/6), which might be a reason why research evidence is not always used when formulating, initiating or evaluating an educational policy initiative (M: 4.35/6).

With regards to *the different sources of information* used by policymakers, the majority of respondents agree that technology has significantly improved access to scientific evidence (M: 5.48/6), and the most relevant sources appear to be national and international statistical databases (M: 5.14/6) and national agencies' reports (M: 4.92/6) as shown in Table 3. This indicates that policymakers are more familiar with institutional reports and raw data issued by national or international organizations and not by researchers in higher education. It is worth noting that respondents rely heavily on their previous professional experience (M: 5.03/6), thus underlining the contribution of experiential learning to the development of professional knowledge and the need for them to be more involved in the research process in order to expand and use their knowledge in the field, which also draws upon external factors.

The researchers' proactivity is reflected in policymakers receiving results of research carried out by higher education institutions or research centres, and it indicates a more direct connection between researchers and policymakers primarily at the executive level (M: 4.55/6) and to a lesser extent among experts (M: 4.16/6). Those policymakers who tend to read and analyse research reports are mostly execu-

Table 3 How relevant are the following sources of information for the educational policy decisions you have made in the last 12 months? (on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 represents 'low relevance' and 6 represents 'high relevance')

Sources used in the past 12 months role within the institution	Publication in scientific journals	Public opinion	Employees of my own institution	Newspapers, magazines, web pages	TV and radio	Previous professional experience	Students	Organisations and professional associations	Formal meetings with researchers at scientific events	Informal meetings with researchers	National and international statistical databases	University databases	National agencies' reports
Administrative	4.40	2.40	3.80	3.80	2.60	5.00	3.00	4.40	4.60	4.60	4.60	3.80	4.00
Expert in a certain field	4.15	3.37	3.65	3.40	2.95	4.89	3.65	4.10	4.50	4.50	5.15	4.25	4.95
Executive	4.31	3.46	4.31	3.38	2.62	5.00	3.00	4.08	4.46	4.23	4.77	4.15	4.77
Documentation/Research	4.25	3.00	4.00	2.75	2.75	5.00	4.00	4.50	4.75	5.50	5.50	4.50	5.25
Planning	4.56	3.44	4.22	3.89	3.22	5.00	3.22	4.22	4.33	4.67	5.33	4.33	5.22
Evaluation	5.00	3.00	4.17	3.33	2.83	5.33	4.00	4.33	4.50	4.33	5.50	4.83	5.33
Rating average	**4.44**	**3.11**	**4.02**	**3.42**	**2.82**	**5.03**	**3.47**	**4.27**	**4.52**	**4.63**	**5.14**	**4.31**	**4.92**

Table 4 When you access and use educational research in decision-making, how frequently do you encounter the following situations? (on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 represents 'never' and 6 represents 'always')

Situations in which research data were used role within the institution	Educational research has been used to project and implement educational policies and programs	Educational research has been used to influence the way in which decision-makers reflect upon different educational aspects	Educational research has been used to introduce new aspects on the political agenda	Educational research has been used to justify or legitimize options already chosen by the decision-makers
Administrative	4.40	3.80	3.60	3.75
Expert in a certain field	4.00	3.47	3.26	3.67
Executive	4.15	4.08	3.38	3.36
Documentation/research	4.00	3.75	3.75	4.50
Planning	4.00	3.70	3.50	3.89
Evaluation	4.00	3.33	3.33	3.00
Rating average	**4.09**	**3.68**	**3.47**	**3.69**

tives (M: 5.45/6) and those working in evaluation (M: 5.50/6). Whereas the latter are less likely to receive results directly from researchers (M: 3.67/6), they appear to use research more in their work; therefore, they should be among those targeted in the dissemination process. When referring to policymakers' proactivity towards research use, the lowest overall rating average is recorded for respondents feeling encouraged by their colleagues/peers to use research data in their activity (M: 3.82/6), which reflects a rather low value attributed to organisational factors in relation to research use.

With regard to contextualization and tailoring of research for policymakers, the results show that respondents most frequently see educational research being used in order to plan or project and implement educational policies and programmes (M: 4.09/6). A lower average (M: 3.68/6) is reported for educational research used to influence the way decision-makers reflect upon different educational aspects. The trend is consistent with educational research being used to introduce new aspects on the policy agenda (M: 3.47/6) and to justify or legitimize options or decisions already made by decision-makers (M: 3.69/6), an aspect which is more aligned with the *demand-pull model*, as previously described.

Values reflected in Table 4 indicate a rather limited role of research in relation to the policy agenda, as perceived by the majority of respondents, with the lowest weighted averages reported by respondents involved in evaluation at the institutional level. It could also be inferred from comparing data that, while all respondents recognize the importance of research and research use in decision-making, in reality, the connection between the two components appears to be rather weak.

5.2 External Factors Associated with the Uptake of Research in Policymaking

In this section, we will focus on two external factors identified in relation to the perceived relationship between policymakers and researchers: policymakers' general involvement in research studies and the strength and nature of the relationship between researchers, particularly in higher education, and policymakers.

Policymakers' general involvement in research studies refers mostly to reading and analysing research reports (M: 5.31/6) and to adopting results of educational research (M: 5.56/6), two aspects relevant mostly for those in executive and policy evaluation roles at the institutional level. However, there is a high level of agreement regarding the lack of training in the field of research utilisation within public institutions where decisions are made (M: 4.06/6), indicating the need for such training in supporting and encouraging the use of research in policymaking.

An important aspect would also be to increase *access to policymakers*, considered to be relatively low given the lack of sufficient forums and networks that could bring together researchers in higher education institutions (HEIs) and policymakers (3.96/6). This is also reflected in a rather low average of policymakers receiving results of research carried out by universities or research centres (M: 3.87/6). A stronger collaboration between policymakers and researchers in higher education is further deterred by the amount of time that must be invested in coordinating the activity between the two parties (M: 4.42/6) and the existing bureaucratic practices, which can cause delays (M: 4.26/6).

Following up on these aspects, it would appear that *the strength and nature of the relationship between researchers in higher education and policymakers* are influenced by the rather limited access to policymakers as well as by the different agendas and timeframes for research and for decision-making.

However, the results presented in Table 5 indicate partnerships with universities are highly regarded by policymakers, who see such partnerships as playing a motivational and commitment role, as research partnerships appear to motivate some of the respondents to further engage with their own work (M: 3.83/5) and to extend the number of contacts with universities (M: 3.78/5). Moreover, there appears to be a general openness towards working in projects developed in collaboration with HEIs and strengthening the relationship between policymakers and researchers in higher education.

The qualitative data collected at the end of the survey summarises the main enablers, facilitators and inhibitors of the uptake of research by policymakers. In aspects related to *communication and dissemination* of research results, respondents value using a clear and friendly language for 'translating results in common language' and expect researchers to make their work more visible and be more proactive in connecting and communicating with policymakers. They also suggest developing partnerships with influential factors within civil society and organisations working in European educational programmes. With regard to *the research content*, policymakers recommend clear, easy-to-understand proposals with short-term impact adapted

Table 5 How do you appreciate the collaboration with higher education institutions in your professional activity? Please express your agreement in relation to the following statements (from 1 representing 'strong disagreement' to 5 representing 'strong agreement')

Statement role within the institution	I had the opportunity to use data which would have otherwise been difficult to access	I have extended the number of contacts within the academia	Research partnerships have contributed to attracting yy financing sources for the institution I work with	Such partnerships have offered me the opportunity to improve my expertise in the field	Partnerships in research have helped me advance in my career	Such projects helped me be pragmatic and realistic with regard to research results	Research partnerships have helped be better understand the work of researchers	Research partnerships helped me be more motivated in relation to the work I am doing
Administrative	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.60	3.40	3.60	3.60
Expert in a certain field	3.80	3.70	3.26	3.55	3.58	3.80	3.85	3.84
Executive	3.77	4.23	3.62	4.00	3.83	3.92	3.67	4.00
Documentation/research	3.50	3.75	3.25	3.25	3.50	4.00	3.75	4.00
Planning	3.22	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.50	3.67	3.56	3.75
Evaluation	3.50	4.00	3.17	3.17	3.33	3.83	3.67	3.83
Rating average	**3.54**	**3.78**	**3.34**	**3.45**	**3.55**	**3.77**	**3.68**	**3.83**

to the context and to the specific requirements of the environment where they will be implemented. They also *expect researchers* to be more proactive and participate as experts in implementing projects developed by institutions that initiate educational policies.

The factors that encourage policymakers to make educational policy decisions based on scientific evidence vary from *personal factors* (intrinsic motivation), such as their personal desire to improve their expertise or their professional responsibility, to *results-driven* factors (extrinsic motivation), either in relation to the decision-makers, such the possibility to influence decisions or substantiate pertinent argumentation that could help adopt a policy, or in relation to the system, such as obtaining long-term positive results and ensuring objectivity in making decisions. Furthermore, there are factors pertaining *to existing general evidence,* particularly the decreasing quality of the educational process or the increase in the drop-out rate, as well as *factors related to research,* namely the need to access highly accurate data, based on rigorous and realistic research, objectivity and sample representativeness.

Besides, *the factors discouraging policymakers* from making educational policy decisions based on scientific evidence are identified at either systemic or institutional levels or are determined by *factors related to research* itself. Regarding the latter, barriers appear mainly in relation to the lack of correlation between theory and practice and the risk of over-theorization, as well as access to evidence. *At the systemic level,* respondents are concerned by public sphere inertia, lack of coherence in designing strategies, the numerous changes in the system, and the lack of thematic research in the national context which is needed when promoting educational policies measures. *At the institutional level*, the main concerns refer to the lack of institutional or practical culture in using results of research and innovation in practice as well as at the level of decision-making. One observation that could be made with regard to this aspect refers to the actual and perceived identity of the policymaker. Given the current data and the wider context of the research, it appears that *employees in public administration*, even though in charge of drafting, implementing and evaluating policies, *do not necessarily perceive themselves as decision-makers*, a role which they mostly attribute to elected or appointed officials in their field. This could also fall under the external factors influencing the research uptake, namely, under factors linked to the preferences of policymakers for one or another research topic, which indicate their preference is mostly driven by the decision-making agenda and less by particular topics of interest. Thus, their preferences appear to be highly volatile and influenced by the political factor, making it difficult for researchers to respond promptly to their requests, especially given the different timeframes in the research cycle and the political decision cycle.

6 Discussion

Our study analysed the factors linked to the perception of policymakers on the use of research in their work. The findings demonstrated that, despite the weak presence of national regulations regarding the support of evidence-based decisions in education, policymakers highly value research contributions and agree that research makes them more confident in their decisions and has implications on the quality of their work. The data also reveal that their trust in educational research is a critical factor in understanding the dynamic of research uptake in policymaking and is the criteria for a successful relationship between researchers and policymakers. In this regard, our results confirm the findings of previous studies (e.g. Brown et al. 2016). However, in a context where research appears mostly as part of political discourse of elected officials and less as an actual practice for civil servants, policymakers still consider their own professional experience as an important source of knowledge when decisions are made. The least relevant aspect in terms of key factors for considering research of priority appears to be the use of research which contributes to the existing theoretical knowledge. This situation generates a discussion about knowledge management in public administration and the balance between formal and informal mechanisms to access evidence. It also sparks a debate on the partnerships and alliances between those in charge of knowledge production and those who use it (Treadway 2015).

The findings shed light on the role of personal and organisational factors in influencing the research utilisation as an organisational dynamic with its internal structures, while also highlighting the role of the existing research culture at public institutions. The research culture is a critical aspect and is linked to the group dynamic in a given organisation (Ion and Iucu 2014), and the support of colleagues and leaders. Similarly, our data highlight the importance of training policymakers in order to increase their level of awareness in the use of data derived from research. The findings also spark discussion, not only on the various internal and external factors contributing to the research uptake, but also on the role played by civil servants in their institutions. Depending on their responsibilities, they could be more or less connected to research.

As it can be inferred from the findings, educational research in Romania is currently at a crossroad between the *science-push model*, as higher education institutions are attempting to influence the research agenda required for evidence-based policymaking and disseminate their results, and the *demand-pull model*, as policymakers are trying to design evidence-based policies without always being able to find the necessary evidence, and with policy interests not necessarily in line with research interests at higher education institutions—who are the main research producers. Even more so, the demand-pull model sometimes implies that the policymakers are looking at evidence to justify their decisions afterwards rather than inform them beforehand, which creates an even larger rift between the two parties.

The study suggests a number of implications for policymakers in public administration. Our research paves the way for an in-depth analysis of organisational factors likely to affect research utilisation: engagement, interpreted as the attitude of organ-

isations and their members towards research; the political and managerial context likely to promote and favour research transfer and use; and the financial context needed to foster quality results. Thus, there is a growing need to enhance the partnerships between policymakers and researchers (Malin and Brown 2019), focusing on high-quality research, well-developed transparency and social responsibility mechanisms, as well the 'third mission' as an academic priority.

Whereas the study tackles the idea of bridging the gap between the policymakers' and researchers' contexts, it cannot provide, at this stage, a full understanding of how an efficient partnership could be defined. However, it provides us with a sense of the policymakers' positive perception regarding the collaboration with researchers in higher education institutions, and it points to possible directions for the latter to strengthen this relation. Researchers could be more proactive in disseminating research results, specifically in engaging with executive and policy evaluation staff in public institutions. Also, more opportunities for researchers and policymakers to meet in both formal and informal contexts could contribute to such engagement from both parties. Another recommendation would be to develop initial and continuous training programs aimed at interpreting and understanding research results, at applying them in drafting educational policy or at facilitating research utilisation in public institutions. It could also contribute to better prepared graduates as future, better informed research producers, users and mediators, and to shaping a clearer role for research in an overall strategy to develop the higher education system.

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Assessing Students' Perspective on Teaching and Learning. The Case of National Students' Surveys

Stefan Marius Deaconu, Roland Olah, and Cezar Mihai Haj

1 Introduction

Starting with the London Communiqué, ministers recognized the need of a transition towards a student-centred approach of learning and teaching, recognizing the role of students in the educational process. Their stated aim was for governments to ensure that higher education institutions (HEIs) have adequate resources to fulfil a complex range of purposes: preparing students for their future role in society, at work and at a personal level, while ensuring an advanced, knowledge-based educational system and stimulating research and innovation. (London 2007). Also, Paris Communique highlighted the importance of collaboration between states in order to enhance innovation in learning and teaching (Paris 2018).

Defining student-centred learning (SCL) goes beyond agreeing on an exhaustive definition. By trying to find an overarching definition, one can only note the main novelties brought in the educational system by the SCL. Besides switching the perspective towards the student, it introduces the concept of students' choice in their education, passive learning turns into active learning, while describing the shift in the power relationship between the student and the teacher (O'Neill and McMahon 2005).

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As SCL's importance has been constantly growing, students' satisfaction surveys became a common reality within many universities part of EHEA. These surveys are one of the most efficient solutions in order to assess students' perspective on teaching and learning, but also to see their perception regarding other elements of a higher education institution (Montserrat and Gummesson 2012). Starting from a point where only a small number of universities had implemented this kind of survey, we have now several countries that conduct this exercise at national level. As students' experience is advertised to follow the guiding principles of the SCL from the day they enter the campus (ESU and EI 2010; ESU 2018), more research is needed in order to assess their university experience (Taylor 2013).

Firstly, the present paper tries to provide an insight regarding the usefulness of a national student survey for the further development of the European Higher Education Area as, for the moment, these are not a common practice in the majority of the member states. In order to see how these national students' surveys can be extended to a larger number of countries within EHEA, it was important to see their relevance to the Bologna Process. Secondly, this paper analyses the connection between several ministerial communiques and the content of the surveys. We tried to compare some focus points mentioned in the Paris Communique, as part of them were enounced in a continuity with previous communiques, and also with the questions and the topics that compound the selected student surveys. We also focused on how these student surveys were developed, and what is their dimensionality. The latter aspect is important for us for the purpose of observing how similar topics, such as learning and teaching, were compressed into a certain number of questions, different from country to country, as a hallmark of the national perspective at that moment. Nevertheless, we identified part of the strengths and weaknesses in order to improve, especially teaching and learning. For these, it was important to understand why and how some of the EHEA members developed a national level student survey.

The actual Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for developing instruments of enhancing Quality Assurance (QA) such as student surveys. As the HEIs should publish their quality assurance policies (ESG 1.1), it is important to highlight the fact that students should be involved in designing the study programmes (ESG 1.2). Student-centred learning, as well as teaching and assessment, are also in the core of ESG (1.3), as there are also standards dedicated to teaching staff (ESG 1.5) or learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6). Moreover, ESG 1.9 mentions the fact that monitoring, reviewing or revisioning a study programme should include the evaluation of 'student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme'. The guidelines of the second part of ESG, regarding external quality assurance, can be related to a national student survey.

2 Methodology

In this study, we mostly used qualitative methods in order to approach two major research questions. These are:

1. What are the particularities of developing and implementing a national student survey?

   a. How is a national student survey implemented?
   b. Who is in charge of the implementation, the review and the improvement process?
   c. Which are the categories of eligible students?
   d. What is the period of implementation?

2. Can such a national student survey be integrated throughout the Bologna Process in order to gather further data from EHEA member countries?

We had an innovative approach compared with previous research which focused only on one survey, rather than making a comparison between several national student surveys (Callender et al. 2014; Damen and Hamberg 2015; Maskell and Collins 2017; Bótas and Brown 2013 and so on) (Callender et al. 2014; Damen and Hamberg 2015; Maskell and Collins 2017; Bótas and Brown 2013 and so on). We used a few research instruments, such as:

– Review of the scientific literature.
– Desk research on student surveys public websites (including some of organisations/institutions in charge of implementing the surveys).
– Interviews with representatives of the organisations/institutions that are in charge of conducting and developing the student surveys (especially where the information was not available, or not available in English).

In this regard, we analysed three national students' surveys: National Student Survey (United Kingdom) (NSS-UK), Studiebarometeret (Norway) and National Sociological Research about Students' Satisfaction (Romania) (NSRSS-ROU). A short research was made upon **how these surveys are implemented**, **who is in charge of the implementation process**, **the review and improvement process**. In addition, we looked at the **categories of eligible students** and the **period of implementation**. Those dimensions are relevant for our study in order to prove the reliability and usefulness of these student surveys, as to mention several aspects in regard to their dynamics. In order to analyse the three national student surveys, we chose the last form that was implemented or, in the Romanian case, the latest available form of the survey.[1]

There are several reasons for which we chose these surveys. First of all, NSS-UK and Studiebarometeret are among the most well-known examples of student consultation throughout a questionnaire in EHEA. There is a limited number of this

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[1]The National Sociological Research about Students' Satisfaction in Romania is in the final development stage and is scheduled to be launched in April 2020.

kind of surveys, and their implementation in mainly unknown at European level. For instance, the *Bologna Process Implementation Report* mentions only EUROSTU-DENT. Graduate tracking surveys are also mentioned, but their purpose is more suitable to be analysed in another paper. Secondly, we tried to have a diversity of student surveys from the point of view of their implementation and their maturity:

– NSS-UK was first implemented in 2005, and the questions remained unchanged since 2017.
– Studiebarometeret was first implemented in 2013, and little changes occurred since then.
– NSRSS-ROU is to be launched in 2020, after one year of development.

In order to reflect the connection between the Bologna Process and the national student surveys, we selected some of the topics that are present in the Paris Communiques which are connected to learning and teaching. Part of these topics was also mentioned in previous communiques.

3 Setting the Background

3.1 Conceptual Background

In the late '80s and at the beginning of '90s, different types of students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness were developed, such as Students' Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ), perceiving students rather as customers than partners (Guolla 1999). As they were developing the instrument, their work was undermined by several myths regarding their unreliability and validity, that included the capacity of students to make consistent judgement, the fact that students were considered "unexperienced" and "capricious".[2] Nevertheless, these myths were systemically deconstructed (Aleamoni 1999).

Student surveys tend to provide more accurate information about issues of great importance for teachers and students, such as teaching and learning (Harvey 1995).

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[2]Such kind of myths are: 'Students cannot make consistent judgements about the instructor and instruction because of their immaturity, lack of experience and capriciousness'; 'Only colleagues with excellent publication records and expertise are qualified to teach and to evaluate their peers' instruction'; 'Most student rating schemes are nothing more than a popularity with the warm, friendly, humorous instructor emerging as the winner every time';'Students are not able to make accurate judgements until they have been away from the course and possibly away from the University for several years';'Student Rating forms are both unreliable and invalid';'The size of the class affects student ratings';'The gender of the student and the gender of the instructor affect student ratings';'The time of day the course is offered affects student ratings';'Whether students take the course as a requirement or as an elective affects their ratings';'Whether students are majors or nonmajors affects their ratings';'The level of the course affects student ratings';'The rank of the instructor affects student ratings';'The grades or marks students receive in the course are highly correlated with their ratings of the course and the instructor'.

Table 1 Examples of topics in a students' satisfaction survey (Harvey 1995; Hill 1995)

Harvey (1995)	Hill (1995)
Accommodation	Accommodation service
Computing services	Career service
Course organisation and assessment	Catering service
Financial circumstances	Computing facilities
Library services	Counselling welfare
Refectories	Course content
Self-development	Feedback
Social life	Financial services
Student workload and assessment	Health service
Teaching methods	Joint consultation
Teaching staff and teaching style	Library service
University environment	Personal contact with academic staff
	Physical education
	Student involvement
	Students' union
	Teaching methods
	Teaching quality
	Travel agency
	University bookshop
	Work experience

Measuring student engagement on several key themes from a survey can determine HEIs and other stakeholders to take evidence-based decisions to improve different aspects of the educational processes (Maskell and Collins 2017). One of the earliest studies on this subject were conducted by Harvey (1995), Hill (1995) (Table 1).

Looking at the scientific literature, a clear need arises for a more comprehensive approach that goes beyond teaching effectiveness to comprise the whole student experience. In this sense, there is an impressive number of surveys in HEIs. Those questionnaires have the aim of collecting information on student satisfaction which is afterwards used in improving the services offered by higher education institutions to reach the expectations of their students or prospective students (Solinas et al. 2012). Also, student surveys are commonly used to evaluate teaching performance, while it represents one of the starting points for further debate on this process (Gaertner 2014).

3.2 National Student Survey (United Kingdom)

National Student Survey is a questionnaire designed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), being implementing since 2005 with the **aim of collecting data on student satisfaction and students' perception on the quality of the courses provided by universities in the UK**. It represents an important component of the external quality assurance process in the United Kingdom. Also, it serves several purposes, such as 'informing prospective student choice', 'enhancing the student academic experience within HE institutions' or 'ensuring public accountability' (Institute of Education 2010).

NSS-UK is addressed to students enrolled in the final year of their undergraduate studies in public universities and some private colleges (Bótas and Brown 2013; Burgess et al. 2018). The survey is to be taken by students annually, between January and April. The questionnaire has evolved over times, but its latest format comprises 27 questions with a 5-grade scale (definitely agree, mostly agree, neither agree nor disagree, mostly disagree and definitely disagree) and the not applicable option. One of the questions has the general purpose of assessing the overall student satisfaction, while the remaining 26 questions cover other aspects.[3] Students can also answer some open-ended questions, but they are not compulsory. The results are published online on the Office for Students website.

In order to maintain its relevance and to keep it updated, HEFCE, on behalf of the UK HE funding bodies, is periodically conducting reviews of the Student Survey (Callender et al. 2014). HEFCE commissions different educational bodies in order to evaluate NSS-UK and to propose different improvements. This process is not standardized, and we could not identify any suggestions about a future timeframe.

The 2013–2014 review acknowledged the fact that NSS-UK had several shortcomings at conceptual and methodological level, such some unintended consequences like the inappropriate use of the result in different league tables and in universities marketing (Callender et al. 2014). Also, the importance of NSS increased after it was included into the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) as 'HE markets mechanism seek to control the quality of teaching learning and assessment through competitive ranking systems' (Walker et al. 2019). TEF rates universities in order of quality of teaching, and three out of six indicators are measured through the National Student Survey ('Teaching on my course', 'Assessment and feedback', 'Academic support'). Even though TEF has no consequences on public financing of HEIs, it determines the maximum tuition fee that can be charged by publicly funded universities and colleges in England (Spooren et al. 2017).

NSS was criticized for being a survey of 'satisfaction' rather than a survey that is focused on learning outcomes or on 'students' commitment to the academic and

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[3] 4 questions on the teaching experience, 3 questions on the learning opportunities, 4 questions on assessment and feedback, 3 questions on academic support, 3 questions on organisation and management, 3 questions on learning resources, 2 questions on learning community and 4 questions on student voice.

social environment' (Gibbs 2010). Other issues that were identified through scientific literature were:

– NSS-UK had little information about other factors that were not directly linked to teaching and learning.
– NSS-UK neglected students' perception of the relevance of the course in connection to employability.
– Part-time students cannot submit relevant information about their status (Buckley 2012).

In the United Kingdom, the NSS gained such recognition and importance at national level, that universities are virtually obliged to react to the feedback received from students in order to improve their perceived quality of services, as this impacts their ability to attract future students (Thiel 2019). Moreover, it generates wide debates involving all stakeholders, often these debates being reflected by the major daily journals. (David et al. 2013).

Also, NSS-UK became more and more a useful tool for prospective students to choose better their university in relation to the desired subject. Even though the differences between institutions are relatively small, they are 'statistically reliable' (Burgess et al. 2018). Still, there were voices that argued that some questions might disadvantage certain types of programmes, as those in the area of Art and Design (Gibbs 2010).

3.3 Studiebarometeret (Norway)

Studiebarometeret was developed by the Ministry of Education and Research and carried out by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) since 2013. The **aim of the survey is to provide 'concise and user-friendly information about students' opinion of the quality of education offered** at Norwegian higher education institutions. Some of the topics approached by Studiebarometeret are teaching, extent of feedback and academic counselling, feedback and academic counselling, academic and social environment, the study environment and infrastructure, organisation of the study programme, student assessment and participation or learning outcomes.

The survey is conducted in October/November among second-year bachelor and masters' students and fifth-year students of professional degree and integrated masters. The results are published on the Studiebarometeret web portal. (Damen and Hamberg 2015). Studiebarometeret comprises questions or statements using a 5-grade scale (from 1—do not agree to 5—completely agree or from 1—not satisfied to 5—very satisfied) when assessing the satisfaction rate and 5 options when it refers to the recurrence of a statement (never, 1–2 times, 3–5 times, 6–10 times and more than 10 times). Additionally, every question or statement has the options 'do not know' or 'not relevant'. Moreover, some questions include open sections for comments where the students could add further relevant information.

The Norwegian case represents an example of good practice of a link between measuring student satisfaction and the quality assurance processes. As NOKUT is the national QA agency, Studiebarometeret becomes an important instrument in order to measure the quality of higher education. Therefore, NOKUT can propose institutional measures in order to improve the student experience. The data which is collected can help the educational providers to identify the best practices and to take the proper measures (Bakken and Øygarden 2018).

Studiebarometeret has a dynamic component, of approximately 20% of all questions, approaching different topics than the standard ones, which are constant. This part treats different subjects from year to year, as for example, in 2017 approached internationalization, in 2018—transition into higher education from upper secondary education, and in 2019, it focused on practice training. Studiebarometeret website offers information in three different languages (Bokmål, Nynorsk and English), making it extremely accessible, also for the international students.

A first draft of the questionnaire was piloted with students from a few different study programs at three HEIs, summing approximately 1,000 students. It was followed by several focus groups interviews in order to gather qualitative data. This process was important for the developers as they integrated the feedback and conducted the first round of the Norwegian Student Survey in the autumn of 2013. According to the researchers who are responsible for Studiebarometeret, there is a constant review and improvement process. In charge of this process is a reference group established from representatives of different stakeholders which meets twice a year (in January and May/June). The group is mainly formed out of representatives of Higher Education Institutions. Also, there is a permanent contact between NOKUT and all educational institutions, either universities or university colleges, to coordinate activities which are related mainly to data gathering process.

As Studiebarometeret is in continuous evolution, new topics and questions are added as part of a common effort between the reference group and NOKUT. These are piloted both through qualitative and quantitative testing. The respondents of the test surveys are recruited a year before piloting the potential new questions or topics, as they can opt to be part of later follow-up studies when they are completing the survey.

3.4 National Sociological Research About Students' Satisfaction (Romania)

Romania's National Sociological Research about Students' Satisfaction is part of the 'Quality in higher education: internationalisation and databases to enhance the Romanian education system' project, implemented jointly by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) and the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) and is set to be launched in April 2020.

The project, financed by the European Social Fund through the Operational Programme 'Human Capital', has the aim of developing and implementing measuring instruments at tertiary education level which will provide stakeholders reliable data regarding the higher education system, thus leading to evidence-based decisions concerning the improvement of higher education quality.[4] The questionnaire is set to be applied between March and May 2020. Students will receive an email via the National Student Registry in order to register for the survey completion, but they could also opt to register on the NSRSS-RO website.

The purpose of the student survey is to help both MER and HEIs to fundament future policies in order to improve the quality of student experience.

The questionnaire is the result of a series of consultations with all relevant stakeholders, ranging from university representatives, students, Ministry, consultative councils to the ministry and national and international experts. Ultimately, it will contribute to the creation of a database on students' satisfaction on the quality of services offered by higher education institutions which, in turn, will contribute to evidence-based policy-making at national and institutional level. The survey is set to be periodically applied by UEFISCDI/MER in close collaboration with the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS).

NSRSS-RO includes 61 questions distributed among 10 sections, of which one contains 6 questions on the general level of satisfaction. The remaining 9 sections refer to (1) social services—9 questions; (2) students' representatives—2 questions; (3) university infrastructure—8 questions; (4) learning resources—4 questions; (5) academic support—5 questions; (6) teaching activity—9 questions; (7) learning opportunities—7 questions; (8) assessment, communication and feedback—5 questions; (9) organisation of the educational process—6 questions. Also, it includes a dynamic part, that will change from one year to another in order to assess how different policies adopted by the Ministry of Education and Research are perceived by students.

The format of the questionnaire envisages a 5-grade scale (definitely agree, mostly agree, neither agree nor disagree, mostly disagree and definitely disagree) and the not applicable option. Every student from a Romanian HEI can take the survey for a least one study programme where he or she is enrolled. A comprehensive analysis and part of the data collected will be publicly available, starting with the autumn of 2020. Also, each university will receive an individual analysis of the results, in order to maintain or improve different aspects of educational process.

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[4]This is one of the main mechanisms used in Romania in recent years for piloting and implementing policy changes especially when it includes IT platforms, data bases etc.

4 Developing a Student Survey at National Level

Student surveys are one of the most popular methods in order to asses teaching and learning from students' perspective as they represent an instrument that can be applied easily to many under-graduates (Tucker 2015). Nevertheless, there are voices that blame the fact that 'in this epoch of managerialism and instrumentality', there is a need 'to show *progress* to justify consistency and funding'. As for that, there are some authors that advocate that quality in higher education 'should extend beyond satisfaction' (Dean and Gibbs 2015). Still, as students' opinion became more and more important in order to improve learning and teaching, student surveys became common ground in quality assurance processes across EHEA, especially in the higher education institutions. They are basically an efficient tool to implement several guidelines from ESG, such as ESG 1.9.

Another important aspect is that the period of implementation is important to be set in strict correlation with the structure of the academic year. For instance, even though there are studies that 'prove the grades or marks students receive in the course are not highly correlated with their ratings of the course and the instructor' (Aleamoni 1999), neither of the student surveys that we took into consideration collide with assessment periods.

A notable difference regarding the analysed surveys is the eligible students that are able to participate. One survey targets students in their final year of undergraduate studies, another second-year bachelor and masters' students and the third all students in bachelor studies. As it is clear that the more students are taking the survey, the more accurate the results are going to be, it is relevant to point out the fact that even though the UK Government tries to increase the number of eligible students, it faces harsh opposition from different stakeholders, including universities (Havergal 2019) (Table 2). At the same time, studies have shown that every year students are required to fill in a high number of questionnaires that can lead to a decrease in the number of respondents due to *"survey fatigue"*.

In all three cases, we have identified an important input from the governmental structure that oversees higher education affairs. Also, in Norway and in Romania, the national QA agency is involved in the process of developing the student survey. Students are also involved in this process through the national unions of students. They have a significant role especially in the United Kingdom. Student bodies play an important role in developing and promoting these student surveys.

In order to analyse the topics approached by the student surveys that we selected, we will use the typologies identified by Hill (1995), as shown in Table 3. As a result, we understand that NSS-UK has questions from 8 topics (40%), Studiebarometeret points out questions from 13 topics (70%), and NSRSS-RO has questions from 16 topics proposed (84%). Travel agency and University bookshop are the topics that cannot be identified in the student surveys that we chose for this paper. Items connecting to Health service can help both HEIs and national authorities to provide, for instance, a better picture regarding how students are aware of those support services (Storrie et al. 2010).

Table 2 Comparison between selected national student surveys

	NSS-UK	Studiebarometeret-NOR	NSRSS-RO
First implementation	2005	2013	2020
Previous implementation	2019	2018	–
Stakeholders involved in developing the survey	Office for Students (OfS), Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Department for Economy Northern Ireland (DeFNI), Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Health Education England (HEE), Ipsos MORI, National Union of Students (NUS UK)	Ministry of Education and Research, Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)	Ministry of Education and Research (MEC), Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI), The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), National Unions of Students (NUS)
Stakeholders involved in promoting the survey	Governmental structures responsible for higher education, Market research company, National union of students'	QA national agency, National union of students, HEIs	Governmental structures responsible for higher education, QA national agency, National unions of students,
Period of implementation	January–April	October–November	April–May
Eligible students	Students in their final year of study[a]	Second year bachelor and masters' students and fifth year students of professional degree and integrated masters	Students from bachelor and master's degree

[a] Students that are enrolled in more flexible part-time programmes are surveyed during their fourth year of study. Some categories of students' that have dropped out can also take the survey

As we mentioned, NSS-UK has an important role in Teaching Excellence Framework. It represents an example of how such a national student survey is to be integrated in developing national policies. TEF is supposed to enhance student-centred learning in British universities. Metrics for Teaching Excellence Framework come from three data sources: National Student Survey, data from Higher Education Statistics Agency and from *Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey* (Gunn 2018). Even though highly criticized for this by students, NSS-UK represents an example of how to integrate the results of such a survey into HE policies.

Table 3 Comparison of topics in a students' satisfaction survey (Hill 1995) with selected national student surveys

	NSS-UK	Studiebarometeret-NOR	NSRSS-RO
Accommodation service		x	x
Career service		x	x
Catering service			x
Computing facilities	x	x	x
Counselling welfare		x	x
Course content	x	x	x
Feedback	x	x	x
Financial services			x
Health service			x
Joint consultation		x	
Library service	x	x	x
Personal contact with academic staff	x	x	x
Physical education			x
Student involvement		x	x
Students' union	x		x
Teaching methods	x	x	x
Teaching quality	x	x	x
Travel agency			
University bookshop			

5 Student Surveys as Tools to Assess Learning and Teaching in the Context of the Bologna Process

As previously stated, the Bologna Process has promoted learning and teaching as a key part of the European Higher Education Area. As such, it is important to see how much the national students' surveys are able to monitor the main areas connected to L&T.

Looking at the main topics in the selected student surveys, one can expect that teaching and learning will be covered extensively. The NSS-UK Survey includes three categories designed for monitoring L&T. Those are 'The teaching of my course', 'Learning opportunities' and 'Learning resources'. Some of these questions are inviting students to evaluate, for instance, if the staff have made the subject interesting or if the courses are intellectually stimulating. Also, IT and library resources are assessed. Studiebarometeret includes several categories on L&T, as well, such as 'Teaching', 'The study environment and infrastructure', 'Your learning outcome', 'Time spent on academic activities', 'Teaching and learning methods—usage' or 'Teaching and learning methods—contribution'. At the same time, NSRSS-RO has

categories such as 'Teaching', 'Academic infrastructure', 'Learning opportunities' or 'Evaluation, communication and feedback'.

From a comparative point of view, all three surveys include common topics such as:

– Availability of adequate spaces and proper equipment for classes and laboratories.
– Staff/teachers support for students when needed.
– Availability of individualized learning paths.
– Teaching and counselling sessions to reduce the learning gap.
– Staff/teachers engagement in teaching activities.
– Conducting class hours.
– Group work with other students.
– Learning outcomes.

At the same time, it is important to see if new dimensions can also be monitored through national student surveys. In this respect, the authors have selected the main topics included in the latest Ministerial Communique. The 2018 ministerial communique is extremely relevant for the subject as it has dedicated an entire chapter to innovation in teaching and learning (Table 4).

Largely, all three selected student surveys approach several topics that are mentioned in the Paris communique. Similarly, NSRSS-RO is the only questionnaire that tackles inter-disciplinary programmes.

Table 4 Paris Communique references related to learning and teaching from selected national student surveys

	NSS-UK	Studiebarometeret-NOR	NSRSS-RO
Collaboration in learning and teaching	x	x	x
Combine academic and work-based learning	x	x	x
Digitalisation of HE	x	x	x
Diverse learning methods	–	–	x
Encountering research or activities linked to research and innovation	–	x	–
Enhance the quality and relevance of HE systems	x	x	x
Flexible learning	–	–	–
Innovative learning and teaching practices	–	–	–
Inter-disciplinary programmes	-	-	x
Open education	–	–	–
Quality teaching	x	x	x
Student-centred learning	x	x	x

6 Conclusions

A national student survey is an important tool to assess teaching and learning in HEIs. Even though we expected to identify a larger percentage of questions directly linked to these two categories, NSS-UK has 37.03% of the items connected to T&L, while Studiebarometeret has 28.57%, and NSRSS-RO has 29.51%. There are several categories of questions that are common for all three questionnaires, such as availability of adequate spaces and proper equipment for classes and laboratories, staff/teachers support for students when needed, availability of individualized learning paths, teaching and counselling sessions to reduce the learning gap, staff/teachers engagement in teaching activities, conducting class hours, group work with other students or learning outcomes.

Both in the case of the United Kingdom and Norway, the results tend to improve as higher education institutions are pushing for changes in order to increase students' satisfaction. Even though there are some risks, such as students fatigue when they have to take part to several surveys, the data coming from these national surveys is important for a broad number of categories, including prospective students. The latter category shows interest especially on student satisfaction and graduate employment (Loukkola and Zhang 2010).

National Student Surveys can play an important role in gathering data from HEIs at country level based on the same methodology. As the importance of enhancing data collection was mentioned both in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) and in Bucharest (2012) communique, it is to be taken into consideration if such an instrument could become a general one for the European Higher Education Area. If so, besides the common part for all countries, every state could add several questions in order to respond to their national priorities. Therefore, the latter can lead to more in-depth research on the aspects influencing students' satisfaction and where universities need to do more in order to improve their services.

Also, the subjects approached by student surveys are more than relevant both for the stakeholders and for individuals. HEI can use the results in a benchmarking process, which is promoted through Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Measuring constantly the students' satisfaction on these items can show in what degree a university has improved, from year to year. Governing bodies of higher education can improve their evidence-based decisions and evaluate how students' perception is evolving periodically. We still do not have enough data to conclude exactly what was the impact of Studiebarometeret or National Student Survey (after TEF was implemented) on enhancing student-centred learning, for instance.

Since the surveys we analyse compound a significant percent of the topics approached by the Paris communique related to teaching and learning, we consider that in the future, a student survey that can be applied in all EHEA countries is a desirable purpose and should be discussed in the Bologna Follow-Up Group. It is also the most plausible and the most effective action that EHEA member states

could take in order to question the students' perception on changes triggered by the Bologna reforms and how they perceive the educational realities at grassroots level.

As policy-makers are starting to adopt educational policies based on the research in the field rather than different Lisbon Strategy indicators (Ion and Iucu 2015), a national student survey represents a middle way between the two perspectives, as it has an important public impact and it also has relevant results that can lead to substantially improved policies.

Additionally, adding a dynamic part to the questionnaire, as in the case of Studiebarometeret and NSRSS-RO, can be extremely useful for the ministries responsible for higher education and for other national stakeholders when they are developing or revising public policies.

National student surveys can become an important instrument in the process of monitoring the enhancement of teaching and learning in particular EHEA countries that can also be extended to the whole EHEA. They represent an instrument that includes a significant number of the topics assumed in the ministerial communiques.

Also, the compliance of national student surveys to several ESG items is remarkable. Such questionnaires should definitely be used in order to enhance the standards and guidelines that are eligible for that. As both HEIs and QA agencies struggle in trying to provide a vision as close to reality as possible, these types of questionnaire represent a robust solution.

Based on the examined good practices, a set of Guiding principles can be set for such endeavours, for countries that would like to develop their own national survey, but also for a further survey that could be jointly implemented throughout EHEA. Stakeholders should be involved from the design/development stage to the promotion, implementation and review stage, as this offers greater consistency to the whole process. Also, the frequency of its application needs to be carefully planned to take into account other reporting processed that students need to provide, in order to avoid 'survey fatigue'.

These questionnaires should include clear reviewing processes. These should be predictable and should follow certain goals to improve the student surveys. The use of the results of the survey should be clear because their improper use (e.g. in the funding mechanism) can lead to unintended consequences towards the most critical students while moving away from an improvement approach. It is very important to know from the beginning, for instance, what audience do the results target or what was the purpose of designing such a questionnaire. Also, there is a need to set out clearly how the results will be integrated in the decision-making or policy-making processes, if there is the case.

Furthermore, student surveys should aim at providing universities with information that could be used in a reflexive way, as it is a valuable source in order to improve the quality of learning and teaching and other related services. Elements concerning diverse learning methods, flexible learning and open education, items regarding encountering research or activities linked to research and innovation should be considered by both old and new national student surveys.

As in order to have an efficient learning and teaching process, student support services also need to be of high quality. This should include proper accommodation,

access to counselling services or university recreation and intramurals. Health services should be part of any national student survey as the number of students that are dealing with such problems is increasing, especially in terms of mental health issues. Moreover, student surveys should include topics such as availability of adequate spaces and proper equipment for classes and laboratories, staff and/or teachers support for students when needed, availability of individualized learning paths, teaching and counselling sessions to reduce the learning gap, staff and/or teachers engagement in teaching activities, such as conducting class hours/group work with other students or learning outcomes, as it was observed by reviewing the three surveys and the literature concerning this topic.

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The Future of the EHEA-Principles, Challenges and Ways Forward (Coordinated by Sjur Bergan and Liviu Matei)

The Future of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area: New Perspectives on a Recurring Topic

Sjur Bergan and Liviu Matei

1 The European Higher Education Area at 21: *Fata Morgana* or Continuing Policy Journey?

The future of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have been debated for more than 20 years (Bergan and Deca 2018).[1] From the very start, even as the implementation of this continental-wide project in higher education got underway and in parallel to historical analyses ("looking back" too) that begun slowly to emerge, the future of the EHEA has been a constant preoccupation. It is perhaps in the nature of things that while the future can be close or distant, it never quite arrives, like a *fata morgana*, so that any discussion of "the future" can in principle be endless. Or, it could be that in this case discussions about the future indicate continuing uncertainty about the substance, shape and timeline of a European area for higher education. As we are completing the second decade of the Bologna Process and, if we take a formal approach, the first decade of the EHEA, this debate nevertheless takes on added urgency and includes some new elements. We are encouraged by the fact that few if any voices have been heard advocating an end to the EHEA. We therefore disregard this option here.

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[1] The Bologna Process, launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999, is a voluntary intergovernmental process in higher education based on jointly agreed principles, objectives and standards. Currently, there are 48 European states implementing the Bologna Process, which constitute the European Higher Education Area (EHEA); a 49th country (San Marino) may accede at the June 2020 Ministerial conference. The EHEA, as the common European space for higher education, is considered a result of the Bologna Process and it has formally been in existence since 2010.

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When the EHEA was formally established a decade ago (Bologna Process 2010), it could be seen as a transition from a development process to a steady state of affairs. In this view, the EHEA would be seen as an established common area with defined characteristics, such as a European-wide overarching qualifications framework, agreed standards for quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications, a common understanding of the social dimension of higher education, and a clear "foreign policy" defined by the "global dimension" strategy (Bologna Process 2007) and the Bologna Policy Forum,[2] which was launched in 2009. Not least, the EHEA is based on a set of fundamental values accepted by all its members and expected to be respected by all. In the Paris Communiqué, these are described as follows:

> Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA (Bologna Process 2018a: 1).

These values are a slight development of what the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG[3]) in 2004 described as the "principles underpinning the Bologna Process":

– Mobility of students and staff;
– Autonomous universities;
– Student participation in the governance of higher education;
– Public responsibility for higher education;
– The importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process (Bologna Process 2004: 2).

The understanding and practical pursuit of fundamental values in the EHEA are not unproblematic. In this particular case, it should be noted that there is, of course, a difference between fundamental values and underpinning principles that can explain some of the differences between the two lists above, but this difference cannot explain, for example, the absence of reference to academic freedom or to staff participation in governance in the 2004 BFUG document. In fact, academic freedom is a particularly pressing matter regarding both the present and the future of the EHEA.

The discussions about the future also touch on the question of whether or not the EHEA, and the project behind it, is a success or failure (Matei 2018), whether it has been completed or not, and whether the EHEA is a settled reality or one that is still in movement. Seeing the EHEA as a static area would ignore two essential facts: it continues to develop, and the implementation of policies adopted and defined through successive Ministerial communiqués is imperfect and remains so even a decade after the formal launch (European Commission//EACEA/Eurydice 2018).[4]

As part of the development of the EHEA, its terminology has also evolved. Luckily, what was originally referred to as the "external dimension", making a clear distinction

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[2]http://www.ehea.info/pid34364/bologna-policy-forum.html, accessed February 27, 2020.

[3]http://www.ehea.info/page-the-bologna-follow-up-group, accessed February 27, 2020.

[4]The 2018 Implementation Report is the latest one available at the time of writing. A new Implementation Report will be published in time for the 2020 Ministerial Conference, but it will have a slightly different scope than previous reports in that it will focus on some longer-term trends in the development of the EHEA.

between "them" and "us", is now generally referred to as the "global dimension" or "the EHEA in a global setting" (Bologna Process 2007). Nevertheless, we would argue that the Policy Forum, as a tool to promote this external dimension, has not found a form that makes it an attractive platform for cooperation between the EHEA and other regions of the world. A suggested change of name to the Global (rather than "Bologna") Policy Forum for the 2020 edition is unlikely to change this perception.

Along with the note about the incompleteness of the implementation of EHEA and the related many difficulties and shortcomings, it is also important to note a series of remarkable achievements. There was good reason to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Bologna Declaration, as was duly done in June 2019, and appropriately at the University of Bologna.[5] There was much to celebrate; the Bologna Process has changed higher education in Europe in ways those who signed the Bologna Declaration could probably not quite have imagined (as confirmed by at least three of them[6] who were present at the celebration). As ministers responsible for higher education in all 48 EHEA countries prepare to gather in Rome a year later, in 2020,[7] the focus will nevertheless be more on the challenges ahead, on the future of the EHEA, than the achievements of the past. These challenges are also the focus of the session on "The future of the EHEA—principles, challenges and ways forward" at the 2020 edition of the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference, which we had the honor to coordinate. The chapters in this section of the current volume are based on papers presented in this session about "the future". They offer a variety of research-informed perspectives on the future of the EHEA, trying to make a contribution to this topic that goes beyond either the desolate or the enthusiastic talk about any *fata morgana.*

Based on research, systematic scrutiny and analysis, the papers also discuss possible further developments. In a gesture of engagement and responsibility, they try to identify possible lessons and ways to address continuing and new challenges. There are also implicit or even direct recommendations for possible courses of action that are put forward.

2   Changing Contexts, Emerging Issues

The Bologna Declaration and its emphasis on structural reforms to improve completion rates as well as international mobility responded to urgent issues with which most European countries were faced at the turn of the millennium. These were issues that could be addressed through fairly loosely organized cooperation in a policy area in which national authorities are jealous of their prerogatives, as shown for the EU member states, at least, through the Maastricht Treaty (Council of the European Communities/Commission of the European Communities 1992). Education is

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[5]http://bolognaprocess2019.it/, accessed February 27, 2020.

[6] Agneta Bladh (Sweden), Tatjana Koķe (Latvia) and Pavel Zgaga (Slovenia).

[7]The Ministerial conference has now been postponed from June to November 2020 because of the COVID pandemic.

one of the areas in which the EU does not have exclusive competence and where it was considered preferable to apply the principle of subsidiary contained in the EU Treaty.[8]

Two decades later, European societies have evolved, and new issues have moved to the forefront of the professional, policy and political debates in higher education. Implementation of structural reforms—a major motivation for starting the Bologna Process in the first place—remains important, both because these reforms are essential and because putting them into practice takes longer than originally foreseen. Issues around the main approach to implementation gave rise to what was probably the most heated discussions ever in the BFUG in 2015–2018. In essence, the argument was between those who favored recourse to peer learning alone to promote the EHEA objectives and those who, while accepting the importance of peer learning, wished to see it complemented by more explicit follow-up of EHEA member countries that were far from implementing specific commitments, as shown by the Bologna Implementation Reports. The discussion resulted in a "[s]tructured peer support approach for the implementation of the three Bologna key commitments" (Bologna Process 2018: 5) and the setting up of a Bologna Implementation Coordination Group in the 2018–2020 work program.[9]

More broadly, the contentious debate on implementation reflects divergent views of the character of the EHEA itself. What does it mean that the EHEA is a voluntary cooperation? Is it voluntary to join, but once a country joined, it is required to implement its commitments, or are EHEA members free to consider commitments rather as optional guidelines and policy aspirations (Bergan 2015; Bergan and Deca 2018; Harmsen 2015; Vidjarsdóttir 2018)? Even if the focus on peer support in the 2018–2020 work program was considered a reasonable compromise by most of those engaged in this difficult debate, the underlying different approaches to the EHEA remain and must be expected to color, at least in part, the further debate on the "future of Bologna". One of the key points of discussion in the section on "the Future of the EHEA" at the 2020 Bologna Process Researchers' Forum was whether peer support and peer learning are by themselves sufficient measures to ensure that the fundamental values of the EHEA are respected. While we would not claim there was consensus among participants, those who spoke on this issue tended to believe that stronger instruments will be required for the future. At the risk of upsetting a compromise that was reached at great expense of energy and adrenalin in the BFUG, this discussion is likely to continue into the next decade of the EHEA, as it will be at the core of a continuing debate not only about what it means to be an Area but also what it means to be European.

At the same time, in addition to older issues (which one may call the original or foundational "Bologna sins"), new ones emerge that are also linked to the very character and organization of the EHEA. Some of them do, for example, raise questions

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[8]https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/7/the-principle-of-subsidiarity,   accessed February 27, 2020.

[9]http://www.ehea.info/page-Bologna-Implementation-Coordination-Group, accessed February 27, 2020.

about whether a relatively loosely organized cooperation between public authorities (remember that the EHEA is considered to be a voluntary inter-governmental initiative) is the right forum for addressing them. The financing of higher education is undoubtedly an important issue in all countries, and countries can learn from each other's experience (Matei 2012), but it is less clear that developing common guidelines or commitments in the framework of the EHEA would be the best course of action, beyond the affirmation of higher education as a public good and public responsibility (Bologna Process 2001, 2003) and a commitment to "securing the highest possible level of public funding for higher education and drawing on other appropriate sources" (Bologna Process 2010: 1).

Another set of issues is linked to learning and teaching (covered in another section of this volume). Learning and teaching are, of course, one of the prime tasks of higher education, but the main actors are students, faculty, and institutions—not the public authorities. As far as public authorities are concerned, the main question is whether they can help at all, and then how to help develop good practice in learning and teaching in the EHEA through incentives and through reform of the education systems. A particular issue concerns the use of Artificial Intelligence and, more broadly, information technology, which is no longer labeled a "new technology". Many higher education institutions are of course well advanced both in research in these areas and in using the technologies in learning and teaching. We would also argue that quality education will in the future depend largely on the extent to which programs and institutions have recourse to a variety of pedagogies and modes of delivery: the question is less whether learning and teaching should be online or face to face than how programs and institutions make use of both. Again, the challenge for the EHEA in the immediate future is to define how public authorities can, through a relatively loosely organized European cooperation, best further policies and practice in an area in which students, faculty, and institutions are the main actors.

The social dimension of higher education has been on the "Bologna agenda" since the Prague Ministerial Conference (Bologna Process 2001). Since 2015, the social dimension has been linked more explicitly to the broader societal mission of higher education. In Yerevan, Ministers underlined that

> **Making our systems more inclusive** is an essential aim for the EHEA as our populations become more and more diversified, also due to immigration and demographic changes. We undertake to widen participation in higher education and support institutions that provide relevant learning activities in appropriate contexts for different types of learners, including lifelong learning (Bologna Process 2015a: 2; bold in the original).

In Paris, they stated:

> We recognise that further effort is required to strengthen the social dimension of higher education. In order to meet our commitment that the student body entering and graduating from European higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations, we will improve access and completion by under-represented and vulnerable groups (Bologna Process 2018a: 4).

At the same time, the broad agreement that the social dimension of higher education is important has not been matched by agreement on actual policy measures,

whether at the European or national level (European Commission//EACEA/Eurydice 2018: 214). In June 2020, Ministers are expected to adopt "European Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education" (Bologna Process 2020a), which are currently available in draft form and which will be further discussed by the BFUG.

The fundamental values of the EHEA were once taken for granted but have now surfaced as one of the most difficult issues facing the EHEA. The reason is that over the past few years, we have seen increasing violations of these values, as underlined in the Paris Communiqué:

> Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA. Having seen these fundamental values challenged in recent years in some of our countries, we strongly commit to promoting and protecting them in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation (Bologna Process 2018a: 1).

The situation of the Central European University, which has been forced by a series of politically motivated actions initiated by a national government to move most of its teaching and learning and research activities from Hungary to Austria, is an emblematic example but there is, alas, no shortage of others, such as legislation in Turkey and Hungary more broadly or the revoking of the license of the European University in St Petersburg in March 2017 by Russian authorities. We mention these examples because they are the ones included in the latest Bologna Implementation Report (European Commission//EACEA/Eurydice 2018: 42), but the list is far from complete. There is even talk about a crisis of academic freedom presently in the EHEA altogether (Matei 2020). It is also worth recalling that implementation of the fundamental values of the EHEA was included in the Belarus Roadmap (Bologna Process 2015b) and that the assessment of the implementation of this part of the Roadmap was critical (Bologna Process 2018b: 15). Aspects of the fundamental values of higher education have also been the topic not only of the work of the Magna Charta Observatory,[10] but also of other organizations. In June 2019, the Council of Europe and other partners organized a Global Forum in Strasbourg on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the future of democracy (Council of Europe 2019; Bergan et al. forthcoming).

As with the social dimension of higher education, however, agreeing that the fundamental values are and should be at the core of the EHEA does not easily translate into agreed policy or performance criteria, as illustrated by the quite perfunctory coverage of these issues in the latest Bologna Implementation Report (European Commission//EACEA/Eurydice 2018: 40–46; see also Jungblut, Maassen and Elken in this volume). The BFUG therefore appointed a Task Force to put forward recommendations for future monitoring of values. The current draft (Bologna Process 20120b) is still under discussion in the BFUG; the intention is to submit a proposal for adoption at the June 2020 Ministerial Conference.

The discussion of fundamental values is challenging not only because they touch on the soul of the EHEA but also because they concern the identity of its member

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[10] http://www.magna-charta.org/, accessed February 27, 2020.

countries and their commitment to this common space of policy dialogue and practice. It may be painful for a minister to recognize that his or her country lags behind in developing its qualifications framework or quality assurance arrangements, and the discussions in the BFUG on implementation and non-implementation between 2015 and 2018 underscored the point. Nevertheless, for a minister to admit that his or her country is deficient in academic freedom, institutional autonomy, or student and staff participation in higher education governance—as judged against clear European standards and common references—is infinitely more difficult, as it amounts to admitting openly that the country is less than democratic. It is perhaps a sign of health that making this admission is difficult, but it is not a sign of societal health that some governments try to make a virtue of being less than democratic, sometimes by attempting to redefine democracy by combining it with alien concepts like "illiberal".

3   Where Is the EHEA Heading?

This question, which has been asked almost since the Bologna Process was launched, is approached from three quite different angles in the present volume.

Writing from the multiple perspective of a long-time professor of history at an Italian university and a leading actor in international projects like TUNING as well as her current experience as Vice Chair of the BFUG, Ann Katherine Isaacs looks at the major challenges with which the EHEA will be faced in the next decade. One of them is that while discussions of new priorities have often faced on which specific issues should be addressed, the EHEA now needs to develop (finally!) a convincing vision. Focusing on the ongoing discussion within the BFUG, the author considers how this group—and by extension the ministers meeting in Rome in June 2020—could develop such a vision for the EHEA for the next decade. She also explores whether this vision could be furthered by reference to a European higher education community or system.

Approaching the success and the challenges of the EHEA from a political science perspective, Jens Jungblut, Peter Maassen, and Mari Elken argue that there is good reason to celebrate the first two decades of the EHEA and underline that it has played an important role in reforming the higher education structures in Europe. At the same time, it faces serious challenges, not least as concerns identification with and respect for its fundamental values. In this area, the situation is even more challenging now than when the Bologna Process was launched or the EHEA formally established. A shift in focus from the structural and technical progress made to underlying political tensions and conflicts would coincide with a declining political interest in the EHEA in most member states, in spite of the fact that the 2018 Ministerial Conference in Paris had stronger political representation than the conferences immediately preceding it.

Ligia Deca and Robert Harmsen also use a political science concept—soft governance—in their analysis of the EHEA. They see the EHEA as a relatively successful example of soft governance. Despite being successful in many ways, however, the EHEA is faced with challenges that touch on its very direction and purpose, as

exemplified by the often bitter debate on implementation/ non-implementation in the 2015–2018 work period. The authors also explore the role of the EHEA as a policy forum and a community of values. The discussion about the nature of the EHEA also links to the broader debate about "Europe"—often meaning the EU—and cannot remain untouched by current trends toward Euroscepticism. This trend is most explicitly exemplified by Brexit but is found in many EU member States.

4   Specific Challenges Toward 2030

A subset of articles considers specific aspects of the development of the EHEA, ranging from autonomy and accountability through the organization of studies and quality assurance to the challenges of establishing a more independent Secretariat not linked to the hosts of the upcoming Ministerial Conference.

Veronika Kupriyanova, Enora Bennetot Pruvot and Thomas Estermann explore the relationship between autonomy, efficiency and accountability. Drawing on the EUA's work on institutional autonomy and the University Autonomy Scorecard as well as the higher education efficiency framework developed by the EUA, the authors explore the impact of regulatory frameworks on efficiency in institutional management, how autonomy can be used to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, and how efficiency can support autonomy. They consider all issues in relation to the various dimensions of autonomy developed by the EUA Scorecard: organizational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy. They suggest the capacity of institutions to manage funds internally, select and promote their staff, and design their academic offer to match the needs as institutions identify them are key success factors.

In the context of the discussion about present and future challenges in the EHEA and common values in higher education, Liviu Matei explores what he calls the "crisis of academic freedom" in the EHEA. His paper also looks at actual and potential efforts to overcome this crisis, in its two dimensions: intellectual (academic freedom has been severely neglected in EHEA intellectual and policy debates, there is no common conceptual reference for academic freedom in the EHEA) and empiric (academic freedom is challenged, threatened or directly under attack in almost all regions of the EHEA). Designing a way out of the crisis requires a coordinated effort of charting a new course for academic freedom. A comparative analysis of who is doing this, who is charting the shape or course for academic freedom in Europe and the United States, reveals surprising differences. The most striking of all is the complete absence of higher education institutions themselves in Europe from these discussions and efforts aiming at charting a course for academic freedom.

Tim Birtwistle and Robert Wagenaar explore the impact on higher education learning of the quite extensive and rapid changes in society and the labor market we are currently witnessing. To meet these challenges, higher education institutions—as well as public authorities as custodians of education systems—should reassess the way generic and subject specific competences are combined and balanced. Even more, however, systems and institutions will need to broaden opportunities for life-

long learning by enabling learners to design their own learning pathways based on three key components: (1) a core focused on a particular field of studies (thematic or disciplinary); (2) a fully integrated set of transferable skills; and (3) a large set of learning units of various sizes covering a flexible curriculum. They suggest developing a broad offer of micro-credits should be an important part of this effort.

Sjur Bergan and Irina Geantă discuss the feasibility of setting up a permanent Bologna Secretariat, in the light of the broader challenges to the EHEA over the next decade. While this issue has been considered by the BFUG as well as by a previous Bologna Process Researchers' Conference (Bergan 2015), this discussion has so far not moved much beyond listing potential obstacles. The authors explore challenges related to the tasks of a permanent Secretariat as well as a set of issues related to its status, location, financing, and staff. They consider relations to the authorities of both the country hosting the Secretariat and those hosting successive Ministerial Conferences. Without arguing that a permanent Secretariat is a necessary condition for the EHEA to develop further, the authors identify a set of conditions they argue must and could be fulfilled if the BFUG—and more broadly the EHEA—is to be served by a more stable Secretariat than one provided by and linked to the hosts of the forthcoming Ministerial conference.

5 Conclusion

An emphasis on defining an overarching vision for the EHEA as we look toward its third decade should be welcomed. This vision should include, among other things, a more precise and careful conceptual and policy articulation of the fundamental values of higher education in the context of the EHEA and a more clear, flexible but workable governance structure. The EHEA has largely been successful in devising and implementing structural reforms, even if the continuing bitter debate on implementation shows that putting policies into practice has been difficult, and success has been less than complete.

However, both the reforms carried out so far and successive discussions of new priorities have largely been presented as a set of individual measures, perhaps with the Working Groups on "new goals" in the 2015–2018 period (Bologna Process 2018c) as a particularly poignant example of measures that each had their merits, but the rationale for which was not argued in terms of how they would develop the EHEA as such.

Our contention is that while the EHEA has carried out successful reforms in the past and demonstrates potential for the next decade, it has lacked the will or the ability to couch these in terms of an overall rationale or vision. Structural reforms all imply technical challenges, and these have to a considerable extent been met. But structural reforms are also undertaken for a broader purpose, or at least they should be. In the case of structural reforms, part of the rationale has in fact been articulated: reducing drop-out rates and providing both students and employers with competences and qualifications at different levels. Except for doctoral qualifications, which are at

the top of the qualifications framework and therefore do not lead to further formal qualifications even if they often lead to a lifetime of learning and research, every qualification in the higher education system has two objectives: qualifying for further study, i.e. access to a study program at a higher level, and qualifying for appropriate and meaningful employment. As important as these purposes are, however, they have not been articulated in relation to a higher purpose: how education contributes to developing the kind of society in which we would want to live.

Until the Ministerial Conference in 2020 and the adoption of the Rome Communiqué, the jury will perhaps be out on whether the next decade of the EHEA will be based on a coherent vision. In closing this introduction to the consideration of the "future of Bologna" at the 2020 edition of the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference, we nevertheless venture to offer our own view on what the EHEA of the next decade should strive for.

We cannot imagine an EHEA that would truly serve European societies at large, its academic community of scholars and students, and its democratic traditions unless it offers students, staff, and graduates an opportunity to move freely throughout all of the EHEA for purposes of work or study.

Committing to this seemingly simple vision has much broader implications than what may appear at first sight. We cannot move freely unless the full value of our qualifications is recognized, so that we do not have to leave part of their real value behind at the "border" between systems because of less than fair recognition practices, incompatible qualifications frameworks, or lacking quality assurance mechanisms—so the structures of our education systems will still be essential. We cannot move freely if the ways in which we learn and teach do not encourage us to reflect critically or if they ignore technological developments and their opportunities as well as their pitfalls. We cannot move freely if our education systems and institutions do not enable all of us to develop our potential and aspirations to the full, either because of barriers to access or because of barriers to successful completion.

Most importantly, we cannot move freely if the political conditions of the EHEA block us. Democracy and education quality both require academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Higher education must help develop a culture of ethics, transparency and integrity, and it must draw on the contributions and creativity of students and staff by involving hem in higher education governance.

As we write these lines, the importance of higher education and research has been illustrated in a quite dramatic way. The transmittable disease that has become known as the COVID-19 pandemic shows in at least four ways why higher education and research are essential. Firstly, we need to improve our knowledge and understanding of this particular virus through research. At the time of writing, there are simply too many things we do not know about this virus to take fully effective measures, even if research seems to be progressing relatively fast, building, of course on basic research that has been developed over generations. Secondly, we need to disseminate the knowledge and understanding we *do* have about the virus, and also an understanding of the limits of that knowledge, among non-specialists. Higher education must play a key role here. Thirdly, public authorities must develop policies to meet the threat posed by the virus in reasonable and efficient ways, but without overreacting. Again,

this cannot be done without the contribution of higher education and research. And, fourthly, we must meet the kind of populist reactions that seem to believe the disease is carried through a specific nationality or passport with arguments that are easy to understand but nevertheless based on facts that can be complex and that withstand the test of democratic debate.

The example of the COVID-19 virus provides an urgent example not only of why higher education and research are important, but also of why a European Higher Education Area built on structures and values, teaching and learning, excellence and inclusion is essential to our future.

A European Higher Education Area that were not built on and did not help develop a culture of democracy, and hence were not respectful of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, ethics and transparency, and student and staff participation in higher education governance, would not provide quality education and would not help build the kind of society in which we would like to live ourselves or that we would want to leave to our children or grandchildren.

Our challenge, then, is to build on the first two decades of the EHEA to make sure that when it reaches the age of 30, it will be an area of coherent higher education policy and practice that makes Europe not only competitive but inspiring, an area others will not only want to compete against but to be inspired by and emulate.

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A New Concept for the Future EHEA

Ann Katherine Isaacs

1 A Time, a Place and a Need for the Bologna Process

The motivations behind the Bologna Process were many. Indeed, the buildup to the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Process 1999) and its signing must be seen as a polyhedral phenomenon, a multi-faceted confluence of different motivations, experiences and perspectives, many of which continue to underlie and influence subsequent developments. One important factor at the time was the realization that while Europe was becoming increasingly connected, politically and economically, its higher education systems were so diverse that real communication and direct interaction among them were very problematic, or basically non-existent. If the future goal was to be free circulation of goods and people, it was reasonable to hope that, one day, people also would be able to circulate freely to universities anywhere in Europe, and the resulting degrees allow them to seek employment in countries other than that in which they were born or earned their degrees. Another consideration for several countries was the hope that the rapidly growing cohorts of young people desiring a university education would be able to obtain qualifications useful for employment more quickly, thanks to the relatively short time necessary to complete one of the new First Cycle or Bachelor degrees (Isaacs 2006). It was hoped that having an intermediate short-term goal would reduce both the number of dropouts and the number of the many who did not drop out but remained in the system for many years before receiving their degree. After the Sorbonne Declaration (Bologna Process 1998) was signed by four large countries, authorities in central and eastern as well as other western European countries saw the potential benefit of being included in a framework that could coordinate efforts and create a recognizable 'European system', able to compete credibly with American universities (Barblan 2011). The use of credits and a system of sequential degrees would require radical change in most countries but offered the possibility of

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bringing them into closer communication while allowing and even enhancing their very real cultural and linguistic diversities. The ECTS[1] pilot project had shown that, although difficult, this was possible, and nearly thirty countries responded to the Italian Minister's invitation to the conference in Bologna that launched the Bologna Process in June 1999.

Notwithstanding the rhetorical success of the idea that universities form a world apart, a realm where universal ideals about expanding human knowledge without regard for national borders hold sway, historical reality has been very different, especially in recent centuries. European universities as they existed in the 1990s were products and also among the creators, shapers and supporters of nation states, national cultures and national literatures as well as national economies and, when required, national war efforts. Nineteenth and twentieth century European universities had the legitimate task of educating their national elites and preparing their bureaucracies, and they often became important actors in formulating competitive and even divisive national projects and visions.

Before the official beginning of the Bologna Process, the Magna Charta Universitatum (1988) and the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Council of Europe/UNESCO 1997) aimed to bring the connected and international character of higher education back to the fore and to give it reality by breaking down the barriers built up over time around separate national systems.

It was not by chance that an initiative such as the Magna Charta Universitatum looked back to the pre-national Middle Ages and to Renaissance Humanism, when supposedly there had been a connected intellectual world of scholars and scholarship, and where 'international mobility' in pursuit of knowledge, collaboration and sharing was a given. To what extent this imagined reality corresponds to historical fact is not important here. Rather, the vision of an ideal past, based on the University of Bologna as the Alma Mater Studiorum, the Nourishing Mother, and a template for all universities, furnished a useful model and inspiration for a more open future, as did Erasmus of Rotterdam, an example of an accomplished and tolerant Humanist scholar and teacher, Latin-speaking and writing, able to travel from one part to another of a Europe until it was divided by the Reformation. Hence the relevance and resonance of ERASMUS, the well-chosen acronym for the longwinded "EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students".

Most of the higher education systems existing in the European Union at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) had roots not so much in the Middle Ages as in the French Revolution and its aftermath: the Napoleonic founding of the Imperial University, its breakup, and the numerous subsequent creations connected with national unifications, awakenings, and re-awakenings—up to and including those following the demise of the USSR (Gerbod 2004; Rüegg and Sadlak 2011). There were exceptions, of course, and in many cases, traditional aspects

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[1]European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, originally established as the European Credit Transfer System (hence the abbreviation) in 1988. For an overview, see https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en, accessed 20 January 2020.

inherited from a previous age subsisted. But in recent centuries, most universities, whether traditional or innovative in their academic organization, were dedicated to the fashioning and the promulgation of a national culture, literature and language, rather than—or in any case, in addition to—the more general ideal of the development of knowledge for the sake of all humankind. Today's Humboldt University (so named only in 1949) was indeed founded by Wilhelm von Humboldt, giving rise to the much cited but varied and even contradictory images of the 'Humboldtian university' (Östling 2018); he did so however in 1809, as head of the Directorate of Education, a subsection of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, and the result, the Friedrich-Wilhelm University, was part and parcel of an intensive state-building program.

One result of their history and strong links to and dependence on governments was that European higher education systems were organized in national contexts, on the basis of national legislation, and under the authority and often the firm control of their Ministries of Education. Traditions differed with regard to the extent and nature of academic freedom, financial and academic autonomy, the structure of studies, the status of professors, and much more. Nonetheless, and it seems relevant in the present context, in almost all countries, few universities could do much to modify or adapt their curricula, to update them or to change their teaching methods radically, without the consent of or even orders from their Ministries.

The principles declared to lie at the base of the Sorbonne and Bologna agreements were, inter alia, the fundamental values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, but not only those. More broadly, we might say that the inspiration, since the time of the Sorbonne Declaration and before, was to proclaim and make real the knowledge that higher education has a duty to provide for society and the world, underlining its character as an autonomous international space where freedom of expression, scientific and intellectual endeavour and the education of young human beings and citizens can take place in an optimal way, beyond national borders—indeed using the possibilities of mobility to enhance critical understanding. To accomplish this, however, clearly the commitment of governments was essential.

The first two decades of the Bologna Process have often placed at its centre the very necessary changes agreed by the member countries in order to create compatible systems of studies and to facilitate communication and transparency among them. This work is ongoing and needs to be completed. However, we now must attempt to visualize the future steps.

2 Towards the Future

Since the Bologna Declaration was signed, there have been numerous important changes in the ways universities connect with and reach out to society, not only in their local and regional areas. At the same time, we have become more aware of the limits that our common efforts, conceived in a more optimistic era, may encounter because of new political, economic and societal challenges.

The celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Bologna Declaration were joyful, as well as thoughtful, and brought together many of the protagonists and interested parties to evaluate what has been accomplished.[2] That moment of enthusiasm gave new life to the idea of the EHEA, which in some quarters has come to be seen with ennui, if not open hostility. The Bologna Process received and deserved a shot in the arm, stimulus to go forward resolutely. At the same time, its supporters asked themselves how to preserve this new level of energy and aspiration. New objectives? Measurable targets? Or is it better to concentrate on existing commitments, hoping to arrive at full compliance in all countries within a relatively short time?

Many concluded that 2030 is an appropriate target date for reaching another level of progress in the Bologna Process. The obvious place to make manifest future goals is the Ministerial Conference to be held in Rome in 2020.[3] On that occasion, it would be useful for the Ministers to propose and commit their countries to new goals in order to motivate and strengthen cooperation among the countries, organizations, institutions and stakeholders involved in the future development of the EHEA.

3   A European Higher Education System?

The first such possible goal publicly proposed for discussion was to have in place a European Higher Education System by 2030. This idea was propounded by Michael Murphy, newly elected president of the EUA, at the Bologna Celebration itself, and on other occasions. Exactly what Murphy intended and why he proposed it with such vigour seems quite clear: "We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions". In other words, the European higher education must be able to represent itself as one, as a single 'system', able to compete with other 'systems'. In fact, he added, "It is time to examine what was meant by 'European higher education system' and what that system must look like if Europe is to be one of the four or five large geopolitical regions defining global economic, political, cultural and societal norms during the 21st century. [...] We must design a comprehensive system including all universities in deep transnational networks, harvesting and coordinating excellence across the continent".[4]

This proposal reminds us that in Europe excellence does not mean elitism but rather excellence formed through cooperation of diverse institutions and cultures in a guaranteed framework. Nonetheless, the central message is competitive and

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[2]See http://bolognaprocess2019.it/, accessed 20 January 2020.

[3]See http://www.ehea.info/page-ehea-ministerial-conferece-rome-2020, accessed 20 January 2020.

[4]https://eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/121:the-bologna-process-look-back,-snapshot-and-foresight.html; see also https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xy0h6l3cho4&feature=emb_title, both accessed 20 January 2020.

focuses on the need for a "system" in order to represent European higher education effectively in a competitive world. We are invited "to champion the creation of a 'European University System' that will partner with and compete successfully with those emerging in the other great regions of our world [...] Europe's universities must be the powerhouses of European creativity, innovation and success" and, hence, to give stronger support to European higher education institutions "they must be networked, resourced, autonomous, accountable and free to be so".[5]

The proposal encountered mixed reactions. It was generally understood, perhaps somewhat out of context, to mean that the basic rules of the EHEA have been long established and that it is high time to ensure that they are applied fully by all member countries. It is significant that this was understood as the only way of establishing a 'system', respected (and enforced) by all in such a way that studies carried out in any EHEA higher education institution would be recognized by all the others, and so that a compact EHEA could make its presence felt around the world. Such an idea immediately clashes with the fact that there is no public authority at European level competent for the formal organization of education provision and gives rise to the fear that such an authority might be needed, desired or somehow imposed.

The mention of "deep transnational networks" suggests a somewhat different strategy: it points towards the idea that 'groups of Universities', such as those cooperating in the new Erasmus+ European Universities alliances, will be induced to pressurize their governments into completing the tasks set by the EHEA so that the planned cooperation can indeed take place (for example, on joint degrees, as well as the seemingly more complex questions of transferability of tenure and the like). This understanding of the function and the possible effects of the European Universities scheme appears to be aligned with the hopes of the European Commission that the alliances will push forward the 'automatic recognition' agenda, and in general induce countries to take their EHEA commitments more seriously.[6] It is true that if the European Universities alliances are to have such powerful effects on the shape of the EHEA, it will be necessary at the very least to include the member countries not considered 'Programme countries' in the European Universities calls.

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Inter alia, according to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2020, p. 126, "European Universities" are expected to commit, "in cooperation with their national authorities [...] to work towards relevant policy objectives of the European Education Area, such as: multilingualism; automatic recognition of academic qualifications and learning periods abroad provided for by the participating higher education institutions within the alliance […] as well as the Bologna key commitments (quality assurance, recognition, and wherever applicable three cycle degree [sic])": https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/programme-guide_en, accessed 31 March 2020.

4   Discussions, Consultations and Debates Promoted by the BFUG

In any case, the idea that achieving the "Bologna dream" will require a new level of commitment and imagination is widespread, and within the BFUG substantial and interesting efforts have gone into investigating what form the future goals might have. The Paris Communiqué mandated the BFUG to develop further the priorities for the future of the EHEA (Bologna Process 2018). This mandate led to a series of initiatives: first to a consultation among the members of the BFUG,[7] then to a discussion in breakout groups in the BFUG meeting in Bucharest in April 2019,[8] then to asking all countries and all consultative members and partners to conduct consultations among their stakeholders or members,[9] and finally again to breakout sessions at the November 2019 BFUG meeting in Helsinki.[10]

Much of the discussion has focused on whether it is possible to develop an overall vision of the future of the EHEA which can tie together and give coherence to the many priorities and dimensions of the EHEA and the various directions that members and non-members think it should take in the future. It is planned to put the results of the national and organizational consultations carried out in the last half-year on the ehea.info website: the material is abundant and complex, and its study will yield interesting insights into the many-faceted concerns and proposals of the European higher education world.[11]

5   Which Vision? Whose Vision?

In Bucharest (April 2019), the BFUG dedicated the central part of its meeting to the discussion in breakout groups of a concept note[12] which asked them to envision the future world and to imagine the challenges such a world would pose to higher education. The results confirmed many of the existing priorities as continuing to be meaningful in the coming decade. More importantly, it drew an image of a rapidly changing technological, social and economic context, in which the needs for higher

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[7]Online survey on the governance and thematic priorities of the EHEA after 2020: http://www.ehea.info/page-governance-thematic-priorities-after-2020, accessed 20 January 2020.

[8]Preparatory Note, Bucharest BFUG meeting, 4–5 April 2019: http://www.ehea.info/Upload/65_BFUG_meeting_Bucharest/BFUG_RO_MK_65_9_3_Breakout_sessions.pdf, access- ed 20 January 2020.

[9]Materials for the Consultations, July - October 2019: http://www.ehea.info/page-governance-thematic-priorities-after-2020, accessed 20 January 2020.

[10]Helsinki BFUG meeting, 12–13 November 2019: http://www.ehea.info/page-BFUG-meeting-67, accessed 20 January 2020.

[11]The materials on a restricted area of the www.ehea.info website, are available at present only to BFUG members.

[12]Preparatory Note, Bucharest BFUG meeting, see above, note 8.

education may be strikingly different than in the past and at present. In this view, in the near future, and to an extent not yet realized by the higher education community, people at all stages in their lives will need and desire 'updates', new competences of various kinds, necessary for their professional or personal development. This vision of the future suggests that higher education institutions will no longer be able to focus exclusively, or nearly so, on offering complete 'sequential' degree programs. Rather they will need to provide smaller pieces of learning, such as are already being offered by other providers.

This vision suggests that greater flexibility will be necessary, in the sense that people must be able to go where they want in order to build the competences they need, and they must be able to do this when they want or need to. This requirement in part coincides with the original inspiration for the Bologna Process, the idea of removing barriers in order to allow circulation of students and staff to institutions in other countries. It is more radical, however, in that it suggests a widespread need for new kinds of learning, often in a virtual or open context, and a change in focus. Lifelong learning may no longer be a kind of extra with respect to normal curricular studies, but rather the core business of higher education institutions, or at least an important part of it. This has also led to the proposal of offering 'micro-credentials' (e.g. Gallagher 2019), understood in the EHEA context to be 'pieces of learning' corresponding to 3 to 5 ECTS credits. Innovative projects are now starting to elucidate the issues connected with micro-credentials, including their 'stackability', or how to manage their accumulation and recognition.

The question naturally arises as to whether the existing structural elements and transparency and quality tools (the correct use of which form the current "key commitments" for the EHEA members) will continue to have their central role. The understanding of the BFUG discussion groups is that some adaptation may be necessary, but the basics - the Qualifications Framework and ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance - will continue to constitute the foundation blocks of the EHEA.

6   A European Higher Education Community?

After the successful Bucharest discussion on the vision of the future, and in parallel with the national consultations, similar discussion groups were held during the Helsinki BFUG meeting in November 2019. In this case, the 'vision' theme was proposed from a different perspective. Members were first invited to describe the future they would like to see for European higher education in 2030 and beyond, then to focus on how to describe the desired future in a motivating way, and finally

to look at whether the concept of a "European higher education community" could be useful.[13]

The vision for the future of the EHEA that emerged appeared to be a situation where all people in the EHEA (not only citizens, an important distinction) can access, on fulfilment of the necessary formal requirements, whatever level of education they desire; where people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are not only permitted to access higher education, but encouraged and supported in developing the necessary aspirations and qualifications; and where their education provides not only competences useful for employment, but also those necessary for civic and social life, and personal culture. Inclusiveness, greater diversity, closer dialogue with other regions of the world, enhanced mobility are features of this vision, on which all appear to agree. To sum up, we can register support for a vision of higher education which should strive to serve the four purposes specified in the Council of Europe's 2007 Recommendation on the public responsibility for higher education and research, which should include preparation for sustainable employment, for life as active citizens in democratic societies, personal development, and the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced, knowledge base (Council of Europe 2007). We may note that in past Communiqués the first purpose has often been highlighted, the second and the third have received at least lip service; whereas the fourth has perhaps been taken too much for granted, as something that higher education institutions simply do, as part of their normal modus operandi.

This goal or vision is based on optimism and a 'Yes, we can' approach, since clearly the EHEA faces unprecedented challenges. The positive, optimistic, idealistic, and even unrealistic aspect of this vision includes placing at the forefront the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.[14] In this case, too, the ambition is to commit higher education institutions to use their research, educational and outreach capacities fully to contribute to reaching those goals by 2030.

Numerous countries and organizations, when asked to describe their vision in the consultations, emphasize the need for greater involvement of higher education institutions, both in formulating recommendations and in implementing them. The social dimension of higher education and the need for autonomy and better preparation of teachers are often mentioned, as is the need to adapt to a changing world. The importance of digitalization, both as a challenge and a resource, is underlined. Innovative teaching methods and learning activities should take advantage of the opportunities opened by new technologies, on the one hand, while on the other, higher education institutions must respond to the growing need for digital and advanced technological competences.[15]

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[13]Concept Note: Future of the EHEA -Thematic discussion on vision and priorities, Helsinki BFUG meeting, 12–13 November 2019": http://www.ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_FI_TK_67_7_2_Introduction_breakout_sessions.pdf, accessed 20 January 2020.

[14]https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment, accessed 20 January 2020.

[15]See above, note 11.

7   Do We Need a New Guiding Concept?

On many aspects of the future goals or the vision for an EHEA for the coming decades, there is a good degree of consensus among BFUG members. No one doubts the necessity of implementing the existing "key commitments" effectively and in all countries. These are important results of the elaboration carried out during the previous two decades to address the most obvious imperatives: that the basic structures of the degree programs should be the same; that those structures be organized in terms of student workload based credits as a measure of 'volume of learning' and level of learning outcomes; that delivery should be internally and externally monitored, enhanced and guaranteed by independent agencies according to agreed guidelines; that individual learning accomplishments should be recognized: first of all described according to a common format (the Diploma Supplement), and then considered credible in all the other EHEA countries. Potentially, they lead to 'automatic recognition': once again a concept which can be interpreted in different ways, but that, in essence, means reaching a situation where within the EHEA, all EHEA credentials can be accepted as easily as if they were presented in the country of the institution that issued them.

The vision is, in the first place, of an EHEA in which the decisions already taken, the commitments made, and the solutions already developed in the EHEA are implemented, and in such a way that smooth and easy communication can actually take place. This is the bedrock reality, on which innovation and higher future achievements are to be built.

In its essence, the EHEA of the future should be a place where values are upheld, rules are respected, and there is a closer collaboration between public authorities (at ministerial level) and higher education institutions, staff, students, administrators, employers and their hinterland. This seemingly simple image is complicated by a number of factors. In several countries the fundamental values are challenged; many countries are prima facie compliant with the key commitments to structural reform but in ways that are either formally or practically different from those of their neighbours; the BFUG and the EHEA itself, being based on a voluntary intergovernmental structure, often do not make efficient use of the energies and expertise expressed by the higher education world and are under little pressure to do so. In addition, values, tools and rules defined in the course of the past decades will need at the very least substantial re-elaboration to adapt them to existing and future challenges and opportunities and to ensure that students and higher education stakeholders are involved in this process and supportive of it.

Over the last twenty years, the Ministerial Communiqués have become somewhat standardized and often repetitive. Without the monitoring activities, it would sometimes be difficult to tell from the Communiqués themselves whether anything has been accomplished and, if so, what. In many countries, few people except for staff nearing retirement remember the pre-Bologna system. This in itself creates misunderstandings, insofar as younger staff and, naturally, students are unaware of what the previous situation was and are unable to visualize the telluric changes that the

Bologna Process has triggered. As a result, even some of the obvious obligations deriving from the Process (e.g. updating course catalogues, using grade distribution tables, responding to quality assurance procedures based on the ESG) are often understood as useless bureaucratic complications, rather than as keys to making EHEA-wide cooperation work smoothly for the benefit of all.

It is important to consider how the positive, progressive, beneficial and necessary features of the process can be communicated better to those who should benefit directly by them, and/or must carry them out.

8 Which Concept?

The BFUG Board appears to concur that the 2020 Communiqué should be a document that people around the world can read and easily understand. The language should be simple, not simplistic, and the arguments built up in a clear way. It has also been suggested that a simple and powerful image be proposed as an overarching and inspiring goal, to help motivate and guide complex efforts over the next ten years.[16]

As mentioned, the first suggestion was to aim to build a "European Higher Education System". A second, in part contrasting, proposal was to build a "European higher education community". The relations between the two, and with the present "European Higher Education Area", need to be carefully considered, as the implications of the choices to be made are relevant.

Both the 'system' and the 'community' seem to have been originally understood in analogy to the goal stated in the Bologna Declaration of working for a "European area of higher education", which eventually had the result that in 2010 the Area was deemed to exist, and the acronym EHEA became official with the Budapest-Vienna Communiqué (Bologna Process 2010). In other words, the idea that sparked off the current discussion was to propose that during the coming decade the 'Area' should become something different, more specific, stronger and more effective than at present, and that by 2030 both the reality and the name should be changed. Organizing efforts in order to achieve the reality indicated by the proposed new name was seen as a lever for fulfilling the potential of the EHEA, allowing it to reach its objectives more effectively.

Doubts and even strong opposition to one, the other, or both hypotheses were quickly expressed.

With regard to the "system" hypothesis, the objections are that the EHEA is based on a voluntary consensual agreement between governments which does not lend itself to deciding on a single "system", for which there would be no single competent public authority, and which, hence, it would be unable to enforce or regulate, and which in

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[16]This was discussed at the Istanbul Board meeting, 24 September 2019, Minutes, point 4.3: www.ehea.info/Upload/BOARD_FI_TK_66_Minutes.pdf, accessed 20 January 2020.

any case would limit the diversity between national 'systems'—still a feature, and a very valuable one, of the European Higher Education Area. It has been pointed out that the word 'system' is already found in the Bologna Declaration, but clearly, there is a big difference between a rather casual reference to 'system' when the Bologna Process was taking its first steps and a full-fledged plan to turn the EHEA into an EHES.

The objections to "community" seem to be less fundamental with regard to the substance of the proposal: the idea that the EHEA needs to be more cohesive, inclusive and foster a more positive and functional relationship with the higher education world and society in general is widely accepted and appears in many of the documents resulting from the national consultations. Most doubts focus on the fear that people will be confused if there is a change of name; the EHEA acronym is well-known in some ambiences, and at least some people are aware in a general way of what it stands for. Any change of acronym would destroy this level of awareness without creating particular benefits.

Some documents have been elaborated and informally circulated among members of the BFUG Board in order to discuss whether and how the various concepts of 'Area', 'system' and 'community'—with or without capital letters—might be used separately or together, insofar as they indicate or emphasize different aspects or desired features of the future EHEA.

For example, in "A Goal: The European Higher Education Community?" the present author suggested the following relationship between these key elements:

– In the Bologna Process (1999), we already find the expressions 'Europe of Knowledge'; 'common social and cultural space';—'European labor market'— and 'European area of higher education' (which eventually became the goal for 2010). Now we are in search of a concept or image which can motivate people, institutions and governments, in carrying the Process forward for the next decade and beyond. The suggestion has been made to aim for a "European Higher Education System". This expression seems to imply ensuring that all the agreed rules and tools actually work smoothly (i.e. are actually implemented in all EHEA countries, and hopefully in similar and compatible fashion)—which in itself would be a worthy objective.

– There are however a number of further 'dimensions' which have often been described and advocated, but which may not have become a part of the thinking and sensibility of the broader higher education community and society at large. Great attention must be given in the coming decade to developing a more flexible, competence-, work- and research-based higher education world.

– Thus we might see the "European Higher Education Area" as comprising the geographical space occupied by the current and future members of the EHEA, presumably all signatories of the ECC.[17]

– The objective for 2030 could be to build, within this space, a "European Higher Education Community"—a more complex task, which would place at the fore-

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[17]European Cultural Convention (author's note).

front the aspects of inclusion, participation and collaboration of the entire higher education world—ministries, organizations, networks, universities and other HEIs themselves, students staff, teachers and researchers—and the societies which they serve and in which they are embedded.

– This "European Higher Education Community" would be built within the "Area", with links to other Areas (world macro-regions); it would be founded on shared values (fundamental values, not only of an academic nature) and on the "European Higher Education" necessary to ensure transparency, recognition and mobility (freedom of students to choose). It would be crisscrossed by the links formed by European Universities, Joint Degrees, a high level of mobility for education and training. It would create strong links with schools of all levels, with employers, and would enable citizens to be and become learners at all ages, according to their needs.[18]

In this version, the EHEA as an acronym and general name would continue to exist and define the two-dimensional 'space' in which the official members are located. The 'system' would define the common elements which, properly implemented, allow smooth flows from country to country and from institution to institution. 'System' would also allow European higher education institutions to represent themselves on the world scene as a cohesive whole, which would be useful from the point of view of international competitiveness (and transparency). 'Community' would indicate the kind of 'society' that should emerge in the 'Area': a multifaceted, diverse, responsive, inclusive 'area' where cooperation and solidarity are keynotes, and where peer support at all levels is practiced in the interests of all. Where students, employers, employees, academics and ministries can speak to each other and be heard because they are working for common goals.

9   And What About...?

The next questions might be: are there specific reasons for refusing the 'system' word and/or the 'community' word? Are they in contrast or conflict with the 'area' word?

As mentioned, 'system', at least when capitalized, proves worrisome for many countries because of its overtones of regulation and coercion and the implication that there should be a single competent authority in Europe. 'System' per se, as used in several disciplinary contexts, does not necessarily entail an imposition of rules by an authority. In the social sciences, it is rather an empirical way of understanding complex interactions understood as taking place largely if not exclusively within certain boundaries. Thus, a 'world system' can include the entire world or a part of it: the definition of 'world', in this case, being that most (not all) of what is relevant takes place within it. Interestingly, during the discussions that took place in Helsinki

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[18]Informal note, circulated during the Istanbul BFUG Board Meeting, 24 September 2019: http://www.ehea.info/Upload/BOARD_FI_TK_66_Minutes.pdf, point 4.3, accessed 20 January 2020.

in November 2019, one BFUG member (by profession a chemist) asked whether 'community' could be understood as an ecosystem. Indeed, in the natural sciences, 'system' (and 'ecosystem') has a descriptive function rather than a regulatory one. However, inevitably, "education system" implies clear and certain boundaries and a responsible public authority.

"Community" is widely, but not universally, understood to be something that symbolizes participation, sharing or belonging. To the historian or social scientist, it is likely to suggest a complex, often urban, society including forms of (self) government, agreed rules, diverse social groups, social, economic, political and artistic activities, not necessarily closed. However, one discussant said that when he thought of community, he visualized the closed or 'gated' communities that have become common in some parts of the world, particularly to protect the wealthy from unwanted contacts with the rest of society. For an EHEA that wants to become more and more inclusive and for its student body to reflect more and more closely the social, economic and ethnic/linguistic composition of the population, such an understanding, if general, would eliminate 'community' from the running. Fortunately, this does not seem to be a widespread reaction.

The problem of the degree of openness with respect to the rest of the higher education world must be resolved on its own terms, whether the guiding concept is Area, system, or community. Interestingly, some of those opposed to replacing Area with community motivate their opposition with the idea that the 'Bologna Area' should not be closed and suggest that the future relationship with countries and institutions that declare their desire to comply with Bologna, but are not eligible to become members, could be considered part of a broader a 'Bologna community'. This idea has not yet been discussed in the BFUG, but prima facie offers a novel and stimulating perspective.

A further question is whether any of the terms under discussion have negative valences when translated into other languages. A cursory examination of the usual (and many of the unusual) translations proposed by Google in all the national languages represented in the BFUG suggests that most have versions of 'system' and of 'community' that derive from Latin or Greek, although in many cases there are other possible translations which have a different root, or a different basic meaning. Some resonances may be negative ('common' itself can mean low quality or vulgar, as well as shared or frequent), but so far in discussions, it appears that understandings of 'system', ''community' and 'area' depend more on professional training than on national or regional understandings.

10   To Conclude

Discussion will continue in the coming months. A closer study of the material produced in the national consultations may provide further insights and guidance.

The concepts proposed to encapsulate and symbolize the future form of the EHEA convey quite different ideas, which, although not necessarily incompatible,

emphasize certain directions of development rather than others. At its beginning, the Bologna Process responded to numerous, at times contradictory, expectations and needs. In the coming decade, once again, it will be necessary to indicate a broad path forward, describe the landscape through which it must pass and the objectives to be reached. Again, it is reasonable to imagine that understandings and motivations will be varied and even contrasting, but areas of agreement, confluence and consensus can be found.

We may ask whether the Bologna Follow Up Group in its present configuration will be able to guide this process effectively. In the years immediately preceding and following the signing of the Declaration, there were more varied forms of direct involvement of the academic community. Bologna Seminars, Thematic Networks and Tuning and other forms of transversal interaction brought together academic experts and subject area groups of academics committed to developing European higher education in new ways. The BFUG was not yet consolidated as the place where representatives of ministries and certain key organizations were expected to guide and guard the Process. During the round of consultations on the future priorities in view of 2030, the BFUG has felt the need to reach out to the academic community and to the other higher education stakeholders in a more open way.

The beauty and the value of the European Higher Education Area will not be found by guaranteeing internal uniformity, nor in the EHEA becoming a direct rival or imitation of other world systems. Rather, they will lie in the unique and difficult enterprise of coordinating, enhancing and connecting very different cultural, linguistic, scientific and organizational realities by means of broad agreed guidelines. European higher education systems and institutions, precisely because of their diversity, offer unprecedented opportunities for creating knowledge and competences, forming abilities and skills, and developing capacity for autonomy of judgement and social responsibility (Isaacs and Sticchi-Damiani 2003). Europe and the EHEA are not founded on uniformity, nor on an ideal of uniformity, but rather on the lucid realization of the value of difference and the necessity of agreement in order to protect it and benefit from it.

Mobility of individuals, creation of shared projects and programs, inclusion, outreach: all are factors which enrich our peoples—if our countries and higher education institutions are connected in contexts of freedom, democracy, citizenship and awareness of and openness to the wider world. Such ideas and ideals inspired the Bologna Process, but to realize their full potential further agreement, action and hard work will be needed.

In the view of this author, re-establishing strong and direct links with the academic world itself will be necessary if the Bologna Process is to move forward. The key role of motivated academics (teachers and researchers) in giving substance to the EHEA must be recognized and supported. The support, knowledge and creativity of all stakeholders—learners first of all, higher education institutions themselves, local authorities, employers—will be needed to reach the goals for 2030. This realization underpins the concept of community.

The author hopes that the Area can become the centre and the foundation of a European higher education community and that the community's borders will

encompass and connect a larger space than those of the present Area. If deemed opportune, the EHEA acronym may be retained, but the broad path forward should include commitment to making the 'system' work, by ensuring adhesion of its many component 'systems' to the agreed guidelines, while building a connected, inclusive, cohesive and polyhedral community by 2030.

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Quo Vadis EHEA: Balancing Structural Continuation and Political Variety

Jens Jungblut, Peter Maassen, and Mari Elken

1 Introduction

European integration in higher education entered a new era with the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (Bologna Process 1999) and its subsequent implementation, generally referred to as the Bologna Process (Maassen and Olsen 2007). In March 2010, along with the anniversary of the Bologna Process' first decade, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was launched. The main overall objective of the EHEA was to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe. According to the official website of the EHEA,[1] the 48 participating countries with different political, cultural and academic traditions agreed to reform higher education on the basis of common key values—including academic freedom, institutional autonomy, freedom of expression, independent student unions, and free movement of students and staff. While the reforms have reduced the structural barriers for student and staff mobility, little progress has been realised when it comes to the adaptation of the common values. As will be argued in this paper, it can be concluded that in some of the EHEA countries the adherence of fundamental values, e.g. with respect to academic freedom, has deteriorated instead of improved since 2010.

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[1] See: http://www.ehea.info, accessed 10 February 2020.

At the Ministerial Conference in Paris in 2018, the participating Ministers agreed that they want a more ambitious EHEA beyond 2020 (Bologna Process 2018). In elaborating this strategic ambition, the Ministers expressed the EHEA's commitment to extend integrated transnational cooperation in higher education, research and innovation, with the aim to increase the mobility of staff, students and researchers, and to develop more joint study programmes throughout the whole EHEA. In the period 2018–2020, the full potential of the EHEA was to be unlocked (Bologna Process 2018: 2) through a focus on:

1. The compatibility of the three-cycle system with the overarching framework of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS.
2. The compliance of the EHEA with the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
3. The compliance of quality assurance in the EHEA countries with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ENQA 2015).

In addition, the Ministers want European higher education to play a key role in meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs[2]). At the same time, while the Paris Communiqué acknowledges that fundamental values, such as academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Bologna Process 2018: 1), have been challenged in recent years in some of the EHEA countries, the promotion and protection of these in the entire EHEA is left to political dialogue and cooperation. Given the already referred to deterioration of the situation in a number of EHEA countries, it can be argued that the Paris Communiqué exemplifies the symbolic nature of the commitment to basic values and principles, and the lack of effective action for truly making fundamental values and principles a key component of the EHEA.

The symbolic nature of the commitment to fundamental values in the EHEA comes at a time when the overall European integration project is going through a difficult and in many respects uncertain period. For example, the consequences of Brexit; the rise of nationalistic, anti-EU political parties and movements; important disagreements among EU member states on key ideas and principles underlying European integration, as well as the growing global political and economic rivalry, are all forming serious challenges for the further development of European collaboration and integration. In the end, these challenges might also threaten the further development of the EHEA. Consequently, key questions to address for the next phase of the EHEA are:

– What kind of universities for what kind of Europe?
– How can fundamental values and principles become a sine qua non in the next phase of the EHEA?

In this paper, we will start with a discussion of the possible relevance of science diplomacy for addressing these questions. Next, we will analyse intra-European political tensions, with a number of member states having moved away from basic European values and principles concerning liberal democracy and open societies. Further, we

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[2]See: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ (accessed 10 February 2020).

will examine the impact of the European Universities Initiative[3] and funding patterns of other European education programmes on the further development of the EHEA. Finally, we will discuss the consequences of growing global higher education competition. What does the 'European' in EHEA stand for in this competition, and will the EHEA represent one coherent, strong voice and position that will allow Europe to remain a global key actor in higher education?

2 Science Diplomacy and the EHEA

The challenges that Europe is facing globally have been clearly addressed on several occasions by its political leaders. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for example, raised the issue of the importance for Europe to put up a united front to be able to deal adequately with threats of global rivalry in an interview published May 2019 in six newspapers: "Europe must reposition itself to stand up to the challenges posed by its big global rivals… This is indeed a time when we need to fight for our principles and fundamental values" (Guardian, 15 May 2019).[4] In this, Merkel is primarily referring to the USA, China and Russia, with challenges that range from the US monopoly over digital industries through China's economic power to Russian interference in democratic elections. In addition, also the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen has addressed the importance of key values for Europe's external relations: "We must use our diplomatic and economic strength to support global stability and prosperity… and be better able to export our values and standards."[5]

For securing Europe's future global political influence and economic competitiveness, the importance of developing more effective connections between science and innovation is emphasized in various national and EU policy and programme initiatives, including Horizon Europe.[6] the EU's next research and innovation programme to succeed Horizon 2020 in 2021, and the European Education Area,[7] Horizon Europe consists of three pillars, that is, pillar 1, 'Excellent Science', pillar 2, 'Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness', and pillar 3, 'Innovative Europe'. In the third pillar, the European Innovation Council is included as a new instrument for supporting various types of innovations that are too risky for private investors. An important ambition with respect to Horizon Europe is that Europe can do better

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[3]See: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en (accessed 10 February 2020).

[4]See: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/15/angela-merkel-interview-europe-eu-unite-challenge-us-russia-china (accessed 10 February 2020)

[5]See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-josep-borrell-2019_en.pdf (accessed 10 February 2020).

[6]See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme_en, (accessed 10 February 2020).

[7]See: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en (accessed 10 February 2020).

at transforming its excellent research into leadership in innovation and entrepreneurship. In this, an example of a fundamental value issue, as referred to by Merkel, is the choice between technologizing humanity versus humanising technology, with European politicians stating that they want to promote the latter.

Obviously, the interest of the EU and its member states in the connection between science and innovation is not confined to an isolated science policy arena. Science has become more and more integrated into other policy areas and arenas as visible, for example, in the growing link between science and foreign affairs, referred to with the term 'science diplomacy'. In a speech given in 2015 in Washington, D.C., then EU commissioner Moedas argued that "Science diplomacy is the torch that can light the way, where other kinds of politics and diplomacy have failed[8]" (Moedas 2015). This perspective is further elaborated as follows in an article published in 2016: "Scientific cooperation has an indisputable role in effective European neighbourhood policy, international relations, and development policy. Therefore, as commissioner for research, science, and innovation, I want to see the EU play an increasingly active and visible role in international science diplomacy. This can be achieved, namely, by using the universal language of science to maintain open channels of communication in the absence of other viable foreign policy approaches" (Moedas 2016: 2). This quote reflects the strong belief that scientific interactions can have a stabilizing influence on the relationships between countries with seriously incongruent ideological approaches and political systems. From this perspective, science diplomacy can be described as "… the use of scientific collaborations among nations to address the common problems." (Federoff 2009: 9). This implies that science diplomacy represents a path of "common interest building", opposed to "conflict resolution" (Berkman 2019: 65). For example, the SDGs clearly represent the outcomes of an effort of (global) common interest building. Consequently, science diplomacy is assumed to play a central role in the global and regional efforts to balance national needs with common interests among two or more countries (Berkman 2019: 79).

How did science diplomacy contribute to the development of the EHEA? Did science diplomacy result in a growing adherence to fundamental values and principles among the 48 participating countries within the EHEA? In addressing these questions, we will examine the political interest in the EHEA, followed by an analysis of the extent to which the EHEA countries adhere to academic freedom, being one of the most central fundamental values the participating countries have agreed upon. We will start by briefly discussing the growing variety among the EHEA countries ideological foundation of national governance models with respect to higher education.

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[8]See: https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/newsletter/international-research-update_57_june-2015.pdf (accessed 17 March 2020).

3 National Contexts

For discussing the variety in the ideas underlying specific national arrangements for higher education, we will use in this paper the basic visions on higher education governance and organization identified by Olsen (2007: 28-33). These visions are recognisable in national governance models with respect to higher education in Europe (Maassen and Olsen 2007), and using them allows us to identify three groups of countries.

First, in some countries a market- and competition-oriented approach is emphasized in the government's higher education governance model. Second, there is a group of countries in which higher education is primarily regarded as one of the key instruments for implementing and realizing national political agendas. In the third group of countries, the public authorities adhere to a more balanced mixture of ideas underlying their higher education governance model overemphasizing one dominant vision. How are higher education institutions affected by the dominant governance vision in their national context? First, in those countries that most directly and consequently follow a market- and competition-oriented approach in their higher education governance model, higher education institutions have become more like private sector firms in their governance and organization structures. In these countries, governments believe in the positive impact of competition; more direct relationships between the higher education institutions and their users or clients; private, diversified funding (including high levels of tuition fees); and economy-driven research agendas, implying a strong focus on the Life Sciences and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines. Here, the role of the state and the size and formal mandates of the public domain have been adapted and in many ways reduced over the last decades, and the political economy can be characterised as a liberal market economy (Hall and Soskice 2001).

Second, in those countries in which higher education is first and foremost regarded as one of the key instruments for implementing and realizing national political agendas, the higher education institutions' governance structures and practices are in general quite strictly controlled by the public authorities. This can be direct by selecting and appointing institutional academic and administrative leaders, or indirect through legal frameworks and policies that limit the institutional autonomy and through earmarked funding practices. Many policy initiatives are introduced to stimulate the higher education institutions' academic quality and socio-economic relevance, but often on a trial and error basis. This implies that there is a rather low level of stability in the institutions' environment, and they have to adapt regularly to new productivity-enhancing policies and targets introduced by the public authorities. The political economy in these countries can be characterised as a state-led market economy (Hall and Soskice 2001).

Third, in those countries where the public authorities use a more balanced mixture of ideas underlying their higher education governance model overemphasizing one dominant vision, public funding levels remain relatively high, tuition fees are moderate, low or disallowed, and institutional governance models try to maintain

a balance between democratic and executive principles and components. While we also see in these countries a growing reliance on the working of the market place and competition, and a focus on the contribution of higher education to innovation in the private sector, at the same time also the promotion of open societies, democracy and intercultural competences are important elements of the higher education governance approach. In these countries, the role of the state and the size and formal mandates of the public domain have been adapted but not necessarily reduced over the last decades, and the political economy can be characterised as a coordinated market economy (Hall and Soskice 2001).

4 Development of Political Interest in the EHEA

While political variety among countries participating in the EHEA has increased, the convergence of structural elements of the higher education systems in the EHEA, such as the introduction of ECTS, the three-cycle degree structure or quality assurance mechanisms, has successfully progressed since 1999 (Scott 2012). When looking at the stocktaking reports that have been prepared for the ministerial conferences,[9] it becomes clear that structural differences are being reduced and higher education systems are converging towards a so-called "Bologna model". At the same time, national higher education governance models discussed above act as a filter for the implementation and interpretation of policies coming from the EHEA especially in cases where these policies conflict with interests or values on the national level (Gornitzka and Maassen 2014). Consequently, the diversity within the EHEA with respect to fundamental values and principles, such as institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and the social dimension of higher education (Yagci 2014) remains significant or has even increased in some aspects. Apparently, the science diplomacy approach described by Moedas (2016) has not had the effect of the EHEA becoming more homogeneous in the way the participating countries adhere to fundamental values in practice.

In parallel, the EHEA seems to become politically less salient over time. Earlier studies have shown that the level of political representation of full member delegations (excluding the European Commission) to the Ministerial Conferences of the EHEA has steadily declined between 1999 and 2015 with an especially steep decrease for EU member countries (Vukasovic et al. 2017). Following up on this study, we analysed the attendance lists of all Bologna Ministerial Conferences from 1999 to and including 2018. In this, we coded the level of political representation, that is, the title of the head of delegation, of each full member delegation (excluding the European Commission) on a 5-point scale, with 1 being the highest level of

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[9]See: http://www.ehea.info/pid34367/implementation-and-national-reports.html, accessed 10 February 2020.

Table 1 Mean level of political representation of the head of full member delegations

Year	Mean level of political representation
1999	1.13
2001	1.76
2003	1.40
2005	1.49
2007	1.57
2009	1.81
2010	1.96
2012	2.29
2015	2.67
2018	1.90

representation (minister) and 5 the lowest (bureaucrats below the level of a Director General).[10]

When assessing the level of political representation of the full member delegations throughout the years, our results are in line with prior studies. Except for the last Ministerial Conference in Paris (Bologna Process 2018), we find a clear decrease in the mean level of political representation over time, dropping from a situation where most delegations were headed by ministers in 1999, to one where in 2015 most full member delegations were led by state secretaries or lower-level bureaucrats. In a way, this development lets one question whether the label "Bologna Ministerial Conference" is still appropriate given that in 2015, only 14 out of 46 full member delegations were headed by a minister. In 2018, the situation got somewhat better with 29 out of 49 full member delegations being headed by a minister. Overall, this suggests that the political salience of the EHEA is decreasing over time, as full members do not see it necessary anymore to be represented on the highest political level at the Ministerial Conferences. The data presented in Table 1 illustrate this overall trend, and even with the increase in the mean level of political representation in 2018, representation did not reach a level equal or higher than in the years up to 2009.

For analysing the mean level of political representation of the head of full member delegations, we have grouped the Bologna Ministerial Conference delegations in four groups:

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[10]For a discussion on the problems of classifying the level of representation, see: Bergan and Deca (2018).

Table 2 Mean level of political representation of the head of full member delegations grouped by EU membership status

Year	EU member	EEA/EFTA	EU candidate	Neither
1999	1.00	2.00	1.00	–
2001	1.63	1.75	1.77	2.25
2003	1.31	2.25	1.15	1.50
2005	1.42	1.75	1.25	1.62
2007	1.57	2.75	1.00	1.33
2009	1.76	3.00	1.67	1.58
2010	2.00	1.50	3.00	1.77
2012	2.45	3.33	2.00	1.75
2015	3.04	2.75	2.40	1.67
2018	1.83	1.50	3.00	1.82

1. delegations that represented EU member countries at the time of the conference;
2. delegations that represented EEA or EFTA members at the time of the conference;
3. delegations that represented countries that were candidates for EU membership at the time of the conference;
4. delegations that did not fall in either of these categories.

Looking at the results presented in Table 2, one can see that especially the level of political representation of delegations from EU member countries decreased over the years. Moreover, it is the increase in the level of representation of EU member countries for the 2018 Paris conference that drives the increase in the mean level of representation observed above. In general, one can observe that since 2007, delegations from countries that are not members of the EU or EFTA/EEA, nor a candidate to the EU, had on average a higher level of political representation than EU members. This suggests, in line with previous studies (Vukasovic et al. 2017), that the EHEA has more political salience for countries that are not part of the EU or EFTA/EEA.

5 Adherence to Academic Freedom in the EHEA

While most action lines in the EHEA are rather politically neutral, the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué emphasized the importance of shared values in the Bologna Process, referring explicitly to academic freedom and institutional autonomy.[11] These values were already part of the initial 1999 Bologna Declaration with its reference to the Magna Charta Universitatum.[12] While the Bologna Implementation Reports usu-

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[11] See: http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf, accessed 10 February 2020.

[12] See: http://www.magna-charta.org/, accessed 10 February 2020.

ally offer a wide set of data to assess the level of implementation of the different Action Lines in the member countries, the Bologna Implementation Report 2018 only presents a limited, relatively ineffective set of indicators to assess the state of the art as regards fundamental values in the EHEA (EU 2018). With regard to academic freedom, the report relies mainly on discussing problematic individual incidents in Turkey, Russia and Hungary, claiming that while concerns have been raised about violations of values in some EHEA countries, it would be difficult to find causal explanations. The report further points out that all but four higher education systems in the EHEA reported that academic freedom is mentioned in their national legislation with a varying degree of specification. The four systems that do not refer to academic freedom in their legislation are the Flemish Community in Belgium, Malta, Hungary and Belarus (EU 2018: 42).

To further investigate the values underpinning the EHEA, we used data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset (version 9), which is prepared by the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg (Coppedge et al. 2019, Pemstein et al. 2019). This dataset is widely used in political science research and it provides a number of indicators measuring different aspects of democracy. The data are generated using more than 3000 country experts that code countries on a number of variables. One of the variables measures the freedom of academic and cultural expression (3.8.1 v2clacfree) on a scale from zero (severe restrictions) to four (no restrictions). The variable includes yearly data for most countries in the world from 1789 until 2018. The only EHEA full members that are not included in the dataset and thus had to be excluded from our analysis are Andorra, the Holy See, and Liechtenstein. Based on the countries represented as full members at the Ministerial conferences, we used the V-Dem data to calculate the mean academic freedom value for each conference (see Table 3). The data show that the mean level of academic freedom decreases throughout the development of the EHEA, reaching

Table 3 Mean academic freedom level in Bologna member countries at each Ministerial Conference

Year	Number of delegations	Mean value of academic freedom
1999	30	3.83
2001	34	3.74
2003	41	3.61
2005	44	3.57
2007	44	3.50
2009	45	3.56
2010	47	3.53
2012	46	3.46
2015	43	3.37
2018	46	3.17
Total	420	

Table 4 The level of academic freedom of each delegation's country by EU status at the time of the Ministerial Conference over the period 1999 until 2018

	Severely restricted	Restricted	Somewhat restricted	Few restrictions	No restrictions
Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	10	22	46	1
EU candidate	1	1	8	28	27
EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	29
EU member	0	0	2	28	221

its lowest point in 2018. Using the mean value to describe the level of academic freedom throughout the EHEA, one could say that we moved from a situation where there were barely any restrictions on academic freedom to one where there are few restrictions. While this does not seem like a dramatic shift, the declining tendency in itself is worrying.

Moreover, when disaggregating the level of academic freedom following the above-mentioned groupings according to EU membership status, it becomes clear that especially delegations from countries that are neither members of nor candidates to the EU or EFTA/EEA have more limitations regarding their academic freedom. In Table 4, an overview is presented of all 420 delegations that have attended Ministerial conferences over the years, clustered by the countries' EU membership status and the level of academic freedom according to the V-Dem data.

A 2-tailed correlation between an ordinal variable measuring the EU membership status of a country and its level of academic freedom shows that there is a significant and positive relation between a closer integration into the EU and less restrictions for academic freedom (Spearman's rho .691**, significant at .01 level). This is not entirely surprising given the general importance of EU citizens' rights in the process of EU accession, but the strength of the correlation points towards somewhat of a bifurcation in the full members of the EHEA with regard to the support for academic freedom. Table 5 presents the results of the two previous tables together and presents a detailed overview of the level of academic freedom by EU membership status for each individual Ministerial Conference. This table shows both the general decrease of the level of academic freedom over time in all EU membership categories except for the EEA/EFTA countries, and the bifurcation between EU and EFTA/EEA members on the one hand, and EU candidates and non-affiliated countries on the other. The latter are having, generally speaking, lower scores in their level of academic freedom.

The number of delegations from those countries that received the lowest scores for their level of academic freedom (restricted or severely restricted), actually increases over time reaching its peak in 2018 (see Table 6). Given that only one country joined the EHEA in 2015, this is a strong indicator of an erosion of the value-basis on

Table 5 The level of academic freedom of each delegation's country by EU status for each Ministerial Conference

Year	EU membership status	Severely restricted	Restricted	Somewhat restricted	Few restrictions	No restrictions
1999	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	0
	EU candidate	0	0	0	4	8
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	0	1	14
2001	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	0	1	1	0
	EU candidate	0	0	1	4	8
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	0	0	16
2003	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	1	1	7	0
	EU candidate	0	0	0	4	9
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	0	0	16
2005	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	1	2	8	0
	EU candidate	0	0	0	3	1
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	0	1	25
2007	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	1	4	5	0
	EU candidate	0	0	0	3	0
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	0	3	25
2009	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	1	3	6	0
	EU candidate	0	0	0	3	0
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	0	2	27
2010	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	1	3	6	1
	EU candidate	0	0	1	2	0
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	0	3	27

Table 5 (continued)

Year	EU membership status	Severely restricted	Restricted	Somewhat restricted	Few restrictions	No restrictions
2012	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	1	3	6	0
	EU candidate	0	0	2	2	1
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	2
	EU member	0	0	0	4	25
2015	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	1	3	3	0
	EU candidate	0	1	2	2	0
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	0	6	22
2018	Neither member nor candidate to EU or EFTA/EEA	0	3	2	4	0
	EU candidate	1	0	2	1	0
	EFTA/EEA	0	0	0	0	3
	EU member	0	0	2	8	20

Table 6 Delegations from countries with restricted or severely restricted academic freedom over time

Year	Delegations
1999	0
2001	0
2003	1
2005	1
2007	1
2009	1
2010	1
2012	1
2015	2
2018	4

which the EHEA is supposed to be built. Moreover, the fact that the number of delegations from countries with serious academic freedom challenges is the highest at the Ministerial Conference following the Yerevan Communiqué with its focus on highlighting the EHEA's fundamental values puts the ability of the EHEA to safeguard and promote the values, on which it claims to be built, into question.

In Table 7, an overview is presented of the total number of full delegations of all EHEA countries that participated in the Ministerial Conferences from countries

Table 7 Number of delegations to Ministerial Conferences from countries with restricted or severely restricted levels of academic freedom at the time of the conference

Country	Delegations between 1999 and 2018
Azerbaijan	6
Belarus	3
Russia	1
Turkey	2

having the lowest scores for their academic freedom (restricted or severely restricted) in the respective years of the conference. In this, we only count delegations to conferences in years when the country had one of the lowest scores with respect to its academic freedom. The results show that four countries have sent delegations to Ministerial Conferences while having problematic academic freedom scores. The optimistic interpretation of Table 7 is that only four countries have or had severe problems with their academic freedom. In a more pessimistic interpretation, one could argue that both Russia and Turkey are long time EHEA members that experienced a backsliding in their academic freedom scores in recent years despite their participation in the EHEA. Moreover, Azerbaijan shows a steady level of restricted academic freedom scores throughout its membership in the EHEA since 2005. Finally, Belarus, the most recent member of the EHEA, was able to join despite its problematic academic freedom situation. While Belarus was admitted only after agreeing to a roadmap which also included enhancing academic freedom, the results of the analysis raise doubts about the implementation of this roadmap as well as about how important the values and principles that are claimed to be at the foundation of the EHEA are in practice.

The 2018 Bologna Implementation Report (European Commission/EACEA/ Eurydice [EU] 2018) highlighted that nearly all EHEA countries have academic freedom in some way enshrined in their laws. When it comes to the four countries included in Table 7, only Belarus does not mention academic freedom in its law. This strongly suggests that the indicator used by the Bologna Implementation Report is not sufficiently insightful for assessing the level of academic freedom in the EHEA countries.

Consequently, from a science diplomacy perspective, it can be argued that the EHEA represents a form of collaboration, which aims at staking out a path of common interests for all countries involved instead of being an arena for resolving possible and real political disagreements and conflicts. The common interests highlighted concern mainly academic and economic aspects, while fundamental values and principles are playing a merely symbolic role. It can be assumed that serious efforts to include values and principles in the core agenda and commitments of the EHEA and monitor how each country 'honours and promotes' them would make it necessary to address far-reaching political differences among the EHEA countries. Therefore, trying to enforce the promotion of the identified fundamental values and principles in all EHEA countries would very likely threaten the continued existence of the EHEA in its current form.

6 EU and Beyond—Multiple Patterns of Coordination and the Future of EHEA

One question emerging from the above analyses is how the variations in political ideologies, geographical scope, and economic strength affect inter-country collaboration until now, and ultimately also the next phase of the EHEA. In this, we will focus especially on EU funded collaboration.

The EU has historically been constrained in developing a coherent higher education policy (Corbett 2005), and the Bologna Process was initiated outside of the EU framework as an intergovernmental process. Nonetheless, the EU quickly became involved with the Bologna Process, especially by providing EU funding (Gornitzka 2009). While formal EU political coordination in higher education is legally constrained, the EU has funding capacity. This allows for various types of educational programmes across Europe, such as ERASMUS+, and capacity building programmes beyond Europe in education. In the implementation of these, specific programme features and aims meet overall EHEA policy aims, including fundamental values and principles, without the latter being accepted as framework conditions for programme-specific funding decisions. Budgets for higher education collaboration have been expanding. ERASMUS+ funding for the period 2014–2020 was €14.7 billion, an increase from the €7 available for its predecessor, the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013).[13] In March 2019[14] it was announced that the proposed budget for the next period (2021–2027) would be tripled, after initial indications of doubling the budget.[15]

The different programmes allow for various kinds of emphases when it comes to collaboration, competition and consequently, prestige. While the EHEA-EU relationship is presented as frictionless, EU programmes aimed at higher education offer some EHEA countries a comparatively strong platform for cooperation. This means that EHEA countries that are, for example, geographically further away, and, as discussed above, in some instances also have restricted or severely restricted academic freedom track records, are involved much more marginally in EU programme funded education projects. The exception to this is formed by the EU capacity building programmes.

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[13]Overview of ERASMUS+ Predecessor programmes, https://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/pdf/fp7-factsheets_en.pdf, accessed 10 February 2020.

[14]Press release from the European Parliament, 28 March 2019 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190321IPR32121/erasmus-2021-2027-more-people-to-experience-learning-exchanges-in-europe, accessed 10 February 2020.

[15]Press release on EU budget, 30 May 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_3948, accessed 10 February 2020.

6.1 EU Funding for Collaboration—Strategic Partnerships in Higher Education

In the area of education, the main EU funding instruments are included in the Erasmus+ programme, which has three Key Action (KA) areas: individual mobility (KA1); cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices (KA2); and support for policy reform (KA3).[16] More recently, KA2 project funding also includes the European Universities Initiative.[17]

This section presents KA2 project funding patterns in the area of higher education. Our main interest concerns the rate of participation of higher education institutions from each individual country, as project coordinator *and* participant in KA2 projects.[18] First, in Table 8 an overview is presented of the total number of Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education projects coordinated per country. The data set includes 1227 projects from the period 2014–2019. The overall number of projects has been growing substantially during the whole ERASMUS+ period—from 121 in 2014 to 329 in 2019. In terms of funding, these projects are specified and sometimes rather limited in scope, ranging from about € 40 000 to about € 450 000.

In this overview, we have not looked into the number of partner institutions in each country, only country participation over time in project consortia.[19] This means that a single institution can participate in several consortia at the same time, while there can be several institutions from the same country in a single consortium. Our interest lies in the broad participation patterns and country patterns. Here, the picture that emerges is relatively widely spread across Europe. In 2019, the countries that coordinated most projects were Spain, Germany, France, Poland and the United Kingdom. Aggregating the numbers to the four main geographical groups as determined in the calls (north, south, east, west), the picture is stable over time (see Table 9). Institutions from Central and Eastern Europe coordinate between 20 and 26% of the projects (in 2019, 24%), around 15% of projects are coordinated by an institution from a Northern European country, between 24 and 28% from Southern Europe and around 35% from Western Europe.

Looking into project partner countries in consortia, a somewhat different picture emerges (see Table 10). Funded consortia most often include partner institution(s) from Spain, Italy and Germany. This could also be explained by the fact that other Southern European countries are smaller which then leads to higher concentration of projects in institutions from Spain and Italy in projects where one is required to include a partner from Southern Europe. Here, also Germany (117) and the United Kingdom (86) are well represented as well as smaller countries, such as Belgium (74)

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[16]See: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en, accessed 10 February 2020.

[17]See: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en, accessed 10 February 2020

[18]This means that higher education institutions that are project coordinators are in Table 10 also counted as members of the consortia.

[19]Optimally, both should be done, but for the purposes of this analysis, we aim to identify which countries and regions are well represented in the funding schemes.

Table 8 KA2—Strategic partnerships for higher education: number of projects per country (coordinator institution)

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Spain	12	15	15	16	20	30
Germany	10	14	14	17	21	27
France	8	10	9	12	17	26
Poland	10	12	9	14	20	26
United Kingdom	9	8	16	19	22	26
Italy	4	8	8	12	16	19
Turkey*	7	9	12	14	9	16
Romania	7	6	7	7	7	14
Belgium	2	9	2	4	7	13
Netherlands	6	7	7	8	10	12
Czech	4	4	4	4	7	11
Denmark	1	2	3	6	7	11
Sweden	4	5	5	6	11	10
Finland	1	3	2	2	4	7
Greece	3	3	4	5	7	7
Norway*	3	6	4	5	5	7
Portugal	2	3	2	6	6	7
Austria	4	3	3	3	5	6
Croatia	1	2	2	2	3	6
Hungary	2	3	3	3	6	6
Bulgaria	1	1	2	3	5	5
Lithuania	2	3	3	3	3	5
Estonia	1	2	3	6	7	4
Iceland*	3	3	3	1	3	4
Slovakia	3	2	2	3	5	4
Slovenia	3	2	2	2	2	4
Cyprus	1	2	2	2	2	3
Ireland	1	2	1	2	2	3
Liechtenstein*	2	2	3	3	4	3
Latvia	1	3	2	3	3	2
Malta	0	2	3	2	2	2
Serbia*	0	0	0	0	2	2
Luxembourg	2	2	2	3	1	1
Rep of North Macedonia*	1	2	3	3	3	0
Total number of projects	**121**	**160**	**162**	**201**	**254**	**329**

*Non-EU members

Table 9 KA2—Strategic partnerships for higher education: project coordinating institution, % region (Refers to north, south, east, west categorization used in Erasmus+ funding calls, set by EuroVoc.) of origin (2014–2019)

	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)	2017 (%)	2018 (%)	2019 (%)
East	26	21	21	20	24	24
North	13	17	15	16	17	15
South	24	26	28	28	24	26
West	36	36	35	35	35	36

Table 10 KA2—Strategic partnerships for higher education: number of times a consortium includes an institution from this country

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Spain	52	67	58	70	111	145
Italy	44	59	63	74	95	139
Germany	40	52	53	71	87	117
United Kingdom	51	47	62	61	67	86
Belgium	29	50	38	53	51	74
Portugal	24	40	33	49	64	74
Poland	32	33	31	42	67	72
Netherlands	31	39	39	48	52	70
France	32	32	27	42	54	67
Greece	19	28	25	36	44	62
Finland	21	22	30	32	51	47
Romania	18	30	27	33	36	47
Austria	19	24	20	26	36	45
Sweden	17	21	22	21	34	43
Lithuania	18	15	21	25	25	41
Hungary	11	19	19	18	29	40
Turkey*	15	12	20	19	18	38
Czech	19	17	20	22	37	35
Denmark	13	13	15	18	33	35
Norway*	13	14	16	21	21	31
Slovenia	18	11	24	19	29	31
Ireland	15	13	13	22	23	30
Cyprus	4	7	9	5	17	28
Bulgaria	6	11	10	19	16	25
Croatia	2	6	14	16	19	23
Estonia	9	13	14	17	22	23
Slovakia	13	12	7	18	17	19

Table 10 (continued)

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Iceland*	6	4	6	3	10	15
Latvia	6	7	11	11	13	15
Malta	3	8	9	9	5	15
Serbia*	2	1	2	1	3	15
Luxembourg	5	4	4	10	13	11
Rep of North Macedonia*	2	4	4	6	9	5
Liechtenstein*	3	2	3	3	4	3
Total number of projects	**121**	**160**	**162**	**201**	**254**	**329**

*Non-EU members

and Portugal (74). Countries with low participation rates (under 20) are generally also smaller countries (Slovak Republic, Latvia, Malta, Luxembourg), and several of the non-European Erasmus+ countries can be found there (Iceland, Serbia, North Macedonia, Liechtenstein).

6.2   European Universities Initiative

The European Universities Initiative (EUI) represents in many ways the ideas that have been circulating in some segments of European higher education, emphasizing the role universities and colleges should play in the construction of the European project. The initiative has been flagged as an important dimension in the further development of the EHEA. The suggestion of a stronger, more integrated form of collaboration between higher education institutions in Europe was introduced in President Macron's September 2017 speech at the Sorbonne.[20] In the same year, the Commission proposed the EUI at the Gothenburg Social Summit, and in December 2017 the European Council endorsed it, calling for:

> "strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities', consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities" (European Council 2017)

A central idea in the first pilot Call of the EUI was that all alliances to be funded should promote European values and identity, in this manner also linking the Initiative to Article 2 in the EU Treaty. In addition, it was expected that the selected alliances would make "substantial leaps" in terms of "quality, performance, attractiveness and international competitiveness of European higher education institutions

[20]The transcript of the speech can be found at: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/english_version_transcript_-_initiative_for_europe_-_speech_by_the_president_of_the_french_republic_cle8de628.pdf, accessed 10 February 2020.

Table 11 European Universities Initiative: number of coordinating institutions of first 17 EUI alliances, per country (2019)

Country	# Coordinating institutions
France	6
Germany	3
Spain	3
the Netherlands	2
Belgium	1
Hungary	1
Slovenia	1
Total	**17**

and contributing to the European knowledge economy, employment, culture and welfare by making best use of innovative pedagogies and striving to make the knowledge triangle" (Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2019). The involved higher education institutions commit themselves to organise 50% student mobility as a standard feature and to develop joint curricula.

To start with, two approaches to collaboration are being tested in two different calls (2019 and 2020). While initially the budget for the first Call was € 60 million, due to the large number of high-quality applications, this was increased to € 85 million with each selected alliance receiving € 5 million in the next 3 years. In the second Call, with a deadline 26 February 2020, a different format was tested. Finally, in the upcoming 2021–2027 budget period, a significantly larger budget and a more established format is expected.

The results from the first Call show that of the 54 applications, 17 alliances were selected. They include in total 114 higher education institutions from 24 countries, yet the distribution of institutions per country is rather uneven. Rather unsurprisingly, large EU member states dominate the picture. However, even if it is required that the alliances cover different regions (North, South, East, West), 12 of the 17 consortia are led by a university in Western Europe, 2 by a university in Central and Eastern Europe, and 3 in Southern Europe, while none is led by a Northern European[21] university (see Table 11).

While it can be argued that in a programme such as the EUI, the coordinator role is less important, there is also geographical unevenness in terms of overall alliance membership (see Table 12). The 16 French and 15 German institutions involved participate in 14 out of the 17 alliances, with one alliance having two French and two German universities as a partner. Overall, it is noteworthy that a substantial share of the participating institutions comes from Western European countries (46 of 114). Further, it is notable that there are only three universities from the United Kingdom included and no Turkish universities. While firm data on the development process of the 17 selected alliances are currently lacking, a possible assumption is that the institutions that have initiated these 17 alliances have, for political reasons,

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[21]Note that the EU definition of Northern Europe here also includes the Baltic countries, which are sometimes grouped together with Central and Eastern Europe.

Table 12 European Universities Initiative: number of participating higher education institutions per country in first 17 EUI alliances (2019)

Country	# Institutions in alliances
France	16
Germany	15
Italy	12
Spain	11
Sweden	6
Hungary	5
Poland	5
Belgium	4
Finland	4
Netherlands	4
Greece	3
Lithuania	3
Portugal	3
Romania	3
United Kingdom	3
Austria	2
Croatia	2
Czech	2
Denmark	2
Ireland	2
Latvia	2
Norway**	2
Cyprus	1
Malta	1
Slovenia	1

*Bulgaria, Estonia, Iceland**, Liechtenstein**, Luxembourg, Rep of North Macedonia**, Serbia**, Slovakia, and Turkey** had no participating higher education institutions
**Eligible countries which are not EU members

avoided to invite Turkish universities. In addition, Brexit can be assumed to have had an impact on the below par representation of universities from the United Kingdom (compared, e.g., to the participation of UK institutions in Erasmus+ projects).

Yet, these data do not really give a good indication of the scope of the participating institutions in their country. Therefore, we have assessed the share of EUI participating institutions' student numbers in their respective countries' overall student population (see Table 13). It is rather striking that already through this first Call in 12 of the 24 involved countries at least one in five students will get an opportunity to study in a context where European collaboration between institutions is significantly strengthened.

Table 13 Approximate share of students per country who are enrolled in higher education institutions that are part of one of the 17 first EUI alliances

Country	Share of students (%)
Malta	79
SIovenia	49
Sweden	38
Greece	27
Italy	26
Finland	26
Lithuania	24
Hungary	23
France	23
Czech	20
Belgium	20
Spain	19
Denmark	16
Latvia	16
Croatia	15
Ireland	14
Germany	12
The Netherlands	11
Poland	11
Norway	10
Romania	8
Austria	8
Cyprus	8
United Kingdom	3

Sources EUROSTAT (2016, number of students, ISCED 5-7), ETER database for institutional enrolments (ISCED 5-7, 2016/2017), overview of consortia membership. Note: Some of the institutions had missing values in the ETER database, which we have supplemented from numbers from institutional websites and alternative sources. Moreover, the shares are calculated per 2016 data, and in some countries, merger processes have taken place since. Therefore, the percentages should be seen as estimates.

7 Conclusion

The perspective on the recent developments in and future of the EHEA discussed in this paper implies complementing the focus on the structural and technical progress made in the EHEA with an appropriate inclusion of fundamental values and principles in intra-European higher education collaboration. The data presented in the paper on declining political interest in the EHEA throughout the 48 participating countries and the deterioration of the situation with respect to fundamental values, especially academic freedom, in a number of EHEA countries can be interpreted as

an important challenge to the future of the EHEA. In addition, the overview of EU funded Erasmus+ (KA2) projects, and especially the first 17 alliances selected in the first EUI Call, shows that there are important variations between the four EHEA regions when it comes to the level of project leadership and participation.

The first Call of the EUI is of relevance for identifying an appropriate future trajectory for the EHEA. The introduction of the EUI can be regarded as a start of an ambitious new phase in intra-European higher education collaboration, moving from relatively short-term project collaboration to a more programmatic, long-term, integrated level of collaboration. The data of the outcomes of the first Call of the EUI show that especially higher education institutions in the four largest Continental European EU member states have been successful, while also Eastern European EU member states are well-represented. On the other hand, the very low UK participation and lack of Turkish institutions in the 17 first EUI alliances strongly suggest that political considerations have been taken into account in the composition of the alliances. From the perspective of the foreseen budget for the EUI and the large interest and commitment from the higher education institutions in the EU/EFTA countries to form EUI alliances, as well as the profiles of these alliances' joint programmes, the first Call of the EUI might indeed be the beginning of an important transformation in European higher education. To do justice to and further develop this transformation, it is necessary that the participating countries are more explicitly and effectively committed to fundamental values and principles than is currently the case in the EHEA, as shown in this paper.

The lack of action in the EHEA to stimulate that the agreed upon commitment to fundamental values and principles is followed up in practice hinders, amongst other things, the development of a clear European identity in higher education. As indicated by heads of state of major EU countries as well as the new EU Commission, the growing global political, economic and scientific rivalry, with especially the USA and China, demands a clear and strong European identity. The role of higher education in the promotion and development of this identity is crucial. But, as indicated, the EHEA is currently not the arena where European identity ambitions can be comprehensively and effectively boosted and realised.

What might the data presented and analysed in this paper imply for the future of the EHEA? Two complementary trajectories can be presented here, the first implying a move away from the geographical focus on Europe, the second a move back to a core of EU, EU membership candidate and EFTA countries. The first trajectory would imply moving from a *European* to a *Global* Higher Education Area. Such a move would imply connecting higher education systems and institutions around the world through a global programme incorporating EHEA components, such as student and staff mobility, mutual recognition of credit points, educational quality and the use of digital technologies. This could, amongst other things, contribute in a meaningful way to strengthening the contributions of higher education to the realisation of the SDGs. In practice, this could imply creating regional/continental Higher Education Areas that are based on the same structural and technical components as the EHEA, that is, converging degree structures, developing joint quality assessment procedures and structures, and reducing barriers for student and staff mobility, not only within

each region but also between the regions. In this way, a Global Higher Education Area could be created, of which European Higher Education would make up one of the regional components.

The second trajectory would imply making the adherence to fundamental values and principles a central element in the creation and maintenance of a new common area for European universities and colleges. This new area will be more integrated and more anchored in a common *European* identity than the current EHEA. In this trajectory, the basic aims and components would include institutional integration instead of project collaboration. This trajectory would follow the path laid out by the ambitions and emerging practices of the European Universities Initiative and the higher education institutions participating in the selected alliances. Membership and participation in this new area would be dependent upon a set of framework conditions, including adherence to agreed upon fundamental values and principles. For such a new area to be effective and relevant, an independent monitoring body could be established, with a mandate to develop transparent and relevant indicators and to report regularly on the situation with respect to all framework conditions, including values and principles in all participating countries. If a country does not adhere to the agreed upon framework conditions, membership of the new area should be suspended. Putting fundamental values and principles at the core of the new area would potentially provide a foundation for science diplomacy negotiations with European countries that are not part of it. This could, for example, allow for an inclusion of these countries in the new area as associate members, as long as they adhere in practice to the framework conditions on which the new area is to be founded.

Obviously, the ultimate consequence of the two trajectories would be the disbandment of the EHEA in its current form.

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Taking Stock of the Bologna Process at 20: The Possibilities and Limits of Soft Law Governance

Ligia Deca and Robert Harmsen

The Bologna Process has been widely portrayed as a 'success story'. On the one hand, it is often presented as an (infrequent) instance of the effective functioning of a mode of soft law governance, serving in the European context as something of a precursor for the European Union's subsequent development of the Open Method of Co-ordination (Rav 2008; Haskell 2009). On the other hand, it is also often seen as having provided a model for regional cooperation in higher education subsequently followed in other global regions (Huisman 2012) or, in more multipolar terms, as one of the major models of a 'higher education regionalism' that has also seen significant developments elsewhere (Chou and Ravinet 2015).

Yet, somewhat paradoxically, the period since the formal consolidation of the process as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010 has been marked by an increasing questioning of its core purpose or continuing utility. For example, a key strategy document submitted to the 2015 Yerevan ministerial meeting, on the basis of deliberations in the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), affirmed in its opening sentence that the EHEA 'has come to a turning point where a new sense of direction is needed in order to move ahead' (EHEA 2015a). Commentators have similarly asked whether the process has 'exhausted' itself (Harmsen 2015: 795) or simply risks 'running out of steam' (Bergan and Deca 2018: 298–302).

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These interrogations are, in part, the product of the very success of the Bologna Process. It has undoubtedly created an "agora" (Zgaga 2012: 30–32) or shared higher education policy space at a continental level (cf. Dakowska and Velarde 2018) where none previously existed. Yet, at the same time, this growing questioning of the process also stems from its (perceived or real) shortcomings. It is clear that the implementation of key Bologna commitments, seeking to facilitate the comparability and recognition of qualifications and with it enhanced continent-wide mobility, remains markedly uneven across the 48 participating countries (Sin et al. 2016; Huisman 2019). Indeed, there is significant sentiment that, after an initial wave of reforms during the first decade of the process, the more recent period has perhaps seen something of a slowing down, if not a stalling of reforms (cf. Viðarsdoóttir 2018). This, in turn, could be seen as pointing to the potential limits of a soft law governance process itself. At the same time, attention has also been focused on a further expansion of the objectives or topics to be covered within the process—indicating an aspiration for renewal beyond an initial agenda focused primarily on issues of structural reform.[1]

It is against this background that the present paper is conceived, intended—to use the (earlier) terms of the Bologna Process itself—as a 'stocktaking' exercise. The paper broadly surveys the current state of play as regards the EHEA, probing the major topics of current discussion, likely medium-term developments, and what this portends for the future direction(s) of this now twenty-year-old experience of regional higher education cooperation. To this end, the first three sections of the paper examine: the recent, intensified treatment of the issue of non-implementation; the development of the EHEA as a 'policy forum' as regards both its member states and wider international cooperation through the Bologna Policy Forum; and the role of the EHEA as a 'community of values', focusing on its capabilities and limits as regards the promotion and/or enforcement of those values. The paper concentrates on the period since the formal founding of the EHEA at the Budapest-Vienna ministerial conference in 2010, with a particular emphasis on the more recent period encompassing the Yerevan (2015b) and Paris (citeyearEHEA18a) ministerial meetings. It draws both on publicly available documentary sources and commentaries and on the authors' own involvement in different aspects of the Bologna Process.[2]

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[1]One of the working groups constituted after the 2015 Yerevan ministerial meeting focused on 'policy development for new EHEA goals' (EHEA 2017). As Bergan and Deca (2018: 302) note, however, the group 'seems to have faced serious difficulties in defining clear policy measures that lend themselves to the particular context of the EHEA'.

[2]Ligia Deca was a member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) in 2008–2010 as the Chairperson of the European Students' Union and was also the Head of the Bologna Secretariat in 2010–2012, hosted by Romania. In her latter capacity, she was involved in the drafting of the Bucharest communiqué (2012) and coordinated the organisation of the 2012 EHEA ministerial conference.

1 (Non-)Implementation

Preparations for the formal establishment of the EHEA in the mid- to late- 2000s saw discussions within the BFUG as to whether a 'hardening' of the essentially soft governance process might be either possible or desirable. There was some discussion as to whether a formal legal instrument might be adopted on the model of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention and, relatedly, whether provision might be made for the exclusion or suspension of non-compliant contracting states (Zgaga 2012: 24). In a similar vein, there was some consideration as to whether the move from the 'informal' Bologna Process to the more formally constituted EHEA might be used as a form of selection mechanism, possibly restricting membership to only those states that had already met key commitments or, alternatively, placing conditions on the membership of those states that had not yet achieved such a level of compliance (Bergan and Deca 2018: 309). These discussions within the process also found an echo in (and were to some extent reinforced by) the academic literature. Most notably, Garben's (2011; 2010) critical legal analysis of the Bologna Process put forward the argument that it both could and should have been adopted through the instruments of EU law, which, in her view, would have provided for more effective implementation as well as for a more transparent decision-making process. Such arguments, however, were able to gain little political foothold; any idea of putting the process on a more formal legal basis was relatively quickly taken off the table.

With such a 'legal' option being an apparent non-starter, this left essentially two competing perspectives as to how implementation might be conceived within the framework of the EHEA (as contrasted in Bergan and Deca 2018: 310). On the one hand, there are those who view the process primarily in terms of policy learning (e.g. Harmsen 2015). In this view, the EHEA is 'essentially an area of peer learning, where countries develop good practice by learning from each other but where it is either not desirable or not possible—or neither desirable nor possible—to take measures where countries do not implement commitments' (Bergan and Deca 2018: 310). On the other hand, there are those who argue that the EHEA, while significantly relying on peer learning, nevertheless requires some form of effective enforcement mechanism so as to maintain its credibility and thus to secure the existence of a pan-European higher education space in which qualifications are readily and unproblematically recognised across borders (e.g. Bergan 2015). Viðarsdoóttir[3] (2018: 391–392) evocatively makes the case for this latter vision of the process, drawing a strong distinction between an initially voluntary participation and the need, nevertheless, to ensure consistent compliance once that initial commitment has been undertaken:

> It is, however, essential that for the Bologna Process to function, the voluntary nature of the agreement only applies to participation but never to implementation. In short–once you sign up to take part in the Bologna Process, you should not expect to find yourself in front of a smoörgaåsbord of educational delicacies where you might choose to have two slices of salmon but ignore both the ham sandwiches and the potato salad. Instead, you sit down to

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[3]The author, an official in the Icelandic Ministry of Education, was also a co-chair of the Non-implementation Advisory Group (2016–2018) whose work is discussed below.

> a set lunch, carefully nutritionally balanced but not catered to individual tastes. It may look less appetising than the smoörgaåsbord but its constituent parts have been carefully thought through so that unless you consume all the individual components you miss out on its full benefits and it will function less than optimally.

The presentation of these two positions is necessarily somewhat stylised, and an understanding of the underlying dynamics of (non-)compliance within the EHEA undoubtedly requires a more fine-grained analysis of the possibilities and limits offered by the full spectrum of instruments—including positive socialisation, 'name and shame' mechanisms and the adoption of more formal sanctions—potentially operable within a soft governance framework. Nevertheless, the basic distinction between a predominately 'peer learning' approach, on the hand, and an approach concerned to ensure the 'collective enforcement' of commitments, on the other, may usefully serve to frame much of the discussion surrounding (non-)implementation in the EHEA from 2010 onwards.

1.1   *From Bucharest to Yerevan*

The 2012 Bucharest ministerial conference saw some moves in the direction of strengthening implementation within the EHEA. Following on the decision taken at the 2009 Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial conference, the previous 'stock-taking' exercises were replaced by a 'Bologna Process Implementation Report', developing more fine-grained indicators of compliance with key commitments. Consequently, as observed in the report, 'the colour dark green is less prevalent in some action lines than before' (EACEA 2012: 7)—i.e. relative to the 'traffic light' (green-amber-red) bands used to indicate compliance, fewer countries were able to meet the more rigorous standards applied for a determination of full compliance. The final communiqué of the Bucharest meeting (EHEA 2012) also stated that the EHEA would 'encourage the development of a system of voluntary peer learning and reviewing in countries that request it', with a view to helping 'to assess the level of implementation of Bologna reforms and promote good practices'. This commitment in the Bucharest communiqué was made having in mind the already existing EU funded peer learning activities (PLA) and with a view to better use EU funds for Bologna Process implementation.

Three years later, at the Yerevan ministerial conference, the issue of non-implementation figured with much greater prominence in the final communiqué. While noting the progress that had been made by the Bologna Process, the introductory preamble to the communiqué nevertheless also underlined that 'implementation of the structural reforms is uneven and the tools are sometimes used incorrectly or in bureaucratic or superficial ways' (EHEA 2015b). This was then amplified later on in the document, with a call to redouble efforts to ensure 'full and coherent implementation of agreed reforms at the national level', to be achieved by further instilling a vision of the 'shared ownership' of those reforms on the part of policy-makers and academic communities, while also more actively engaging stakeholders.

The framing of the issue of non-implementation broadly reflected the logic of the 'collective enforcement' position outlined above, affirming that the credibility of the EHEA crucially depends on the existence of effective mechanisms to ensure that consistent standards of compliance are maintained. In the words of the communiqué:

> Non-implementation in some countries undermines the functioning and credibility of the whole EHEA. We need more precise measurement of performance as a basis for reporting from member countries. Through policy dialogue and exchange of good practice, we will provide targeted support to member countries experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals and enable those who wish to go further to do so (EHEA 2015b).

On the basis of the Yerevan conclusions, an advisory group was then established to deal specifically with the issue of 'non-implementation', working in liaison with the existing working groups on monitoring and implementation. The work of the group proved to be extremely contentious by the usual standards of the EHEA, giving rise to 'difficult discussions' within the BFUG (Bergan and Deca 2018: 320). In effect, as detailed in the section below, the group's deliberations touched directly on the different visions which the participating states might hold of the nature of the EHEA itself—in particular, pointing to differing understandings of the nature of the 'commitments' made within the process and the extent to which these could or should give rise to more or less public and constraining instruments of enforcement.

1.2 The Advisory Group on Non-Implementation

The group worked from early 2016 through early 2018, following the usual format with regular meetings and regular reports to the BFUG.[4] It decided early on to concentrate only on the (non-)implementation of three key commitments: (1). A 3-cycle system compatible with the EHEA Qualifications Framework and making use of ECTS; (2). Compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention; and (3). Quality Assurance in compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), implying external QA performed by independent agencies, preferably those registered on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). While recognising that these commitments 'in no way represent all EHEA tools, reforms and common values', the group nevertheless stressed that these commitments 'are central to the Bologna Process' and that 'their correct implementation is a necessary prerequisite to any higher education system that embraces the fundamental values of the Bologna Process' (EHEA-AGNI 2016a).

The scope of the commitments to be (initially) dealt with thus defined, the group moved to tackle the question of how implementation might be improved. The initial work of the group in this regard appeared broadly consistent with the 'collective enforcement' approach identified above, again stressing that 'the Bologna Process

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[4]The major proposals and regular reporting documents produced by the group (including the documents cited below) are conveniently collected at: http://www.ehea.info/cid105406/ag-non-implementation-2015--2018.html, last accessed on 16.12.2019.

will lose credibility if no consequences are visible for non-implementation' (EHEA-AGNI 2016: 3). An initial proposal was drafted and discussed for an eight-stage cyclical process to deal with non-implementation, whereby national problem areas would be identified by an implementation committee on the basis of regular national reports (1), leading to a request for information from the state concerned (2). The state would then reply to the committee (3), opening a dialogue (4) and developing an action plan (5) on which the implementation committee would provide feedback (6). Progress would then be subject to regular updates within the normal cycle of business defined by ministerial conferences (7). Data would further be collected and collated in view of the next ministerial conference (8). Non-implementation procedures would be 'highlighted' during ministerial conferences, allowing for exchanges and follow-up in a new cycle. The implementation committee, as envisaged in this original model, would be a standing committee of the BFUG, made up of BFUG members and external experts where relevant. Pointedly, in this first draft, states subject to non-implementation procedures would have been excluded from membership of the non-implementation committee.

Work continued in this vein through much of 2016 and 2017, including the presentation of two draft model letters that would be sent respectively to countries with 'good' implementation records and to those where implementation was deemed to be 'insufficient' (EHEA-AGNI 2017a). Yet, though the proposal appeared to have garnered substantial (majority) support, it was also clear that significant apprehensions, if not outright opposition, also existed in relation to the approach adopted.

These doubts and oppositions found clear expression at the meeting of the BFUG in Tartu in November 2017, at which a number of states, led by France, made clear that they could not accept the proposal on the table. The French delegation argued against a system which they argued would 'stigmatise' rather than 'encourage' states, further noting that the process lacked adequate legal and governance provisions to move in the direction proposed. They were joined by Italy and Russia, as well as to varying degrees by a number of other states, in this opposition (EHEA-AGNI 2017b).

Faced with this opposition, the advisory group was sent back to the drawing board to work out a new compromise, with a Flemish proposal based on the use of 'reverse peer groups' emerging from the discussions as the most likely way ahead. Meeting jointly with representatives of Working Groups 1 (Monitoring) and 2 (Implementation) in Brussels in December 2017, the group sought to thrash out the contours of a new proposal, in particular seeking to allay French (and others') fears that the initially envisaged approach would risk appearing to put countries 'on trial' (EHEA-AGNI 2017c).

This led to the proposal of a new document on 'Support for the Implementation of Key Bologna Commitments', communicated to the BFUG meeting in Sofia in January 2018 (EHEA-AGNI/WGI 2018a). Relative to the earlier model, the new proposal streamlined the cyclical procedure (reduced to six steps with less onerous administrative requirements) and significantly changed the tone of the overall presentation so as to stress its essentially supportive character—'a change in overall language to better reflect the positive and incentive-based aspects of the process' (EHEA-AGNI/WGI 2018b). Crucially, the role of the implementation committee in

identifying national problem areas was also removed from the process. This would be replaced by a practice of self-identification as regards both areas where countries sought additional assistance and areas where countries felt themselves positioned to offer such assistance on the basis of the successful implementation of commitments.

Under the revised proposal, after the collection and collation of data for the Bologna Implementation Report prior to each ministerial conference (1), states will then self-identify as having successfully implemented key commitments or as having not or insufficiently implemented such commitments, expressing an interest in joining one or more peer groups on this basis (2). The Bologna Implementation Group will then play a coordinating role, facilitating the constitution of peer groups on the basis of the responses received (3). The peer groups will then begin their work, initially focused on the three key commitments already identified above (4). The peer groups will regularly update the Bologna Implementation Committee on their progress (5), and countries will then submit their reports on implementation prior to the next ministerial conference, restarting the cycle (6). Positive implementation experiences may be highlighted at the ministerial conference, while provision is also made to bring to the attention of the conference any instances where countries have failed to make significant progress on the implementation of key commitments across two reporting cycles. It would then be for the ministerial conference to make a (political) determination as to such action as might be taken in these circumstances.

It is this revised proposal that was adopted by the May 2018 Paris ministerial conference. The overall trajectory of the drafting process bears underlining. Having started from a comparatively strong 'collective enforcement' position, significant (minority) resistance produced a progressive push back, ultimately resulting in the adoption of a model clearly on the 'peer learning' end of the spectrum. This, indeed, is evidenced in the final document itself, which describes the adopted model in the following terms:

> The proposal follows the Bologna philosophy of peer- and process review which fits well with the collegiate and improvement-oriented ethos of the EHEA and aims to make implementation of key commitments more transparent (EHEA 2018a).

Reflecting the general tenor of developments, it is perhaps noteworthy that the Paris ministerial conference was also the first time since 2003 when national implementation reports were not made publicly available for all EHEA member countries (leaving this option open only for those countries that specifically wanted to make their self-reporting available to wider audiences).

1.3 From Paris to Rome

The 2018 Paris communiqué devoted two sections to questions of implementation, noting the progress made but also affirming that continuing efforts must be undertaken so as 'to unlock the full potential of the EHEA' (EHEA 2018b). Echoing the terms of the Yerevan communiqué three years earlier, the conclusions to the 2018

ministerial meeting further noted that better implementation may only be achieved through ensuring 'a full ownership' of the agreed reforms across the EHEA, engaging governmental and institutional actors as well as staff, students, and the wider community of stakeholders.

As noted above, the Paris meeting further agreed to proceed on the basis of the final, revised proposals put forward by the Non-implementation Advisory Group together with the Working Group on Implementation. To that end, the period since the 2018 meeting has seen the constitution of a Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) as well as three peer groups dealing with the three key commitments identified as being of central importance for ensuring the credibility of the EHEA: the qualifications frameworks and ECTS; recognition (including both the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement); and quality assurance.

At the time of writing, the three peer groups have been constituted and have begun to lay the foundations for their work, both identifying thematic orientations and clarifying the concept of peer support itself (BICG 2019a). There has been a good overall uptake as regards participation in the groups. As of November 2019, there are 24 countries participating in the qualifications framework group, 38 countries in the recognition group and 37 countries in the quality assurance group (BICG 2019b). Only one jurisdiction (the United Kingdom as regards England, Northern Ireland and Wales) has not (as yet) manifested its intention to participate in any of the peer support groups. Of course, the jury must remain out at this stage as to the effectiveness of the newly agreed process, which will be reviewed at the scheduled June 2020 ministerial conference in Rome. Some speculative observations might, however, be permitted as a means to frame future discussions.

On the one hand, the model adopted offers a perhaps underestimated possibility for process learning. Thematically focused peer exchange may effectively allow for both the identification of common impediments to the fulfilment of key commitments and the means by which these may be overcome. It may also, perhaps even more importantly, facilitate a deepening and reshaping of our understanding of those commitments, helping to ensure their continuing relevance. For example, group work in the area of recognition could push beyond a simple scorecard approach to understand how recognition operates in practice across the EHEA, at both official and institutional level, in terms that could better facilitate mobility without necessarily insisting on a (perhaps unattainable, if not undesirable) convergence of institutional forms.

This view of the process, relative to the models outlined at the beginning of this section, would see it fully embrace its potential as a model of peer learning, concerned not only with the implementation of existing commitments but also in creating dynamic processes of iterative adaptation. In relation to wider concepts of soft governance, this corresponds to the logic of the influential experimentalist governance model of Sabel and Zeitlin (2010: 3), which specifies that 'the framework goals, metrics, and procedures themselves are periodically revised by the actors who initially established them, augmented by such new participants whose views come to be seen as indispensable to full and fair deliberation'.

On the other hand, there is, of course, no guarantee that the process will necessarily realise this full potential. Moreover, given the model agreed, it appears unlikely that the operation of the process will satisfy those whose primary concern is that of ensuring the consistent, if not uniform, implementation of key commitments at the level of individual participating states. Viðarsdoóttir (2018: 397) gives voice to such concerns in her discussion of the model adopted, making an appeal (unheeded at Paris) for the adoption of a stronger sanctioning mechanism within the process:

> The most notable problem with the model as proposed is that it contains no endpoint and no obvious consequences for those countries who are either unable or, more worryingly, unwilling to participate in it and for whom no improvement is noted over the course of the cycle. It is theoretically possible within the model as it stands that it becomes a perpetual cycle of "support" for countries in which no improvement is ever seen or judged likely. Having noted the near standstill that some countries have come to with regard to the implementation of some key commitments makes it necessary that an escalation or endpoint to the model be put forward for discussion and eventual decision by the EHEA ministers at their next conference in Paris in 2018.

Across these two positions, there is perhaps also a further point to be made concerning research on the EHEA. It is clear that participating states have differing views of the nature of the 'commitments' which they have made in joining the process and that these are expressed in terms that often call to mind the differing 'worlds of compliance' identified by Falkner et al. (2005; 2008) in their studies of the implementation of EU directives. These 'cultures of compliance' deserve more attention in the context of the EHEA, not only as a means to understand differing patterns and degrees of implementation, but also as potentially structuring factors that must better be accounted for in our overall conceptualisation of the limits and possibilities of the EHEA itself.

2   The EHEA as a Policy Forum

As a voluntary inter-governmental process, which 'has soft law in its DNA' (Harmsen 2015: 796), the structures of the EHEA readily lend themselves to functioning as a policy forum, facilitating policy dialogue and peer learning for its member countries as well as between the European Higher Education Area and other interested parties worldwide. While the previous section discussed the tensions between those wishing to move to stricter interpretations of what it means to be an EHEA member country and those emphasizing the need to focus (only) on policy dialogue as a tool to reach the commonly assumed goals, this section will look at this wider dimension, taking stock of how the Bologna Process has developed itself as a policy forum in recent years. Attention is first focused internally on the (limited) development of the social dimension, before turning to the Bologna Policy Forum and the EHEA's efforts to engage in enhanced dialogue and cooperation with other global regions.

2.1 The Social Dimension

The social dimension of higher education is deemed essential in order for higher education to fulfil its societal mission, especially in view of contributing to social cohesion in the EHEA member states. As social policy broadly conceived is *par excellence* an area of national specificity and jurisdiction, policy dialogue was considered to be the best way forward by which the EHEA could support each higher education system to meet the goal of inclusive higher education. One particular three-year (2012–2015) project—Peer Learning for the Social Dimension (PL4SD)[5]—foresaw a number of activities that were aimed to support EHEA countries in their efforts: drafting country profiles regarding existing policies on social inclusion, two peer learning activities at the European level, and developing a database of over 300 good practice examples as well as three in-depth country reviews. Besides the PL4SD project, the Report of the Working Group on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning was complemented by a dedicated strategy for the topic, bearing the title '*Widening Participation for Equity and Growth: A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area to 2020*'. However, despite the call made in the 2009 Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial communiqué for all countries to set 'measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the […] decade', less than 20 % of systems had set targets for inclusion for under-represented groups in 2015 (EACEA 2015). It was mainly the countries that had anyway focused on the social dimension (Belgium–Flemish Community, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, etc.) that could show concrete progress when the latest EHEA implementation report was being drafted (EACEA 2018). It can, therefore, be argued that peer learning works primarily when the involved parties are already ready, willing and able to pursue a specific agenda. Since the EHEA member countries left out this dimension when identifying key Bologna Process commitments, it is highly likely that the EHEA will focus on its 'policy forum' role and attempt to promote innovative ways of increasing the policy learning process for willing and interested parties, without attempting a more coercive approach, despite the modest progress made in the past decade.

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[5]PL4SD was developed by the Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna (Austria), in partnership with a number of partners including the European Students' Union (ESU) and was funded by the European Commission. More information can be found at: https://www.esu-online.org/?project=pl4sd-social-dimension-observatory-sdo, last accessed on 16.12.2019.

2.2   The Bologna Policy Fora—Between Policy Export and Global Dialogue

The issue of policy dialogue between the Bologna Process and other regional initiatives first appeared in the EHEA context in the Berlin ministerial communiqué (2003), where the ministers sought to encourage cooperation with other parts of the world, namely by opening Bologna events to those interested coming from non-Bologna countries. It was, however, not until 2007 that a report on the *Bologna Process in a Global Setting* was drafted (Zgaga 2007) and a Strategy on the External Dimension of the EHEA was adopted by Bologna Process member countries. The Strategy focused on five main policy aims: '1. Improving information on the EHEA; 2. Promoting European higher education in order to increase its attractiveness and competitiveness; 3. Strengthening cooperation based on partnership; 4. Intensifying policy dialogue and 5. Furthering recognition of qualifications' (Bologna Process 2007).

The fourth policy priority focused specifically on intensifying policy dialogue and it was further detailed by the work of the Bologna Working Group on European Higher Education in a Global Setting (2007–2009), which recommended that ministerial conferences should be complemented by Bologna Policy Fora, as events opened to non-EHEA members. Five such Bologna Policy Fora have been organised since 2009, back to back with each EHEA ministerial conference. The Bologna Policy Fora enjoyed initial enthusiasm from EHEA and non-EHEA members alike, but political participation dropped significantly in the following editions. The format ranged from plenary debates only to a combination of plenary debates and thematic parallel sessions, with a recent gradual opening of the EHEA ministerial sessions to non-EHEA countries in order to increase the attractiveness of the event.

These events have been largely deemed unsatisfactory, due to various reasons: lack of political focus evident in the superficial discussions between participants, insufficient political representation (in recent years particularly from the side of EHEA countries), lack of follow-up in between these events, and a general difficulty in finding the right balance between national interests and internationally relevant topics of discussion (Bergan and Deca 2018: 313–314). The relative lack of involvement of non-EHEA members in organising these events has also led to a European centric approach that lowered the level of relevance for non-European dialogue participants. In the experience of one of the authors in organising an edition of the Bologna Policy Forum, most EHEA ministers were more interested in organising parallel meetings with minsters with whom they had something to discuss rather than being involved in an attempt to make the overall event more adapted to their interests. The final list of participants, despite being a BFUG prerogative, was always heavily influenced by the interests of the country organising the Bologna Policy Forum. This meant that sometimes the invitations went out very late, and the concept was rather a poor attempt at reconciling overarching EHEA (and oftentimes EU, due to funding allotted for the event) interests and the foreign policy priorities of the host. But these organisational aspects were not the only factors weighing in on the success of the

five editions of the BPF. The discussions that revolved around the preparations of each edition always involved a clash between those mainly considering the policy dialogue aspect (which emphasised the need also to focus on the priorities of those outside of the EHEA) and the EHEA members which were more interested in the 'export' value of the event (e.g. prior to the first BPF, the European Commission put forward a proposal to promote 'Bologna labels'—a tool that would recognise the efforts of countries that wish to align their higher education system to the EHEA, without actually becoming members).

Despite the difficulties encountered by the EHEA as a whole to make the BPF a success, EHEA members have successfully intensified their policy dialogues in various contexts. Notably, the European University Association (EUA) forged solid partnerships with counterparts in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the European Students' Union (ESU) increased its global student dialogue with the help of UNESCO, and the EU intensified its efforts to expand its Erasmus programme to non-EHEA countries, etc.

Perhaps some of the difficulties faced by the BPF to fulfil its purpose are also linked with the lack of enthusiasm of the countries with globally competitive higher education systems to embark on a common EHEA promotion effort. One telling example is the failure of the Information and Promotion Network, which was designed to support the International Openness Working Group in the 2010–2012 timeframe with enhancing the exchange of good practices related to HE promotion and to work towards an EHEA plan in this sense. The reluctance of many of the members actually to embark on EHEA wide efforts to promote not just their higher education system but the EHEA as a brand prompted the group to not ask the BFUG to renew its mandate, though the group nevertheless stressed the need for more concerted marketing efforts, which would pre-suppose financial efforts (EHEA-IOWG 2012). The European Commission funded a project in 2015 to further the activity set out in the IPN Terms of Reference, but its implementation gave rise to several conflicts between higher education promotion agencies.

2.3   Is the EHEA a Successful Policy Forum in All of Its Dimensions?

Looking at the relative achievements of the EHEA in its attempts to become a policy forum, both for its members and for interested external parties, a few observations can be made. Firstly, the topics on which the debates are most constructive in terms of policy learning are those that benefit from an overlap with national political priorities (structural reforms, recognition, etc.) or by a non-challenged prominence (e.g. transparency tools). In other cases, such as for the social dimension of higher education, the effectiveness of the soft governance mechanisms, which mainly rely on policy dialogue, are limited by factors outside of the EHEA's reach—political prioritisation and stability, national socio-economic context, perceived role of the higher education

sector, capacity etc. Furthermore, the limits for policy dialogue are also set by the perceived or presumed added value of the EHEA for each individual member—in the case of EHEA's policy dialogue with other regions, some aspects are seen as best kept in the national remit, such as international marketing efforts, especially for those that would not necessarily benefit from a very strong image of the EHEA to the detriment of marketing efforts for their national system.

The influence of the wider political climate must also be borne in mind, marked by growing levels of Euroscepticism. European values have been challenged in a number of countries, from the rule of law to freedom of expression and university autonomy. This policy mood could not remain without consequences, and the EHEA has seen a lack of appetite even for some of its initial trademarks (such as the publicly available national implementation reports). In this context, policy dialogue could not remain untouched and the effectiveness of this tool will depend on the willingness of national and institutional representatives to buck the political trend, which appears in many cases to point towards a more inward-looking approach to policy. These past years have also brought the issue of fundamental values in the EHEA to the forefront, as any effective policy learning process must be embedded in a community of shared purpose and values. The next section will look at how some of the debates on EHEA values have evolved and will discuss the potential need to focus more on this aspect if the EHEA is to continue to be a successful policy forum in the future.

3   The EHEA as a Community of Values

The Bologna Process, from the outset, has represented a 'community of values'. The 1999 Declaration notably made explicit reference back to the 1988 Magna Charta Universitatum, which set out a broad, humanist vision of the university as an autonomous institution rooted in an expansive vision of academic freedom and the unity of teaching and research.[6] These underlying values themselves have not, however, for the most part been subject to explicit monitoring within a process that has largely concentrated on more technical questions of structural reform as discussed in previous sections.

Recent developments have, nevertheless, pointedly underlined that core principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy cannot be taken for granted across the member states of the EHEA. Reflecting this situation, a 2016 background document surveyed key issues surrounding academic freedom and institutional autonomy across the EHEA and further raised the question of what role the EHEA itself might play in the promotion or defence of such core values (Bergan 2016). This challenge

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[6]The declaration is available on the site of the Magna Charta Observatory at http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/the-magna-charta/english, last accessed on 16.12.2019. The Charter has acquired a resonance well beyond its initial European context, and as of mid-December 2019 had been signed by 889 universities in 88 countries.

was then, in turn, taken up in the 2018 Paris communiqué, which strongly affirmed these 'fundamental values' in one of its opening paragraphs:

> Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA. Having seen these fundamental values challenged in recent years in some of our countries, we strongly commit to promoting and protecting them in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation (EHEA 2018b).

On the basis of this affirmation, a task force has been established 'for future monitoring of values', with a view to making a proposal for adoption at the 2020 Rome ministerial meeting. This task force is essentially confronted with two main challenges.

On the one hand, it is clearly a number of high-profile, egregious violations of core principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom that have led to the renewed interest in bringing the monitoring of such values into the process. Worrying developments may be identified across a range of EHEA countries, including high profile cases such as the measures taken by the Erdoğan government in Turkey in the aftermath of the failed 2016 military coup or the actions of the Orbán government in Hungary as regards the Central European University in the context of wider restrictive moves concerning academic freedom.

Yet, it is precisely in such severe instances of the limitation of academic freedom that the EHEA is arguably least able to act because of the political sensitivity of the issues raised. As Bergan and Deca (2018: 317) comment, 'Facing challenges in the implementation of one's national qualifications framework is one thing, and the responsibility lies squarely with the public authority responsible for education. Facing challenges in implementing democracy and human rights is quite another story, and it is not one that lies primarily in the remit of the Minister of Education'. While one may find it regrettable, this comment accurately reflects the limits of the EHEA, which cannot reasonably be extended to encompass a wider political dimension. Indeed, its core logic and structures reflect these limits, essentially providing for monitoring as regards the (non-)fulfilment of commitments, in terms qualitatively different from an enforcement mechanism designed to allow for the sanctioning of violations.

The partial exception in this regard has been the case of Belarus, which had initially been refused admission to the EHEA (Gille-Belova 2015) and was then later admitted only on condition of following a 'roadmap' of supervised post-accession reform (cf. EHEA 2018c). Even here, however, there has been significant political pressure from a number of participating states to end the country-specific monitoring process, despite clear evidence of the non-fulfilment of key commitments.

On the other hand, this leaves open the question of what may reasonably be accomplished within the process. Relative to this challenge, the most useful starting point is to take stock of the situation at the European level as regards the existence of relevant benchmarks and standards. Here, as Matei and Iwinska (2018) convincingly argue, a notable imbalance may readily be detected, in which a comparatively well-articulated European model of 'university autonomy' has emerged in recent decades,

but in the absence of a correspondingly well-developed notion of academic freedom as a necessary complement and counterweight. The European University Association has effectively played a strong agenda-setting role (Nok and Bac 2014), notably through the development of its national university autonomy scorecards, framing the discussion in terms reflecting the concerns of its membership (essentially university rectorates/central administrations). As such, a conception of autonomy has emerged that is primarily shaped by organisational considerations. The central focus has been to ensure that university leadership has the necessary capacity to respond to the growing external demands placed on higher education institutions—the product of a generalised 'autonomy-accountability two-step' (Harmsen 2014). Individual level academic freedom has, however, been relatively little considered within this wider policy turn, and may indeed have suffered significant erosion in the face of both increasing managerial centralisation and the growing importance within universities of externally defined priorities (cf. Christensen 2011).

The EHEA process might thus usefully address this situation by focusing on a definition and monitoring of academic freedom. In part, this may build on existing work that has mapped a range of possible indicators that could be used in such an exercise (Karran and Terence 2017). Beyond the identification of indicators, further (and potentially more difficult) discussions will also be required as to how or where such monitoring might fit in relation to existing EHEA structures. While one might conceive of new structures, the more likely option would see an academic freedom dimension mapped on to existing reporting requirements in relation to the implementation report, to peer support structures or (in some proposals) to quality assurance mechanisms. Consideration might further be given to expanding the range of sources used and/or actors involved in reporting beyond the self-reporting of participating states—though, depending on the specific mechanisms adopted, this evidently risks being an area of considerable political sensitivity.

Overall, if considerations of academic freedom (or other fundamental values) are to be brought within the process, it is thus very likely that their treatment will be fundamentally shaped by the limits and possibilities of the existing soft governance model, rather than marking a significant departure from this model as regards any putative (let alone punitive) notion of enforcement. With this, we thus return, in our conclusion, to a balance sheet concerned to understand the operation of this distinctive governance model as it has evolved over the past two decades.

4 Conclusion

Reflecting its soft law character, perhaps the most important accomplishment of the EHEA continues to be that of the construction of an 'agora' or of a 'policy space' as noted in the introduction. The EHEA continues to facilitate structured, continent-wide dialogue on major issues of higher education policy to an extent largely unparalleled in other global regions. The major focus and most productive areas of discussion remain those concerned with the structural reform of higher

education systems, where clearly articulated European-level templates have emerged as shared reference points, even if their implementation remains uneven (see below). Beyond a core of structural reform issues, where participating states have often appeared willing to invest in the European process so as to gain added leverage for desired, difficult changes at the domestic level, developments have been more limited. The much discussed, but relatively little acted upon social dimension of the Bologna Process is a case in point. As discussed above, significant advances in this area have to date appeared largely restricted to a small group of participating states already committed to relatively ambitious policy agendas, with the European-level influence as such appearing correspondingly marginal. It remains to be seen whether this will change in the aftermath of the upcoming 2020 Rome Ministerial Meeting, where ministers will be invited to adopt a set of Principles and Guidelines on the Social Dimension.[7]

Implementation remains uneven, here again reflecting the character of a soft law process whose basic design does not lend itself to providing for strong mechanisms of enforcement. The contentious discussions surrounding the work of the non-implementation working group between the Yerevan and Paris ministerial meetings (2015–2018) provided a stark representation in this regard of both the in-built limits of the process and the differing understandings of it across the participating states. A proposed move to create a still comparatively light-touch form of 'authority' in the process, allowing for states to be identified as non-compliant and to be required to develop a monitored action plan to address the indicated shortcomings, was blocked by a vocal minority of participating states. Instead, a final compromise was reached which relies entirely on self-identification and voluntary peer support groups—and this in a context where the previously systematic publication of country-specific implementation reports had also slipped off the table. Underlying this controversy were two quite distinct, contradictory views of the Bologna Process itself. On the one hand, there are those countries (including France, Russia, Greece, Poland, Spain and Italy) which appear to view the 'voluntary' character of the process as not permitting any meaningfully binding enforcement of the commitments entered into within it. On the other hand, there also appears to be a larger group of countries (including the Nordic states, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom) who view the 'voluntary' character of the process as applying only to the initial decision to join, after which they hold that there should be an enforceable obligation to abide by the commitments entered into. As previously highlighted, these different understandings of the process, and the 'worlds of compliance' that underlie them, have been comparatively neglected in research on the Bologna Process and merit much greater scrutiny going forward.

This, in turn, connects the EHEA to the wider European political landscape, where it cannot entirely escape the rise of Euroscepticisms and the growing forms of questioning of the European political project. Like all forms of European cooperation at

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[7]The draft of the European Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education available at the time of writing the article was last accessed on 16.12.2019, at: http://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_FI_TK_67_5_5b_AG1_Principles_and_Guidelines.pdf.

present, the Bologna Process must now invest greater efforts in securing its own legitimacy, pushing beyond a comparatively narrow policy community. More directly, the EHEA is also faced with growing threats to its fundamental values, most particularly as regards core tenets of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. How or whether the process is able to deal with such threats—effectively affirming its foundational principles while not succumbing to the risks of a potentially destabilising politicisation—will undoubtedly be one of the major challenges of the coming years. The potential development of a definition and indicators of academic freedom within the EHEA context may, for example, prove to be something of a litmus test of both the possibilities and limits of the normative 'soft power' of the process.

Finally, as a governance model, the experience of the EHEA to date affords us some potentially interesting lessons of wider applicability. The process has displayed a significant degree of innovation in the creation and deployment of a diverse toolkit of policy instruments. Evolving practices of benchmarking, stocktaking and peer learning have been introduced, refined, and reformed over the course of the past two decades. Such practices, moreover, sit within the framework of a wider policy community that has displayed strong socialising dynamics, developing shared templates and understandings of higher education policy across the continent. Despite markedly uneven patterns of implementation, the anchoring of these broad structures is in itself an important achievement. It is the nature of this achievement which, moreover, points to the direction of future development for the process. As in the past, the EHEA will be able to advance only by a careful calibration and adaptation of policy instruments to realities on the ground—fostering consensus, facilitating learning and prodding participating states towards the individual fulfilment of collectively defined objectives where necessary. As such, it will also continue to be an exemplary instance of soft governance in practice, illustrating both the possibilities and limits of a governance model that must—in the absence of both significant legal constraint and substantial financial resources—ultimately rely on normative suasion.

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Autonomy, Efficiency and Effectiveness—Opportunities for Higher Education: A Pilot Study

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1 Introduction

Autonomy and accountability are among the key topics that have been shaping the European higher education landscape over the past years. Recently, these issues have acquired renewed importance for both higher education practitioners and academia in the context of the intensifying public discourse on efficiency and effectiveness and the related targets that funders and policy-makers set for universities across Europe in view of declining public funds and other external pressures (e.g. Estermann and Nokkala 2009; Estermann 2017; Salerno 2003). Efficiency and effectiveness are also part of the EU priorities for higher education and research, reflected in the EU Strategic Framework for Education and Training until 2020, the Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education and the Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth. Autonomy has been discussed in several theoretical and practice-oriented studies as a pre-condition for the capacity of higher education institutions to be efficient and effective (e.g. Levacic 2002; Estermann and Kupriyanova 2019). Previous research concluded that "universities must be autonomous and able to independently shape their governance structures within agreed accountability frameworks in order to be able to react more effectively to external challenges, address social and economic needs, and manage resources in a more strategic, efficient and effective way" (Estermann and Kupriyanova 2019: 9).

While there has been some general acknowledgement of the link between autonomy and efficiency of universities, there has been little research so far on the internal

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mechanisms of this relationship, particularly, considered through the prism of institutional autonomy in various fields, such as organisation, staff, finances and academic matters.

This paper aims to close this gap with a pilot study aimed at testing—with a small group of European higher education professionals—a new methodological approach to assess the impact of autonomy on both effectiveness and efficiency of higher education institutions based on the four autonomy dimensions and the related indicators included in the University Autonomy Scorecard.[1]

The goal of this research direction, which is certainly not limited to this paper, is to offer a more nuanced understanding of how national regulatory frameworks affect the capacity of institutions to deliver on their missions in an efficient and effective way. Such new knowledge can be useful to inform discussions between public authorities and the university sector and to support leaders and managers of higher education institutions in the development of institutional efficiency strategies.

In this paper, we aim to launch the debate on several major questions, which will require further investigation: What mechanisms connect regulatory frameworks to efficient and effective university management? Which elements (i.e. dimensions and indicators) of autonomy have the greatest impact on efficiency and effectiveness of universities? How can (greater) autonomy be converted into efficiency and effectiveness in the higher education context? And, finally, what is the role of accountability in this constellation of autonomy, efficiency and effectiveness?

2   Methodology and Scope

2.1   Research Framework

The concept of *autonomy* in this study is based on a multidimensional approach developed by the European University Association (EUA) for its University Autonomy Scorecard. This approach distinguishes between four dimensions of autonomy: organisational, financial, staffing and academic. Each autonomy dimension is associated with a set of indicators (Table 1). For example, organisational autonomy refers to the procedures and criteria for the selection and dismissal of the executive head, the composition of governing bodies and the capacity to design academic structures. Financial autonomy involves flexibility of higher education institutions in managing public funds and estates and defining other financial processes applied for tuition fees (Bennetot Pruvot and Estermann 2017). For the purpose of the present analysis, the Autonomy Scorecard indicators for financial autonomy include, in addition, the capacity for universities to engage in joint procurement, given the strategic nature of this field in relation to institutional efficiency (Estermann and Kupriyanova 2019).

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[1]University Autonomy Scorecard. www.university-autonomy.eu, accessed February 12, 2020.

Table 1 Autonomy indicators included in the analysis

Organisational autonomy	Financial autonomy	Staffing autonomy	Academic autonomy
Ability to decide on selection procedure for the executive head	Ability to decide on internal allocation of public funding	Ability to decide on recruitment procedures (senior academic staff)	Capacity to decide on overall student numbers
Ability to decide on selection criteria for the executive head	Capacity to keep financial surplus	Ability to decide on recruitment procedures (senior administrative staff)	Ability to select students
Ability to decide on dismissal procedure of the executive head	Capacity to borrow money	Ability to decide on promotions (senior academic staff)	Ability to introduce programmes
Ability to set term of office of the executive head	Ability to own real estate	Ability to decide on promotions (senior administrative staff)	Ability to terminate programmes
Ability to include external members in governing bodies	Ability to sell real estate	Ability to decide on salaries (senior academic staff)	Ability to choose the language of instruction
Ability to select external members in governing bodies	Ability to engage in joint procurement	Ability to decide on salaries (senior administrative staff)	Capacity to select QA mechanisms and providers
Capacity to decide on academic structures	Ability to set the level of tuition fees for national/EU students	Ability to decide on dismissals (senior academic staff)	Capacity to select QA mechanisms and providers
Capacity to create legal entities	Ability to set the level of tuition fees for non-EU students	Ability to decide on dismissals (senior administrative staff)	Ability to design content of degree programmes

One should note that the current University Autonomy Scorecard does not include any indicators connected to research autonomy. When the original methodology was developed in 2009, the ability to decide on the areas, scope, aims, and methods of research was considered as a significant part of academic autonomy but also an area essentially underpinned by academic freedom and, therefore, enforced throughout all European countries as one of the key pillars and fundamental values in academia (Estermann and Nokkala 2009). This remains one of the methodological limitations for this study, particularly for the analysis of the impact of autonomy on the effectiveness of higher education institutions.

The concepts of efficiency and effectiveness are analysed within a theoretical framework designed as part of the USTREAM project.[2] This multidimensional approach considers efficiency, effectiveness and value for money tightly linked and

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[2]"Universities for Strategic, Efficient and Autonomous Management" (2016–2019), project supported by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme. www.eua.eu/101-projects/607-ustream.html, accessed February 12, 2020.

equally important in the higher education context and refers to the convergence of activities and processes at various levels (system, sector and institutional) and in different areas (strategic governance, operational management and academic matters) (Estermann and Kupriyanova 2019).

These methodological approaches facilitate an analysis of the impact that autonomy frameworks can have on efficiency at various levels of higher education. For instance, financial and academic autonomy provisions, such as the capacity to decide on student numbers or set tuition fees, define the overall competition and collaboration modalities at the *system* level, whereas more specific provisions, such as the ability to engage in joint procurement, underpin *sector*-level opportunities for economies of scale. In this study, we focus primarily on the impact of various autonomy provisions on the efficiency and effectiveness of *individual* institutions.

For the purpose of this study, the USTREAM-based multidimensional efficiency framework has been completed with principles and practices of Lean and Six Sigma which have been successfully applied to the higher education context in previous studies (e.g. Antony 2017; Balzer 2010; Balzer et al. 2015; Doman 2011).

In this context, *efficiency* of higher education institutions is understood as the capacity to achieve financial and other gains through optimised institutional use of *resources* and management *processes* (i.e. waste elimination and cycle time reduction in LEAN terms). *Effectiveness* is viewed as the capacity to achieve the *outcomes* expected from the institutional vision, mission and the corresponding strategies and action plans (i.e. focus on what is critical to the actor according to the Six Sigma approach).

Accountability is another concept discussed in this paper in light of the key findings on the impact of autonomy on efficiency and effectiveness. It is understood as "a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences" (Bovens 2006 : 9).

This concept is included in our analysis for two reasons:

(a) as a mechanism to ensure checks and balances vis-à-vis institutional autonomy and
(b) as an enabler of efficiency and effectiveness of higher education institutions, "forcing them to examine their own operations critically, and by subjecting them to critical review from outside" (Trow 1996: 3).

In this paper, we explore the links to both *formal* and *voluntary* accountability (i.e. "trust-based" accountability Trow 1996 along the lines of "corporate social responsibility" Jongbloed et al. 2008) towards both external and internal stakeholders.

In our theoretical model, accountability is a pre-condition for autonomy, providing a system of checks and balances in the university context. Coupled with accountability, autonomy serves as an enabler for efficiency and effectiveness. The latter, in turn, helps implement autonomy and accountability in practical terms (Fig. 1).
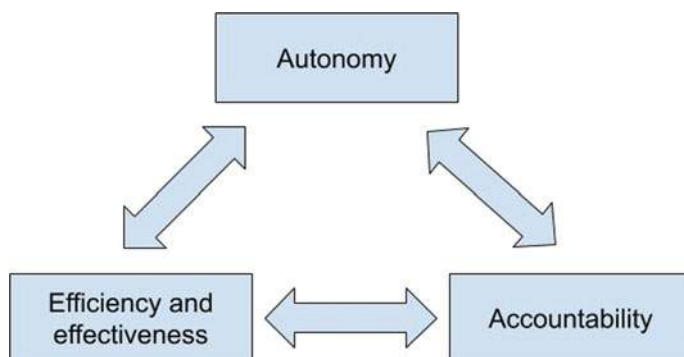
Fig. 1 Autonomy and accountability in practical terms

2.2 Research Method

Our study relies on the conceptual frameworks developed by EUA as part of its work on governance, funding and efficiency, the knowledge acquired in previous focus groups[3] and the expert assessment of the impact of various autonomy dimensions and factors on efficiency and effectiveness. In total, 12 experts from 12 countries in Europe (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland) provided their analytical input to our pilot study in autumn 2019. The experts were selected based on their professional experience in top university management (vice-rector and head of administration level). Consideration was also given to geographic and institutional diversity of the sample.

The experts were invited to assign a score between 1 (lowest impact) and 5 (highest impact) to each autonomy indicator (31 in total), to assess their respective impact on efficiency, from the perspective of *resources* and *processes*. The estimates assigned by the experts to resources and processes were added up to achieve one combined score for efficiency. The experts were also requested to rate the impact of these indicators on effectiveness, from the viewpoint of the expected outcomes, by using the same scale.

Concretely, they had to assess how the ability for the institution to do A, B or C has:

 (i) (1–5) degree of impact on efficiency from the perspective of costs;
 (ii) (1–5) degree of impact on efficiency from the perspective of processes; and
(iii) (1–5) degree of impact on effectiveness (the ability of the institution to achieve its core missions and goals).

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[3]Peer learning and national policy activities organised under the EU-funded USTREAM project. www.eua.eu/101-projects/607-ustream.html, accessed February 12, 2020.

This assessment was based on their institutional management experience or their "ideal" expectation of such impact (in case there is no significant institutional autonomy in a related field in their system). The experts could provide any qualitative feedback to explain their choices or to share relevant background information.

The average score was calculated for each autonomy indicator by using the arithmetic mean. Standard deviation values were calculated for each case to show the differentiation of experts' views on the topic.

The fact that experts could have different interpretations of the nature of the autonomy indicators included in the study provides another limitation to the applied methodology. Although the descriptions of the autonomy indicators were adapted (simplified) for the purpose of this study, their original purpose was to serve the University Autonomy Scorecard (and thus assess the capacity for institutions to decide on a given set of items). Partly due to this fact, experts found it difficult at times to identify the link between the capacity to decide on a specific item and the impact that *having* such capacity can have on efficiency and effectiveness, and therefore reported that it had proven difficult to attribute a score to some indicators. The related "n/a" responses were excluded from the analysis.

We also acknowledge some difficulties that experts could have in differentiating between the *real* impact of autonomy on efficiency and effectiveness based on the situation in their countries and the *ideal* impact that greater autonomy could have in principle on the topics of study. This aspect shall be clarified specifically with some of the experts.

Furthermore, the applied methodology allowed us to capture the experts' views on some *positive* influence of autonomy on efficiency and effectiveness. We consider any potential negative effects were marginal and therefore excluded them from the scope of this paper. At this stage, we have not differentiated between short-, medium- or long-term impact that autonomy can have on efficiency or effectiveness, which may be a topic for future studies.

Finally, due to the pilot nature of our study, we could only harvest limited qualitative data from the experts' comments to the questionnaire. While the obtained expert data has proven to be sufficient for testing our methodological approach, presenting some preliminary observations on the topic and opening up new questions for future research, any further investigation will require involving a larger and more diverse sample of respondents to both the questionnaire and a series of expert interviews and focus groups.

3   Results

In this section, we present our key findings from three different perspectives. First, we look at the list of the most impactful indicators for each of the four autonomy dimensions in order to identify the most important autonomy drivers in various fields. Second, we analyse the top ten autonomy indicators in terms of their impact on efficiency and effectiveness, respectively, regardless of their specific dimension.

Finally, we present the results of the aggregate analysis at the level of the autonomy dimensions, with a special focus on those dimensions that have similar impact on both efficiency and effectiveness.

3.1 Most Impactful Indicators per Each Autonomy Dimension

Tables 2 and 3 present the most important autonomy indicators for efficiency and effectiveness for each of the four autonomy dimensions ranked on the basis of their mean values. The highest-ranking indicator is indicated for each autonomy dimension. Those indicators that rank highest with respect to both efficiency and effectiveness appear in italics.

The ability to decide on internal allocation of public funding and the ability to design the content of degree programmes emerge from our analysis as the most impor-

Table 2 Autonomy indicators with highest impact on efficiency per each autonomy dimension

Autonomy dimension	Top ranked autonomy indicators for efficiency	Mean	Sdv
Organisational autonomy	Capacity to decide on academic structures	3.50	0.87
Academic autonomy	*Ability to design content of degree programmes*	*3.83*	*0.80*
Financial autonomy	*Ability to decide on internal allocation of public funding*	*4.04*	*0.84*
Staffing autonomy	Ability to decide on recruitment procedures (senior administrative staff)	4.00	0.76

Table 3 Autonomy indicators with highest impact on effectiveness per each autonomy dimension

Autonomy dimension	Top ranked autonomy indicators for effectiveness	Mean	Sdv
Organisational autonomy	Ability to decide on selection procedure for the executive head	3.91	0.83
Organisational autonomy	Ability to decide on selection criteria for the executive head	3.91	0.92
Academic autonomy	*Ability to design content of degree programmes*	*4.17*	*0.69*
Financial autonomy	*Ability to decide on internal allocation of public funding*	*4.08*	*0.76*
Staffing autonomy	Ability to decide on recruitment procedures (senior academic staff)	4.08	0.76

tant indicators for both efficiency and effectiveness within financial and academic autonomy, respectively.

For staffing autonomy, the ability to decide on recruitment of senior administrative staff is more important for efficiency, while the ability to decide on recruitment of senior academic staff is more important for effectiveness.

The ability to decide on the procedure and criteria for the selection of the executive head play a greater role for effectiveness, whereas the capacity to decide on academic structures is more crucial for efficiency, when it comes to various aspects of organisational autonomy.

3.2 Top 10 Most Impactful Indicators for Efficiency and Effectiveness Across All Autonomy Dimensions

Figures 2 and 3 introduce the top ten indicators across all autonomy dimensions ranked on the basis of their mean values. Seven indicators out of the two top ten lists are common for both efficiency and effectiveness (featured in light grey in the graphs). Four out of these seven indicators are related to staffing autonomy and reflect the importance of recruitment and promotion procedures adopted for senior academic and administrative staff. Two financial autonomy indicators with a high impact on both efficiency and effectiveness concern the ability to decide on internal allocation of public funding, which is most crucial for efficiency, and to keep financial surplus (i.e., generate financial capacity for strategic priorities). One last common indicator in the field of academic autonomy is associated with the ability to design content of academic programmes (i.e. actively shape the academic offer of the institution). This indicator has the highest importance for effectiveness among all analysed indicators.

Indicator	Value
Ability to decide on internal allocation of public funding	4.04
Ability to decide on recruitment procedures (senior administrative staff)	4.00
Ability to design content of degree programmes	3.83
Ability to decide on promotions (senior administrative staff)	3.79
Capacity to keep financial surplus	3.79
Ability to decide on recruitment procedures (senior academic staff)	3.75
Ability to decide on promotions (senior academic staff)	3.71
Ability to engage in joint procurement	3.71
Ability to terminate programmes	3.67
Ability to decide on salaries (senior administrative staff)	3.67

Fig. 2 Top 10 autonomy indicators with the highest impact on efficiency

Fig. 3 Top 10 autonomy indicators with the highest impact on effectiveness

3.3 Autonomy Dimensions with the Highest and Lowest Impact on Efficiency and Effectiveness

The ranking of various autonomy dimensions in terms of their impact on efficiency and effectiveness is found to be similar for the two concepts under study. Specifically, staffing autonomy is found to have the highest impact on both efficiency ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.76$) and effectiveness ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.98$) of the four autonomy dimensions under study. Financial autonomy comes as the second most important dimension for both efficiency ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.92$) and effectiveness ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.84$), followed by academic autonomy, which impact is assessed as slightly more important for effectiveness ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.76$) compared to efficiency ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.64$). Organisational autonomy is established to have the lowest impact on effectiveness ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.82$) and, particularly, efficiency ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.70$) (Fig. 4).

3.4 Efficiency Analysis: Resources Versus Processes

A separate analysis has been run to test whether there are any significant differences in the experts' assessments of impact on the two elements of efficiency (resources and processes). The highest differences (>0.3 point) were identified for five financial autonomy indicators. In particular, the capacity to keep financial surplus, the ability to own and sell real estate and the ability to set the level of tuition fees for both EU and non-EU students have greater impact on resources (by generating/making available additional income) than on processes. Furthermore, in terms of academic auton-

Cumulative average of each autonomy dimension
(n=12)

	Organisational autonomy	Academic autonomy	Financial autonomy	Staffing autonomy
■ Efficiency	3.11	3.35	3.49	3.56
■ Effectiveness	3.40	3.51	3.54	3.59
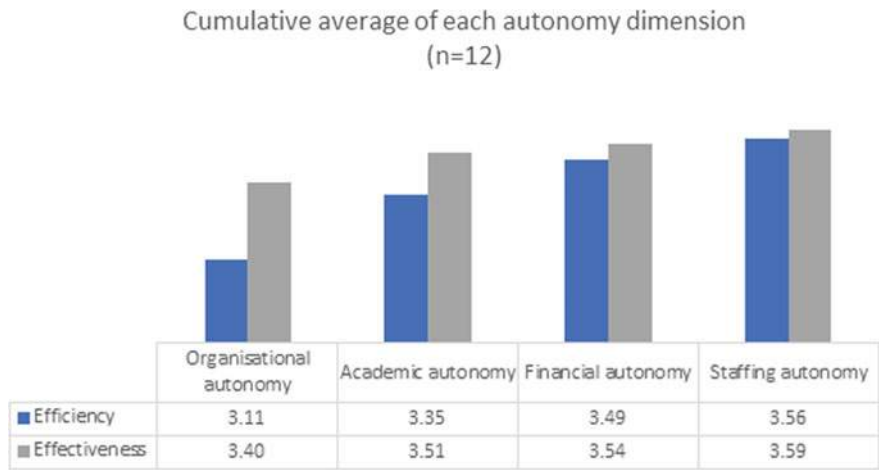
Fig. 4 Cumulative average of each autonomy dimension (n=12)

omy, the ability to select student is considered to have greater impact on resources compared to processes.

Conversely, the ability to decide on the selection criteria for the executive head and set her/his term of office as part of organisational autonomy is established to be more important for processes than for resources. Similar differences are found in staffing autonomy: the ability to decide on recruitment procedures of senior academic and administrative staff is considered to have greater impact on processes than on resources.

Elsewhere, the lack of significant discrepancy in the expert responses between resources and processes and the qualitative feedback received suggest that there is either difficulty or limited relevance in seeking to identify the differentiated impact of the autonomy indicators on these two elements of efficiency. This might, however, be due to the experts' understanding of the differences between resources and processes and requires further attention and clarification in the follow-up study.

4   Discussion

The obtained results show, most importantly, that efficiency and effectiveness of higher education institutions are framed by the same autonomy dimensions, with staffing and financial autonomy having the highest importance for both topics, and all four dimensions have comparable impacts on both efficiency and effectiveness. This finding suggests that efficiency and effectiveness go hand in hand and can be affected by the same national regulatory provisions.

In this section, we discuss our findings in light of specific contexts and concrete examples of efficiency and effectiveness gains in order to provide illustration for new opportunities that may arise for higher education institutions from greater autonomy.

Opportunity No 1: Staffing Autonomy for Greater Efficiency and Effectiveness
Our findings have put staffing autonomy to the forefront in terms of its impact on both efficiency and effectiveness. This finding is not surprising, as the achievement of institutional goals—i.e. effectiveness—largely depends on the competence and motivation of people engaged in the university's core missions and supporting tasks (e.g. Scott 2006). While the ability of universities to recruit senior academic staff and senior administrative staff appears to be most important for effectiveness and efficiency, respectively, the ability to decide on dismissals has much lower importance. This finding refutes one of the widespread assumptions among policy- makers that institutional efficiency amounts to cost-cutting and may be achieved through staff layoffs, considering that salaries often make up the greatest share of the institutions' cost structure. On the contrary, the example of Irish universities shows that staff layoffs may only generate gains in the short term, at the expense of long-term sustainability, strongly affecting the capacity of institutions to deliver on their core mission goals (Estermann et al. 2018). This finding also shows the decision to put a cap on the recruitment of new university staff in several countries such as Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Italy could undermine both efficiency and effectiveness of higher education institutions in these countries (for more details, see EUA Public Funding Observatory reports for 2017 and 2018).

High staffing autonomy can be an important driver for efficiency and effectiveness on two conditions. First, there is sufficient and sustainable public funding of universities in a system, which is crucial to attract and nurture talent. Second, there are proper internal accountability mechanisms that are put by universities in place as part of their "voluntary obligation" to ensure equity, fairness and transparency of all staff related procedures in order to "create and sustain the element of trust" (Trow 1996). Such mechanisms may involve Human Resources (HR) setting out general principles for HR services, recruitment, career paths, leadership and development, recognition and reward as well as positive working environment; thoroughly documented institutional policies (e.g. role profiles, progression processes guidance) and other approaches based on sector best practice and collegiality.

Opportunity No 2: Financial Autonomy for Greater Effectiveness
Our findings point to the strategic importance of financial autonomy, which has high impact not only on efficiency but also on effectiveness. Financial autonomy, particularly the ability to decide on internal allocation of public funding and the capacity to keep surplus, underpins possibilities for institutions to re-invest the efficiency gains from better processes into the core academic tasks.

Other related factors such as flexibility in real estate management and procurement create opportunities to generate efficiencies, for example, by fostering space optimisation initiatives and by establishing purchasing consortia. Although the capacity to act autonomously on these issues seems to have less relevance for effectiveness,

it supports the ability of universities to redesign their campuses to better serve the evolving needs of learners and other societal actors to accommodate student-centred learning, foster co-creation processes, underpin sustainability and create bridges to local economy.

It is interesting to note that *the capacity to sell real estate* is considered by the experts as significantly less relevant (for both efficiency and effectiveness) than the *capacity to own real estate*. A possible interpretation of these findings is that there is no appetite for large-scale, radical operations whereby universities would seek to do away with historical buildings but rather a wish to be able to invest, upgrade and optimise existing assets. However, this argument still needs to be validated on a larger sample, considering a rather high differentiation of expert opinions on the impact of these two indicators, and cross-checked against specific country contexts.

While more flexibility in *setting tuition fee levels* is clearly linked to system-level political choices, it contributes to universities' efforts to diversify their income structure and limit dependency towards public funding. In the systems where universities have margin for manoeuvre to set the level of fees for national (e.g. England[4]) or international students, *value for money* is an important concept viewed as the achievement of economy, efficiency and effectiveness in how the university acquires and uses its resources in order to meet its objectives, particularly in satisfying the needs of students as fee-paying customers (Universities UK 2015).

The EUA Autonomy Scorecard 2017 features only a few higher education systems in Europe that score high in terms of financial autonomy.[5] This is particularly due to the fact that public authorities regulate tuition fees in many systems in Europe and steer the system through an increased use of funding instruments, which are part of the current financial accountability procedures. In systems with a high degree of financial autonomy, such as England, universities are subject to high accountability requirements. Typically, universities are financially accountable to various funders and taxpayers through multiple financial reporting and auditing requirements at national and European level (in case of EU-funded projects). In most cases, such mechanisms provide sufficient guarantees to the stakeholders and speak in favour of greater flexibility for university financial management. It is, however, important to stress that greater financial autonomy should not serve to compensate for public funding cuts to "equip universities to seek funding elsewhere" (Bennetot Pruvot and Estermann 2017). This approach significantly undermines the financial sustainability of universities in the long run and poses new risks, such as university's defaults on debt. In other words, the university's capacity to interact with the market should not be compromised by the lack of public support for its key goals and operations.

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[4]The UK higher education system consists of four sub-systems (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

[5]Luxembourg, Latvia and the United Kingdom (England) are part of the high cluster scoring between 81 and 100%.

Opportunity No. 3: Academic Autonomy for Greater Efficiency
Another important finding is that academic autonomy affects not only the effectiveness of institutions but also their efficiency. In particular, the *ability to design the content of degree programmes* is considered the most important indicator for effectiveness across all autonomy dimensions and, at the same time, it is ranked among the top 3 for efficiency. Flexibility in introducing content based on the principles of student-centred and research-based learning largely supports the effectiveness of learning and teaching and, more generally, of higher education institutions (EFFECT 2019). Furthermore, the ownership of curriculum design can foster efficiency by using new modes of learning and teaching enabled by technology, helping institutions serve broader and, potentially, larger groups of learners with diverse needs. The appropriate investment in technology, student support and scaffolding, as well as teacher training remain, however, critical to the effective and efficient use of technology in curriculum design. Other modes of delivery and learning experience such as group work, mobility or work placements can further enhance both efficiency and effectiveness of study programmes. Finally, the ability to design content of degree programmes is an ultimate pre-condition for developing shared study courses and engaging in institutional collaboration in teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the *capacity to introduce and terminate programmes* has proven to be particularly important for efficiency. This finding has to be seen in view of the need for adapting the academic offer to the evolving needs of learners and employers, reducing course duplication and optimising the programme portfolio at institutional or faculty level. Any increase in autonomy in this respect requires that proper internal quality culture and accountability mechanisms are put in place. The gradual shift towards institutional accreditation—rather than programme-based accreditation—is in this respect a positive step forward both for academic autonomy and institutional efficiency.

Opportunity No 4: Organisational Autonomy for Greater Efficiency and Effectiveness
Organisational autonomy is found to be more important for effectiveness than for efficiency. While none of the organisational autonomy indicators appears in the top 10 for efficiency, the ability to decide on the selection criteria and procedures for the executive head and the capacity for universities to decide on their internal academic structures are ranked high for effectiveness. Expert opinions particularly differ on the level of impact of some organisational autonomy indicators on efficiency and effectiveness, particularly the ability to decide on the dismissal procedure of the executive head and to set the term of office for the executive head.

The above findings acknowledge the expected importance of framework leadership provisions for effectiveness and show that it can be harder to connect the high-level organisational architecture (e.g. the ability to set the term of office for the executive head) to efficiency.

Yet, it has been previously shown that the institutional efficiency agenda largely depends on university leaders' ability to approach these topics strategically and operationally, to secure internal support and to mobilise resources to invest in modern capabilities and skilled staff in order to reap the benefits of efficient and effective uni-

versity management (Estermann and Kupriyanova 2019). In this context, we interpret the above finding as a need to provide illustration on how various organisational and governance provisions, especially, institutional leadership arrangements can impact efficiency in concrete terms.

Thus, flexibility in defining the *selection criteria for the executive head* allows universities to decide on the appropriate profile and the key competences which might include, among others, the experience in change management, efficiency and effectiveness.

Furthermore, studying university merger management processes, which involve the conceptual work defining the organisation of the university activities in the field of learning, teaching and research (underpinned by the *capacity to decide on internal academic structures*), shows that universities often choose to revisit their academic structures not only with the intention to facilitate desirable developments such as interdisciplinarity, greater interaction with external stakeholders, stronger alignment with strategic priorities of the institution and more visible connection to the ecosystem, but also take it as a chance to review the existing structures and processes from the perspective of their efficiency (Bennetot et al. 2015).

Collaborating with external members of governing bodies is a proven way for universities to make efficiency part of their accountability mechanisms given that the *ability to include and select external members in governing bodies* can help universities critically review and report on their activities. It could also bring some additional expertise in efficiency and effectiveness from the outside and secure support of governing bodies for institutional efficiency strategies and operational plans. The relatively low impact of this indicator on efficiency might be due to the fact that, while it has become frequent for universities throughout Europe to include external members in their governing bodies, their capacity to select such members still remains limited, with public authorities often having a decisive role in the matter or making up for a significant part of the external members themselves (Bennetot Pruvot and Estermann 2018).

Surprisingly, the capacity to create legal entities was found to have one of the lowest impacts on both efficiency and effectiveness, with a rather high differentiation of expert views. Yet, it is one of the key factors for universities to engage in shared services, outsourcing or similar partnership arrangements. The experience of UK universities shows that creating university subsidiaries that manage specialised services for one or several institutions has a potential to foster quality and economic efficiencies in various fields such as facility management, ICT, HR, finance and student services as well as to provide an additional source of income for higher education institutions (e.g. Universities UK 2015). This is another area of organisational autonomy which deserves further attention and investigation in the follow-up study, taking into consideration the diverse capacity of universities to engage in such types of activities in different countries.

These opportunities provide an illustration of the impact of autonomy on efficiency and effectiveness which needs to be further explored. It is also important to stress that any regulatory reform aimed at enhancing university autonomy has to be driven by a broader set of considerations and objectives in a wider national context and

go beyond the discussed needs in efficiency and effectiveness. They should also be accompanied by the appropriate formal and voluntary accountability mechanisms based on the principles of equity, fairness, and transparency.

5 Conclusions

The findings support some of our original hypotheses about the importance of autonomy for efficiency and effectiveness while casting new light on certain elements that have received little consideration so far. Views drawn from university leadership and top management show an acute awareness of the complex relationship between autonomy, efficiency and effectiveness in higher education. They confirm earlier observations derived from the USTREAM project that efficiency is by no means a matter of cutting costs in a rigid structure but rather a question of exploiting opportunities to improve processes and deliver better teaching and research outcomes. Thus, what universities see as essential for efficiency and effectiveness is the capacity to manage funds internally, select and advance their staff in an adequate way and design their academic offer to match the analysed needs. In a nutshell, these are the conditions necessary for an institution to develop a strategic profile and position itself vis-à-vis partners, competitors, funders and students in an increasingly fast-changing complex environment.

Our pilot results confirm the relevance of a bigger analysis involving a larger and more diverse sample representing different types of higher education institutions from a broader set of countries in Europe to validate the established patterns. Combined with the country- specific information from the University Autonomy Scorecard, it could offer new meaningful insights into the national regulatory reforms from the perspectives of efficiency and effectiveness.

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Charting Academic Freedom in Europe

Liviu Matei

1 Introduction

The paper discusses the need to chart a course for academic freedom in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It puts forward the following arguments:

- Presently, there is a crisis of academic freedom in the EHEA.
- This crisis is specific to Europe/EHEA[1]; it is not a global or national crisis, although there are challenges to academic freedom in all other parts of the world and also within individual national higher education systems in Europe.
- The crisis has two main dimensions: intellectual (conceptual) and empiric (political, regulatory, institutional).
- Efforts have been started recently and are underway to address key challenges to academic freedom in the EHEA and, moreover, to eventually plot a course out of this crisis.
- A comparative and applied interdisciplinary study of these efforts, outlined in the paper, helps reveal their nature and scope and identify the actors/stakeholders

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[1]A brief summary of terminology in the context of research on European-wide issues in higher education, such as the distinction between EHEA and Bologna Process, is proposed by Matei and Iwinska: "The Bologna Process, launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999, is a voluntary intergovernmental process in higher education based on jointly agreed principles, objectives and standards. Currently, there are 48 European states implementing the Bologna Process, which constitute the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EHEA, as the common European space for higher education, is considered a result of the Bologna Process. A European Research Area (ERA), which emerged at about the same time with the EHEA, developed as a major initiative under the Lisbon Agenda, the EU's overarching strategy between 2000 and 2010. ERA is defined as a 'unified research area open to the world based on the Internal Market, in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely and through which the Union and its Member States strengthen their scientific and technological bases, their competitiveness and their capacity to collectively address grand challenges' (Lisbon Treaty amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007)". (Matei and Iwinska 2018: 346).

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involved as well as those, astoundingly, absent. It also allows to discuss and assess early on the chances of success and identify challenges and gaps (some remarkably surprising) in these efforts.

2 The Crisis of Academic Freedom in Europe

There is a shared sense among higher education researchers and practitioners that the last ten years, and the last four-five in particular, have brought about significant challenges to academic freedom in Europe. Most often, discussions about these challenges take place in the broader framework of concerns about values, or fundamental values, in the EHEA (Steinel 2019; Noorda et al. 2020). In this context, the argument is made repeatedly that we should focus not only on structural (or technical) reforms within the EHEA but pay attention to a set of explicitly defined fundamental values in European higher education as well (Bergan and Matei, in this volume). A case can be made that a more accurate analysis of the situation compels us not only to talk about challenges here and there but unfortunately to acknowledge the reality of a genuine crisis of academic freedom in the EHEA (Matei forthcoming; Matei 2020).

Bologna Process was launched in 1999 with the objective to promote structural reforms while building a European-wide common space for dialogue and practice in higher education to support these reforms. For a relatively long period in Europe, in the years before and immediately after the launch of this continental-scale initiative in higher education, academic freedom was neglected, largely because it was taken for granted as an immutable value assumed to be understood and followed by all. And indeed, in the immediate post-communist, post-cold war era, this was largely the case—there was a broad consensus about the importance of academic freedom—only for the situation to start deteriorating markedly after 2008–2010. Particularly striking developments have contributed to the sudden realization that academic freedom is not doing well in the EHEA. Such was the case with the repressive measures against entire universities and scores of students and academics imposed by the Turkish authorities in the wake of the alleged coup d'état of 2016. Another case was that of the attacks against higher education and research launched by the Hungarian government since 2017, which forced Central European University (CEU) out of this country and resulted in disbanding the research network of the prestigious Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In reality, as analysed in detail elsewhere (Matei forthcoming), Turkey and Hungary are not the only countries in the EHEA showing disturbing signs of neglect of academic freedom, direct challenges to academic freedom and even its repression. Other countries exhibited worrying signals coming not only from the political, legal and regulatory realms impacting higher education but also from within higher education activities proper.

There are additional arguments and evidence for the assertion regarding a crisis of academic freedom in the EHEA. Together with Julia Iwinska, we have argued that a specific concept and regulatory model for ***institutional autonomy***, understood in the sense of a set of freedoms for higher education institutions *as institutions*, have

been developed in the EHEA—but nothing similar has been done for the notion of *academic freedom*, understood to refer also to specific freedoms of the *individuals* working in higher education institutions (Matei and Iwinska 2018). The findings of that piece of research have helped reveal, more importantly, that the EHEA is simply lacking a common conceptual reference for academic freedom. The EHEA has made possible the emergence of many new common concepts, models and tools in higher education, implemented with varying degrees of success across all or most of the 48 member countries, such as the EHEA standards and guidelines for quality assurance,[2] the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS[3]), the new Bologna degree structure and the new European models of master and doctoral education (Matei et al. 2018). The development by the European University Association (EUA) of a highly impactful model of institutional autonomy, consequential within but also outside the EHEA itself, is another example in this series. The "autonomy project" of the EUA was formally meant only to produce a tool for monitoring autonomy, not a conceptual model of autonomy (Estermann and Nokkala 2009; Estermann et al. 2011; Pruvot and Estermann 2017). We argue, however, that is has achieved exactly that (Matei and Iwinska 2018), contributing in this way significantly to asserting and promoting university autonomy, or a particular view on it, in the EHEA and beyond. The neglect of academic freedom, on the other hand, the fact that it was taken for granted and benefitted from no particular attention in the intellectual and policy reflection in the EHEA, resulted in the absence of a similar model or conceptual reference for it. A striking illustration of the consequences of the lack of a European, or common-European, reference for academic freedom emerged when the European Commission took Hungary to court for infringement of academic freedom in the case of CEU. The Hungarian government retorted asking "based on what?" and stated that the EU courts had no jurisdiction since there is no such thing as a European definition, let alone legal principle about academic freedom (Matei forthcoming). The Commission was almost willing to oblige and considered, at least for a certain period of time, reclassifying the CEU case into one about the right to deliver commercial services only (for which European legislation exists), not academic freedom.[4]

Other researchers have documented for the case of the United Kingdom that not only policy-makers and regulators but also many, if not most, individual academics have no clear understanding or representation about what academic freedom means in Europe these days (Karran and Mallinson 2017).

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[2]https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/, accessed on 20 March 2020.

[3]https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en, accessed on 20 March 2020.

[4]A verdict in this case before the European Court of Justice (ECJ) is expected by September 2020, three years after the adoption of the legislation in Hungary that obliged CEU to leave the country. In March 2020 the ECJ Advocate General issued a formal opinion for the Court asserting that the Hungarian higher education law does infringe academic freedom and the European legislation on academic freedom (https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ecj-hungary.pdf accessed on 6 March 2020). If this opinion were accepted by the ECJ and transformed into a verdict, it would create a major legal precedent and a milestone for the definition and protection of academic freedom in the European Union.

These and related findings support the argument about a crisis of academic freedom in the EHEA. This crisis—it should be stressed again—has two main dimensions.

The intellectual dimension has not been studied systematically to date. It is reflected in neglect and underdevelopment of academic freedom as a concept and in this absence of a (common) conceptual reference for academic freedom for the entire EHEA. The Bologna Process and the EHEA have supported, even generated, a large and multifarious process of intellectual and professional reflection and elaboration that resulted in new or refined concepts in higher education, as summarized above. Again, no such efforts have focused on academic freedom. In spite of occasional generic statements about the importance of academic freedom, such as the Magna Charta Universitatum (1988), this concept remained underdeveloped altogether and absent as a common European reference after the launch of the Bologna Process in 1999. As already put forward in other publications (Matei forthcoming, 2019, 2020), the situation of academic freedom in the EHEA can be compared metaphorically to that of an imposing physical edifice, a large and complex compound with many halls, windows and corridors—some beautiful, some not quite so, some finished and functional, some not yet or not at all—but for which, in any case, the architect has forgotten to design a ventilation system. Without it, everybody in the compound suffers the risk of suffocation, from only mild to severe and deadly. Without academic freedom, the EHEA cannot work properly either; it runs the risk of suffocation.

Seen in this light, the crisis of academic freedom in the EHEA appears as a specific one, not just as a manifestation of challenges or even a crisis of a global nature, discussed in reputable publications (see, for example, the volume edited by M. Ignatieff and S. Roth titled exactly that: *Academic freedom—the global challenge,* Ignatieff and Roch 2017)*. The EHEA can be understood as the result of a formally elaborated project, the Bologna Process. EHEA and, with it, many of the evolutions in higher education in Europe after 1999–2000, did not just happen. The common space for dialogue and practice in higher education in Europe was built with a program, based on a relatively detailed blueprint evolving over a little more than 20 years now. Only that the conceptual underpinning of this "program" missed an important element: academic freedom, because it has been taken for granted at that time. The blueprint for the construction of the EHEA lacked any sections on academic freedom and did not make possible any "execution drawings" for it. That has led to a skewed construction—and a crisis.

This is not a crisis of academic freedom in the particular states of Europe either. In some of them, in spite of clear and present dangers and challenges, academic freedom is well respected and protected, including through adequate national legislation. Many European countries have strong, well elaborated and effective legal instruments for the protection of academic freedom (Beiter et al. 2016). However, in the EHEA, in this integrated common space, that is not sufficient: one country depends on the others, and higher education activities are affected overall even if academic freedom is restricted in some although not all countries. To take just one example: Norway (a member of the EHEA) has some of the best articulated and most efficient legal provisions and mechanisms to protect academic freedom. However, when a

Norwegian student goes with one of the many Erasmus exchanges to Hungary, that person will not have the freedom to enrol in a gender studies program and cannot study (or teach, for academics) gender studies because this discipline or academic area has been banned in Hungary through a government decree since 2018 (Redden 2018). In the EHEA, academic freedom is not or not only a national matter. The crisis of academic freedom is specific to this entire European initiative or space, which is the EHEA. It is not a sum of national crises; it is a European or EHEA crisis. As such, it might require a European, rather than a national or global solution. Like the EHEA itself, a concept or model of academic freedom for this area cannot just happen, it will not emerge spontaneously. A course for academic freedom needs to be plotted programmatically.

The second and related dimension of the crisis is empiric, as discussed above in this paper, be it only cursorily: academic freedom is challenged and threatened "on the ground" in all parts of the EHEA, although to different degrees; it is even severely repressed in some member countries. We have reviewed extensively elsewhere the evidence for this statement (Matei 2019, 2020, forthcoming).

What are the origins of this crisis? This is a relatively recent episode in the EHEA. It is also a somewhat surprising, unexpected one. Although not explicitly conceptualized and operationally promoted, academic freedom was largely accepted by all major stakeholders as a value and guiding principle in the first years of the Bologna Process. The favourable European context at that time (the first decade of the millennium) mattered, in particular, given a set of supportive powerful policy narratives such as Europeanization, democratization, or knowledge society and their corresponding epistemologies relevant for the social contract with regard to higher education. There was large public and political support for higher education in Europe, including for academic freedom. This situation started to change in the years after the great recession of 2007–2009, with the corrosion of these powerful public policy narratives and their progressive and at least partial replacement by alternative narratives and social epistemologies, such as those influenced by populism and neo-nationalism (Matei and Iwinska 2018; Slaughter 2019). These new narratives, in turn, have not been appreciative and supportive of advanced knowledge production and higher education more generally and could not easily tolerate, let alone promote, democratic freedoms altogether, including academic freedom in particular.

We need to note that the studies of academic freedom in the EHEA, which remain limited in number anyway, have almost always concentrated on macro-aspects, such as on national regulations and the actions of state authorities, and only extremely rarely on internal institutional practices and activities. Moreover, while national legislation, including constitutional provisions for academic freedom, exist in most European countries, individual universities themselves rarely have any institutional provisions, definitions, strategies or policies about academic freedom. These are two other expressions of the conceptual underdevelopment of academic freedom in Europe.

3   Overcoming the Crisis: Charting Academic Freedom in Europe

If we accept that a crisis of academic freedom in the EHEA with characteristics and origins as discussed above is a reality, what is the way out? Are there any forces at work to overcome the crisis? Who are they? Who should they be? What do this work or these efforts entail anyway, and what should they entail? The EHEA is indeed *sui-generis* but is there anything we can learn from the research literature on academic freedom in the history of higher education in Europe itself or from non-European experiences, past and present, which could be useful for these efforts?

Europe has a convoluted but often inspirational history of academic freedom. Other parts of the world have their own history with academic freedom as well, with high points and with nadirs, sometimes going back in time at least decades if not centuries, full of potentially useful lessons for understanding and addressing today's challenges. This is true even when these traditions, contemporary challenges and experiences are not extensively studied or just not well-known even among specialized scholars in the "Global North" (of which the EHEA is clearly a part), as is often the case with Latin America, the Middle East, Africa or most parts of Asia.

It can be stated that the scholarship of academic freedom focusing on the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries is more developed in the US than anywhere else, including Europe. So are the intellectual reflection about academic freedom and the quantity of work, even "militantism" in its favour among higher education leaders and higher education "intermediate organizations" (Slaughter 2019) that help structure the governance field of higher education, including academic freedom.

An analytical framework for the study of academic freedom, including in times of crisis like the current one in the EHEA, could be developed based on the existing scholarship and taking into account experiences from all parts of the world. It could help answer the questions listed at the beginning of this section. It would also, most likely, help address these matters in practice, beyond research and scholarship alone. Unfortunately, no such analytical framework is available, let alone one that would be suitable for the current times and realities, which could be put at work in this EHEA crisis case. The present paper does not attempt to build and utilize one either. Instead, it attempts a focused, limited and less ambitious historic and comparative exercise to help shed light not on the recent crisis of academic freedom in the EHEA as a whole, but rather on the current efforts to address it, looking at actors involved/absent, scope and likely impact.

The succinct analysis developed in the first section of the paper suggests by way of logical implication that what is needed in Europe/the EHEA is the development of a novel concept of academic freedom, one that would be adapted to the reality of this *sui generis* and unprecedented transnational, continental-wide common space for higher education. Existing national solutions (such as national legislation) are not sufficient. A global or broader international solution is not at hand, in spite of the dedicated work and efforts in this area, usually linked with concerns for human rights protection, of a few international organisations, such as the UN, UNESCO,

the Council of Europe or even the European Union (Matei and Iwinska 2018). An EHEA solution is both necessary and possible. The work to develop it requires what we could call "charting academic freedom in Europe". The reference to charting is borrowed and adapted here from a recent publication in the US (Randall 2018). This is a remarkable volume taking the form of a simple collection of texts (statements and reports) about academic freedom from the US, also comprising a simple timeline (not extensively commented) of the most important court cases about academic freedom during the last hundred years. Both the texts and list of court cases represent, in fact, the main milestones in the definition, defence and framing of the practice of academic freedom during this period in the US. Indeed, a remarkable publication, powerful in its simplicity. It is also a very good comparative reference for us in Europe.

For the case of the EHEA, I propose to understand "charting" in two ways: as delineating the meaning or understanding for a new concept of academic freedom (similar to an explorer charting a new territory) and as plotting a course for academic freedom (similar to how a ship captain or a pilot is physically, concretely plotting the course for their vessels across the sea or in the sky above the land). Such charting efforts are already underway in the EHEA, and they pursue both paths: defining a new conceptual understanding of academic freedom for the entire EHEA and projecting/plotting a conduit for moving beyond its current crisis.

In 2018 (which is very recently indeed), ministers responsible for higher education from the EHEA countries met in Paris for one of their periodic Ministerial Conferences, along with representatives of the EU Commission, European and international inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, and a small number of university observers. The Ministerial Conference[5] is the main decision-making and governing structure of the EHEA. The direction of the process and all other key decisions have been taken in this forum since the very start of the Bologna Process, in the form of voluntary commitments that member countries agree to implement at home. In Paris, following pressure and discreet (read "anonymous") advocacy by influential and shrewd stakeholders—mainly individuals with European institutional backing but some others as well—the Ministers included a clear statement about academic freedom and other fundamental values that at least recognizes the importance of academic freedom and the fact that it is not doing too well in EHEA, if not the reality of a crisis:

> Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA. Having seen these fundamental values challenged in recent years in some of our countries, we strongly commit to promoting and protecting them in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation. (Bologna 2018)

After the Conference, a "Task Force for future monitoring of values"[6] was established by and under the auspices of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG[7]—the body

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[5]http://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-declarations-and-communiques, accessed March 6, 2020.

[6]http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Board_HR_UA_68_4_5_WG1_Task_Force.pdf, accessed March 6, 2020.

[7]http://ehea.info/page-the-bologna-follow-up-group, accessed March 6, 2020.

entrusted to oversee the Bologna Process between the Ministerial Conferences) to design and propose: a European/EHEA definition of academic freedom, a statement on academic freedom and, eventually, indicators and a mechanism or process for monitoring academic freedom. (The author of the present paper interacted with the Task Force as an invited, non-member expert.) It is expected that the task force will submit proposals on the three items by the next Ministerial Conference, which will take place in Rome in fall 2020. While it is not certain that the task force will complete its work by the time of this meeting (it might even ask itself for more time), there is a good chance that this it will, and three historic proposals on academic freedom will be on the tables of the ministers. It is also not certain that the BFUG will approve and agree in the end to submit any proposals at all to the ministers, and then also not certain the ministers will approve them. If adopted, it is not certain how or if they will ever be put in practice. It is possible for only the explorer part of the charting metaphor to materialize (a new territory will be charted—a definition will be adopted), but the ship captain or aircraft pilot part of it will not (the ship will never leave the shore, the plotted course will not be followed). Still, there is now a high likelihood that this process will be completed,[8] and by summer 2020 or not long after that (a couple more years?), we may have a European definition, or what is called in this paper a "common conceptual reference", for academic freedom and projections for a mechanism to protect and promote academic freedom throughout the EHEA.

These are clearly efforts aiming at charting academic freedom on both dimensions proposed here. They represent a fundamentally genuine, positive, well-intended and daring endeavour. There is little knowledge about these efforts within the academic community in Europe (a matter of lack of transparency, or tactics?) but it should support them because they are meant to serve primarily exactly this community. And yet, it is possible already to see major shortcomings and risks. A comparison of these European charting efforts with those in the US reveals striking differences and also astounding characteristics of the European endeavour. In the US, the main actors involved were university associations (such as the American Association of University Professors—AAUP and the Association of American Colleges and Universities—AACU), courts, but also individual universities and even individual academics *as academics*, as well as student voices. The volume referred to above (Randall 2018) includes moments and texts such as the adoption of the well-known principles on academic freedom and tenure first developed by AAUP in 1915 and endorsed later by AAUC, but also milestones named after individuals who led single-university committees that developed reports or statements on academic freedom. The Kalven report of 1967 (*Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action*) is one of the best known but not the only one. The more recent (2017) *Statement of Purpose: Free Expression on Campuses* was developed by a body called Students for Free Expression. These documents emanating from universities, aca-

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[8]The Task Force proposal for a definition of academic freedom was already approved by the BFUG on March 4–5, 2020, at its meeting in Kyiv.

demics and students—and not from public authorities—have indeed played a role in charting academic freedom in the US.

The current EHEA charting efforts are conducted almost exclusively by representatives of ministries/governments and intergovernmental organizations (the EU and the Council of Europe) who are members of the BFUG. The European University Association and a European federation of teachers' trade unions (ETUCE/Education International) are also providing input along with a handful of independent experts. Fundamentally, this is an intergovernmental endeavour, like the Bologna Process itself. There is no input, let alone leadership in the charting of academic freedom in the EHEA coming from higher education institutions, academic leaders or students. The scope of these efforts is limited, as circumscribed by the limits of the Bologna Process as an intergovernmental voluntary process using "soft law governance" (Deca and Harmsen in this volume). The nature of this process of charting academic freedom is largely intergovernmental, meaning also bureaucratic, before being even political, although it benefits from significant energy, commitment and expertise from devoted and knowledgeable individuals working in these governmental or inter-governmental (bureaucratic) structures. Universities, academics and students are missing. The result will bear the marks of this configuration of actors involved—and absent. Having a common European reference for academic freedom will be a major, good and necessary development. Excluding universities, academics and students from the process of developing it, however, will limit, among others, its legitimacy and the degree of acceptance in the academic world, will run the risk of being too overly political and bureaucratic, thus limiting its capacity to facilitate the work of universities, university staff and students, which academic freedom is for. Taking a first big step is good. Corrections can be made later. Will that, however, risk being too late?

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Re-Thinking an Educational Model Suitable for 21st Century Needs

Tim Birtwistle and Robert Wagenaar

1 Introduction

One can observe a growing disconnect between the deliveries of present educational programmes and the needs of society (UNESCO 2015; (European Commission 2017); OECD 2019). This should be a concern for society at large and the higher education sector in particular. This observation, and concern, requires a scholarly underpinning, on the one hand, and defining an articulated way forward, on the other.

Already in 1997, the European Commission introduced the notion of 'knowledge society' in its Communication *Towards a Europe of Knowledge* (Commission of the European Communities 1997). It builds on EC papers published since the beginning of the 1990s, of which the White Paper *Teaching and learning. Towards the learning society* (Commission of the European Communities 1997) is of particular relevance in this context. The Communication published one year before the Sorbonne Declaration (Bologna Process 1998) and two years before the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Process 1999) combines the notions of knowledge policies and promoting employability. This is no surprise because in these years, the European economy was thought to be in a dip, as a result of regional and global incidents (World Bank 2005) but also more fundamental issues, although in the last years of the 20th century there were signs of recovery in the EU. Nevertheless, there was a good reason why the IMF devoted a full chapter, titled 'Chronic Unemployment in the Euro Area: Causes and Cures', in its *World Economic Outlook* of May 1999 (IMF 1999). In the EC Communication, it is observed that 'Economic competitiveness, employment and the personal fulfilment of the citizens of Europe is no longer mainly based on the production of physical goods, nor will it be in the future. Real wealth creation will henceforth be linked to the production and dissemination of knowledge and will

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depend first and foremost on our efforts in the field of research, education and training and on our capacity to promote innovation. This is why we must fashion a veritable "Europe of knowledge". (Commission of the European Communities 1997:1)

According to the Communication, the changing context requires innovation, research, education and training policies to be reached by 'an open and dynamic European educational area' which should gradually be constructed on the basis of three dimensions: (1) development of knowledge in a Lifelong Learning context, (2) enhancement of citizenship related to mutual understanding of the cultural diversities of Europe as well on the principles of solidarity and finally (3) acquisition of the most useful set of competences required for employability taking into account the evaluation of job profiles (Commission of the European Communities 1997). It shows that both the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations were not original in their content, with one exception, to organise higher education in cycles (a French expression) (Wagenaar 2019a). This would allow for an appropriate differentiation of learning periods in higher education to serve society better. The White Paper on education and training expressed the concern that long-term unemployment, in particular among young people, continued to increase, resulting in social exclusion (Commission of the European Communities 1995). Having the financial crises developing one decade later, that is from 2008, this all sounds very familiar. Over the years, the European Commission kept publishing Communications which were related to the Lisbon initiative to make Europe the most competitive region of the world. We refer here to the ones published in 2003, 2005, 2006, 2011, 2017 which all gave reference to building a knowledge-based society in Europe.

During the same years, not only the challenges were highlighted, but also ideas and concepts were developed to tackle these. A discussion took off about the paradigm applied in (higher) education, until then focusing on the transfer and acquisition of knowledge *pur sang*—based on an expert-driven approach—instead of taking the needs of the learner and society as the point of reference. This debate coincided with one in which the notion of competence/competency was highlighted by limiting teaching not only to the field of 'learning what' but extending it to 'learning how'. In other words, the role of (higher) education should not only be to make students knowledgeable but also skilled and competent and, as a consequence, to develop the notion of learning to learn. This discourse was put into practical action more or less in parallel in the UK by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which decided to develop so-called benchmark papers (ellingham 2008) and at EU level by the project *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, co-financed by the European Commission and the higher education sector (Tuning Educational Website). The relation between the two initiatives was expressed in the Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP) coordinated by ENQA (ENQA 2004). The European Commission asked the EU supported Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs)—perceived as an important means for cooperation and reform at the time—to follow the Tuning model. It also has to be mentioned here that in the context of the Bologna Process, a series of relevant Bologna seminars were organized. For these seminars, a selected group of academics was invited. Since 2005 the audience of these seminars was limited in particular to governmental and quality assurance organisations, creating the so-

called 'Bologna Club' (Adelman 2008), resulting in a disconnect between levels of governance (Wagenaar 2019a). This disconnect was in 2014 described by key members of the BFUG as the 'Bologna bubble' (Bologna Process 2014).

In Tuning, the concept of generic competences and subject specific competences was introduced to relate to the needs of society (González and Wagenaar 2003). Both in the QAA and Tuning initiatives, it was proposed to change from the instruction to the learning paradigm. This philosophy was also picked up by a group of governmental officials and representatives of QA organisations from a number of European countries that called itself the *Joint Quality Initiative*: this group developed the 'key outcomes' commonly referred to as the Dublin Descriptors (Leegwater 2015).

It was the Tuning initiative that identified in 2001 in a meaningful way the disconnect between what should be and what was actually learned. The outcomes of a large-scale survey among relevant stakeholders showed that core generic competences were not, or were insufficiently, covered in degree programmes (González and Wagenaar 2003). Since then, many consultations with different organisations have confirmed the list of key skills and competences needed for operating successfully in society (Beneitone and Bartelomé 2004; European Commission 2010; Hart Research Associates 2013; Agència 2015). This disconnect was later rephrased (by others than Tuning) as the 'skills gap' (Moore and Morton 2017). A gap that highlighted the need for generic competences, not only (computer) literacy, but in particular critical and abstract thinking, analysing and synthesising, applying knowledge in practical situations, identify, pose and solve problems, working in teams, design and manage projects, oral and written communication, decision making, creativity and learning to learn. The problems in the financial sector have exposed the need for developing leadership skills (motivate others) and entrepreneurship. From 2009, this was fully understood by the ministers of education when they embraced the concept of student-centred learning and the related methodology of active learning. It was the European Student Union (ESU) and Educational International, not the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), that came up with a more precise definition of student-centred learning (Education International, Education International and European Student Union 2010). The BFUG found its strategy for moving towards output-based/student-centred learning in taking responsibility for the EC owned ECTS Users' Guide (Wagenaar 2019c).

Some 15 years after the signing of the Bologna Declaration, Tuning, in close cooperation with the European Commission and the Lumina Foundation for Education, took the initiative to find out whether the concept of student-centred/output-based learning was landing and being embedded in the higher education sector. The resulting study shows a clear disconnect between political ambitions and day-to-day reality. One can observe that overall reform, and the concepts involved, is not proceeding beyond the discourse involving higher education management and staff, let alone students. Academic staff, in general, are still operating on the basis of knowledge ownership, not as facilitators of a learning process. One can also observe insufficient alignment of learning, teaching and assessment and shared responsibility for the curricula on offer (Birtwistle and Wagenaar 2016).

In the context of this paper, it seems appropriate to define better what the present and future needs of society are. It should be taken for granted that society requires real specialists as covered by the different academic domains. But it should also be highlighted that it needs high level generalists able to combine different disciplinary related knowledge and skills in a multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary context. Real innovation results from teamwork. The recent European Commission supported project, *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe* (2016–2018), shows that currently there is slightly more attention for developing generic skills besides subject-related ones than two decades ago, but the actual application of both knowledge and these skills in practice by operating autonomously and by taking responsibility is not trained in the vast majority of degree programmes (CALOHEE Website). One instrument of developing these is work-based learning (WBL), but its (full) integration in higher education programmes is still exceptional. WBL is one approach, besides other strategies and methodologies to apply student-centred and active learning (WEXHE Website).

Regarding future societal needs, one cannot help but notice that there is a widespread dissatisfaction with the way societies and the global economy are organised. Large segments of society challenge the *status quo.* As a result of the globalisation of the economy and society based on a neoliberal model, many have the feeling they have lost grip on developments. This has resulted in nostalgia and the embracing of nationalism and local forms of policy making, but also challenging and blaming the 'elite', based on distrust (Kirchick 2017; Müller 2017; Wagenaar 2019a). There is an obvious need for developing civic, social and cultural engagement as part of higher education degree programmes. Applicable models are presently developed, but implementation and integration still have to come, which will be a tremendous challenge in itself (CALOHEE Project 2017). As the Council of Europe has shown, this civic awareness is highly aligned with the concept of generic competences, which brings us back to the 'skills gap' (Council of Europe 2016). The challenge for higher education (institutions) will be to educate knowledgeable and skilled graduates; this requires the balance of 'responsible citizens' able to defend and give substance to the notion of democratic society (Council of Europe 2018a, b, c) and 'successful participants in a dynamic labour market'.

These observations result in the research question of the key issues which higher education is wrestling with and, as a follow-up, what then are the elements which define a convincing response to present and future societal needs. The re-thought model should allow for empowering learners to operate as responsible citizens and be successful participants in a dynamic labour market.

2 The Present Debate—the Contradictory Tendencies

The present debate on higher education learning displays seemingly contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, the argument is made for graduates who are not only knowledgeable in a particular field of studies, but most of all are trained in key

generic competences/transferable skills allowing for autonomy and responsibility, that is offer leadership and the ability to inspire others. (CALOHEE 2018). On the other hand, the argument challenges traditional learning models in favour of Lifelong Learning formats based on so-called micro-credentials/small tailored learning units (Ehlers 2018). These are expected to focus on obtaining additional (new) knowledge and the development of technical skills related to a particular domain. In this context, it is relevant to notice that 'new' knowledge and subject specific competences require a robust foundation of knowledge, skills and wider competences obtained earlier by the learner. Wider competences include values and attitudes.

The need for LLL in terms of re-entering learning, entering learning at a mature stage in life, needing to update a particular part of one's learning to meet new demands or learning for pleasure will have to be catered for in a variety of ways. The '60-year curriculum' will sit alongside a wide range of possibly fast-moving and changing credentials. These credentials will be of different sizes (Cochrane 2019) and will fit together in different ways.

Around the globe, countries are looking at how the landscape is changing and, in the main, coming up with largely similar outcomes even in very different contexts. One unsurprising outcome is to determine that many existing credentials will be "unbundled", and then the component parts may be "rebundled" to form new degrees. The small components of learning (micro) will allow for the creation of new large components of learning, often what existing Qualifications (Reference) Frameworks would recognise as a degree whilst also providing a way to satisfy the demands being made for upskilling, updating, unlearning, in new flexible patterns of access.

To create the larger components, the micro-credentials need to be "stackable" (Naughton 2018) or provide for accumulation, Naughton quotes from the United States' Department of Labor: "stackable credentials are part of a sequence of credentials accumulated over time to build up an individual's qualification to help them move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to potentially different and higher paying jobs." Stacks can then be organised to suit the world of work in three basic ways:

1. Horizontal Stacking provides breadth—e.g., Instructional Design or Facilitation Skills.
2. Vertical Stacking provides depth and level—e.g., Basic, Intermediate, or Advanced.
3. Hybrid Stacking provides both—e.g., Basic Instructional Design or Basic Facilitation Skills, Intermediate Instructional Design or Intermediate Facilitation Skills.

Stacking can also be used to suit what might be termed as more traditional degrees, for example, to sit alongside or within the national Qualifications Framework. This debate is current in Australia with the ASQA review but, for example, Deakin University apparently is concerned about this slowing down the whole venture which the university has embraced (HEA 2019). Deakin University has been working on micro-credentialing, including leading an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching strategic project to explore the potential of micro-credentials. Other

examples are New Zealand's approach for micro- credentials to fit into the QF alongside major qualifications. This is similar to Ireland, Scotland, and Denmark as well as Australia.

Research shows that the labour market is in motion constantly (National Association 2018; McKinsey 2017; OECD 2018). As a result of the movement from production of goods to services, but also the rapid development of computer technology and the related growing use of artificial intelligence, jobs and professions disappear or change and are replaced by others. In this context, tasks and responsibilities of employees are changing on a regular basis. Old knowledge and skills are replaced and complemented by new knowledge and skills or develop to a higher and often more complex level of application. This implies that employees are constantly asked to upgrade their competences. Often this can be done on the basis of experience—learning by doing—but it will also require additional education and training, which has been dubbed lifelong learning. Flexibility of the workforce has become a key notion, which puts pressure on motivation and dedication. Because of (increasing) higher life expectancy, the workforce in an increasing number of countries is expected to work longer than in the past; in the near future up to a decade longer than only some years ago. This is not surprisingly challenged in a number of countries—in particular by those workers in highly demanding physical jobs— however, the argument is made that in order to be able to finance a reasonable pension, and with the changing demographics, working more years is required. This implies that after some 15–20 years of education, including higher, people will spend 40 to 45 years in the workplace. One does not have to be a prophet to foresee that with the present speed of an evolving labour market in mind, the workplace and related activities will change fundamentally during that lifespan. Although, already at the turn of the century, it was stressed by the European Commission and others that Lifelong Learning would be the new learning mode (European Commission 2001), after two decades, not very many countries (and institutions) have full lifelong learning strategies, policies and modes of implementation in place covering the full scale of fields and topics covered in higher education.

Having said this, it seems reasonable to start answering the question what is actually learned, taught and assessed in present day formal education. When responding to this question, one has to stipulate that the picture is diverse. Over time, very inspirational initiatives have been taken by both individual higher education providers and by groups of universities, often organised as EU supported projects. However, in general, it seems the change promoted in the context of the Bologna Process, as well as the Lisbon Strategy (European Commission 2010), since the start of this century, has been uneven, but most of all with not very much progress actually made (EC 2018). In a Tuning study (Birtwistle and Wagenaar 2016), funded by the European Commission, it was concluded in 2016 on the basis of structured interviews with management, (academic) staff and students that the student-centred and active learning approach was not landing in the vast majority of institutions and departments. Many interviewed, in particular younger staff and students, proved unable to recall the Bologna Process and its main objectives. Higher education management complained that they lacked the resources to initiate reforms of programmes and in

conjunction to modernise the methods and approaches applied for learning, teaching and assessment. A consultation organised in the setting of the CALOHEE project, followed by intense discussion, confirmed this picture (CALOHEE Website).

The Qualifications Reference Frameworks developed by CALOHEE, which are based on a merger of the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (Bologna Process 2005) and the EQF for LLL (European Commission 2008) and as a result fully aligned with these, is the most current initiative to define what to expect from a learner now and in the (near) future. The frameworks are subject area based and are therefore—compared to overarching European and national frameworks—much more explicit, offering precision. In practice, they set standards of what a programme should reflect to be relevant for the learner and society at large. They are the products of work done by informed international groups of academics. The model allows for identifying three levels of achievement for both bachelor and master. They clearly put the learner at the centre of an aligned learning, teaching and assessment process. Its real contribution is that its descriptors offer clear indicators of what is needed in the workplace and in society while respecting the requirements of the academic fields involved (Wagenaar 2018, 2019a).

Tuning CALOHEE frameworks emphasis autonomy and responsibility as the highest level of learning. This involves also practicing civic, social and cultural engagement in every programme, making a distinction between four—in the near future five—dimensions of learning: society and culture—interculturalism, processes of information and communication, processes of governance and decision making (including democratic competences) and ethics, norms, values and professional standards and in addition sustainable development (climate change). These dimensions are expected to be integrated in every degree programme in the (near) future. Dimensions are formulated as *constructive key elements which define a subject area.* All frameworks contain also a lifelong learning component, identified as one of its dimensions. It reflects the 4ever learning model (see Sect. 3), the need to keep one-self informed, up-to-date and to act pro-actively in terms of future needs.

Lifelong learning seems to be the foundation of the development of distance learning but needs to be easily accessible and affordable. In 2006, the format of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) was introduced as a follow-up of more traditional online provisions, which developed into a popular mode of learning around 2012, attracting many millions of 'learners' globally (Papano 2012). Looking back, one can speak of a temporary hype, although the format is still popular and influential. It was predicted that MOOCs would have a serious impact on formal education, maybe even replacing it (Kalman 2014; Al-Imarah and Shields 2019).

An obvious strength of MOOCs is that (the) high(est) level of knowledge has become accessible to every learner. This is at the same time its weakness. Simple transfer and acquisition of knowledge—which also includes the concept of TED talks—might make people knowledgeable, it does not make them skilled. This makes it a conservative learning model, related to frontal and expert-driven teaching. It is widely accepted now that deep knowledge can only be developed in an active learning context by a step-by-step approach of collecting knowledge, judging knowledge, analysing and synthesising knowledge and presenting new insights. This is condi-

tional for developing real understanding of a particular issue or topic. This is not what a MOOC achieves, although one has to acknowledge that it is a very useful additional and supportive means of learning, in terms of flipped class room and blended learning models.[1] During recent years, technical solutions have been found for assessing the knowledge obtained in the framework of online-learning, reaching from full degrees to digital badges, certifications of technical knowledge and skills, nanodegrees and MicroMasters. The development has led to the introduction of the term 'micro-credentials' as was mentioned earlier (Gallagher 2019).

However, these new models of learning have not significantly helped to fill the 'skills gap' identified. They are simply not tailored to demonstrating advanced skills development, which is a crucial factor for job qualification. The labour market welcomes the intertwining of (structured) education and experience, which has led to the development of work-based learning concepts as part of a formal programme. Given the type of skills which are perceived as important—such as communication, teamwork, project work, leadership, entrepreneurship—presupposes a social environment or setting, ideally a community of learners. When organised well, formal learning should also limit drop-out.

Although the concept of micro-credentials fits very well in a rapidly changing workplace, labour market and society, and is a logical response to the need for lifelong learning, it seems that it can only partly replace class room models of learning. Nevertheless, as a result of the commercialisation of learning models, the high costs of formal higher education programmes and the promotion of competition resulting from the neo-liberal model, the traditional higher education institution is challenged. For the moment, this seems more to be the case in the United States than in Europe, where higher education is still being perceived as a public good (Bologna Process 2001, 2003; Weber and Bergan 2005) and the drop-out rates are lower (Hennen 2016; Kirp 2019). This does not mean that higher education institutions in Europe should find a response soon. An answer which should also consider its responsibility for educating students for civic, social and cultural engagement as was already stipulated.

By combining the main task of higher education institutions as education providers to prepare graduates well with the notion of a labour market which is changing with high speed, it seems reasonable to expect that higher education in the near future should tailor for lifelong learning which not only will require natural flexibility of provisions, but also allow for accessibility to it, and where needed, stacking credentials/qualifications.

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[1]Blended learning is defined as an approach to education that combines traditional place-based classroom methods with online educational materials and interaction. In a flipped classroom, students watch online lectures, collaborate in online discussions, and/or carry out research at home while engaging in concepts in the classroom with the guidance of a mentor.

3 The Future Needs of Society

Wherever one looks to try and determine what the role of higher education is in the first quarter of the 21st century, a similar refrain seems to be prevalent—so many things are changing, changing fast in so many ways, so, how does higher education figure this out and have a strategy not just to cope but to lead? Titles of articles, policy papers, research papers, blogs show how the thinking is developing across the globe for example: Rethinking the Modern University (Ford 2019); Universities in 2018: Riding trends to drive change (Van Rooijen 2018); Looking to 2040: Anticipating the Future of Higher Education (DeMillo 2019); Statement of the Fifth Bologna Policy Forum (Bologna Process 2018b). However, care must be taken to analyse discretely the various interlinking strands whilst at the same time ensuring, and overtly recognising, the inevitable impact that one has upon the others. Intentionality is needed within the maze of policy and stakeholder aims. How do the interwoven and yet potentially disparate strands of governance, funding, content, access, delivery, outcomes of learning, employability, research, social responsibilities impact upon each other, and how can unintended consequences be avoided?

How are some of these changes quantified? How are the projections shown? Once again, the sources are varied with the spectrum ranging across think tanks, trade unions, higher education researchers, consultancy firms, student groups. A common approach is to anticipate (often through the analysis of data and the projections of that going forward using past directions of travel) the changes in higher education, the anticipation of future skill requirements and the skills gap perceived by employers. Liu (2019) analysed these and affirmed the view of many that higher education must engage with change in terms of learning, skills, competences, assessment, civic responsibilities, technology, artificial intelligence (AI), qualifications and credentials, access, equity, lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning and the place of knowledge sitting alongside all other things.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers 2018 Job Outlook Survey in the United States asked employers what competency was considered essential, and how proficient those entering the workforce after higher education were. The gap between proficiency and how essential that was deemed to be in all but digital technology was at times considerable, that is more than 40%, for example, professionalism and work ethic, oral and written communications, critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration. These gaps are also highlighted by Van Damme (2018): "Mismatches are an important issue, as well as de-skilling as a consequence of low skills use".

The pattern of employability is also changing. McKinsey (2017) assesses the number and types of jobs that might be lost and also created under different scenarios through to 2030. The results reveal the potential shifts in occupations in the years ahead. If these come to fruition, the impact on the workforce in terms of skills (and how they are achieved) and wages will be significant. There may be full employment through to 2030, but what will the employment be? There will be different scenarios across the globe because of the current state of economies, society, and work patterns. There will be a shift in the skills required to be in work with, as one might expect,

an ever decreasing reliance on a person holding raw data in their brain (look at your phone and analyse the computing power in your pocket) but an increasing demand for applying expertise, interacting with stakeholders and managing people. There will be changes in the level of educational attainment required to access the jobs that demand such skills.

The workplace is changing and at the forefront of the changes are digitalization and Artificial Intelligence (AI). These do impact upon higher education, not just in terms of what society will demand from it but also in terms of how it provides what it is offering. Van Damme (op. cit.) posits the notion that the value and life-span of qualifications will be undermined by these two drivers but that learning and skills development, lifelong learning, recognition of learning will be much more relevant. Wagenaar (2019a) too recognises these changes and in similar vein to the McKinsey report identifies where the skill sets will lie and thus what the enduring learner must achieve and refresh, in his case ten key competences: critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, communication, complex problem solving, ethical judgement and decision making (reflective judgements, instead of determined—rule-based—judgements), innovation and creativity (in the framework of learning community). Thus, the absolute need to complete the move to being able to analyse, use, seek out and create additional sources of data, information, and facts surfaces yet again with the stress always on the types of competences listed by Wagenaar (idem.).

How will the learner access the learning that they need and want? How will the provider of learning meet up with the demands of the learner? Presumably, the demands are being made because the learner believes that the employer (or purchaser of skills) is "hiring". What must change is labelling learning by a simple tag such as "distance learning" or an offering as "part-time study". The "4ever" (Birtwistle and McKiernan 2010) notion becomes stronger: [learning] 'whatever, wherever, whenever, however'—it is the fact of learning and acquiring skills that is important not the method of acquiring those things. The importance of future proofing skills and use of diverse learning whilst building transversal skills is an increasingly accepted mantra (Palmén 2019) including how to learn and how to unlearn to be able to cope with change and best gain from lifelong learning (Østergaard and Nordlund 2019). The "Three Voices" shown by Palmén are representatives of students (ESU), an employer, and a creative entrepreneur. This recognition of the interwoven nature of what and how learning is to evolve and best meet the wider needs of society is essential.

In terms of what is to be the content of learning, the approach taken by CALOHEE (supra Sect. 2) provides what is possibly the most innovative, measurable, diagnostic and all-encompassing set of frameworks.

Surveying the learning landscape, Herodotou et al. (2019) provide what they state is: "a set of innovative pedagogical approaches that have the potential to guide teaching and transform learning. An integrated framework has been developed to select pedagogies …. consisting of the following five dimensions: (a) relevance to effective educational theories, (b) research evidence about the effectiveness of the proposed pedagogies, (c) relation to the development of twenty-first century skills, (d) innovative aspects of pedagogy, and (e) level of adoption in educational practice. The

selected pedagogies, namely formative analytics, teachback, place-based learning, learning with drones, learning with robots, and citizen inquiry are either attached to specific technological developments, or they have emerged due to an advanced understanding of the science of learning. Each one is presented in terms of the five dimensions of the framework."

CALOHEE certainly includes the opportunity for continual pedagogical, learning outcomes, and learning assessment methodologies within the frameworks established and includes the changing contexts that learners are confronted with not just in terms of, for example, Artificial Intelligence, but also in terms of climate change (Extinction Rebellion 2019), civic responsibility, and being able to deal with misleading and untrue statements. This sits perfectly alongside the need to acquire the skills to deal with complex challenges and the development of the person as a whole (OECD 2018).

How the providers of learning might change is a moot point. One suspects that the current elite campus-based magnetic hubs around the world will continue largely unchanged—the elite educating their offspring in ways that mirror their own experiences and provide the total learning, social, sporting environment. For the remaining 90%+, the offering will be on a spectrum of types of institutions (some remaining similar to current universities, others not so) and types of interactive streaming of learning covering skills and competences needed to quickly adapt to changing demands. Some employment will still require certification, much as now, to build the professional career ladder (medicine, law, actuarial work, etc.), however, it is likely that the vast majority may well need different types of mini-diplomas, portfolios of competences, quick tests of competence etc.

4 A Revised Model

As stipulated, it is expected there can be and will be a wide range of responses to the future needs of society in terms of appropriate learning models. This will be no different for higher education institutions to assure their continuous relevance as key providers of formal learning.

What seems not really debatable is that a revised higher education model—also taking into account cultural and local/regional/national differences—will demand a highly flexible format to cater for individualized learning pathways, which is expected to be based on roughly three key components:

(1) a particular field of studies (thematic or disciplinary), which can be named 'the core';
(2) a fully integrated set of key transferable skills/generic competences and
(3) additional units to the core—which can be organised as minors, electives, windows for work-based learning, international mobility, etc.

This does not sound very revolutionary, but for many higher education institutions and programmes, it will be perceived as such. What we have seen over time is that

programmes have become more flexible, but not to the extent required by society. It is stating the obvious that 21st Century state-of-the-art higher education programmes need to be organised with the concept of lifelong learning and the continuous need for reskilling and additional skilling in mind. In the model suggested here, it should accommodate both new and experienced learners, that is those who are already active in the workplace. Based on the discussions in and outcomes of the CALOHEE initiative, it is crucial to take as point of departure that students are prepared well for their future role. This is not the actual situation given the identified skills gap mentioned.

Research shows us that graduates with higher levels of education, e.g. higher education—short or long(er)—will stand a better chance of finding employment at a satisfying level. Formal education cannot be replaced by online micro-credentials and the like, due to the skills factor. This notion implies that every undergraduate and graduate programme is based on the development of a domain of knowledge. Development implies becoming knowledgeable, but also skilled and ultimately become inspirational to others. It requires programmes which fully intertwine knowledge and subject-specific and generic skills and competences in the learning process. A strong foundation of well understood knowledge and skills is conditional for absorbing new knowledge and additional skilling.

To accommodate for the most effective learning environment, it is important to create a stimulating and dynamic learning environment. This can be established, for example, by setting up learning communities which allow for intensive contacts between learners and academic staff. These communities are crucial components for applying modes of learning which allow for the development of—as an example—the following skills string reflecting progression of learning: teamwork, project design and implementation, leadership, entrepreneurship. While for knowledge acquisition, blended and flipped classroom learning might be helpful, learning communities will facilitate inclusive learning and social cohesion. It is in the interest of society, both in economic and social terms, to guarantee access to formal learning to all potential learners; without a sound basis, additional learning—in terms of upgrading and updating—will be frustrated.

This can be illustrated by the example of academic staff operating presently in higher education. As has been highlighted—also in the recent Paris Communiqué of the EHEA (Bologna Process 2018a)—there is a need for further engagement with the process of learning across the higher education landscape. The vast majority of higher education academic staff are subject experts with little or no pedagogical training; it might be said that they function as pilots with the experience of a passenger not knowledgeable about basic pedagogical concepts and not educated in the wide range of learning, teaching and assessment methods and approaches. As a result, the relatively new paradigm of student-centred and active learning is not taken on board, because the existing model of expert- driven education is not even understood in the consequences it has for the learner. It has been observed that facilities for staff development are not in place at the required level in most institution due to lack of trainers (Birtwistle and Wagenaar 2016 *idem*).

Having said this, there is another component of learning which requires attention and covering in formal learning: the relevance of what is learned and how it is learned to be successful in and for society as a graduate. Core domain/subject-related knowledge and skills are key which should keep taking on board current achievements in the academic field, but this is not sufficient. To reach the level of application of what has been learned, a sustainable bridge between academia, the workplace and society at large has to be created and nurtured. In present day more developed models—in particular in applied programmes—employers (and employees) play a role with respect to the design, implementation and enhancement but this role is mostly limited to offering advice as members of advisory boards and/or as guest lecturers. Only in a limited number of cases, programmes have integrated work-based learning components. Preparing for civic, social and cultural engagement is very limited or non-existent. As a result, students might become acquainted with the (most) current theoretical insights in their field of studies, but much less so with regard to practical implications and applications.

This issue can be tackled by reserving (substantial) space in both the bachelor and master programme to diversify and to broaden the scope of learning. This can be done by integrating in this space small units of specific learning, which can be perceived as micro-credentials. These micro-credentials—to be offered in this space in addition and besides mobility and work-based learning—will allow for personal profiling and, therefore, tailoring of learning for fulltime students. However, the real innovation proposed here is to make these micro-credentials also available for experienced learners in a lifelong learning context who are already active in the labour market. By bringing full-time learners and lifelong learners together to study well defined current topics, a very dynamic learning environment is created. It will combine the eagerness of learning of young people with the experience of the workplace. Such a model is cost-effective, allowing for a wide offer of state-of-the-art course units because not only high level personnel are in place but also the physical infrastructure in terms of buildings, equipment and ICT. By combining online learning with a social environment for reflection and debate, deeper learning can be achieved, which is immediately applicable in society. One can imagine a model in which alumni are informed every semester about the micro-credentials on offer of their alma mater and/or other institutions (Wagenaar 2019b).

The model described is visualised in this image (Fig. 1):
By offering small-unit learning of quality-assured education in a structured way, higher education institutions will strengthen their societal role and relevance and, therefore, also find convincing answers to decreasing student numbers in their full-time programmes. The micro-credentials not only defined as learning units but also as communities will allow for offering (integrated) learning regarding civic, social and cultural issues as was already outlined. It will also allow—as in the case of core studies—for formative assessment besides summative assessment and for a high variation of aligned active learning, teaching and assessment strategies and approaches. The micro-credentials will be ECTS based involving both student workload and intended learning outcomes. In terms of student workload, one can imagine a variation of 2.5/ 5/ 7.5/ 10 or 3/6/9 ECTS credits. These credit arrangements will allow for
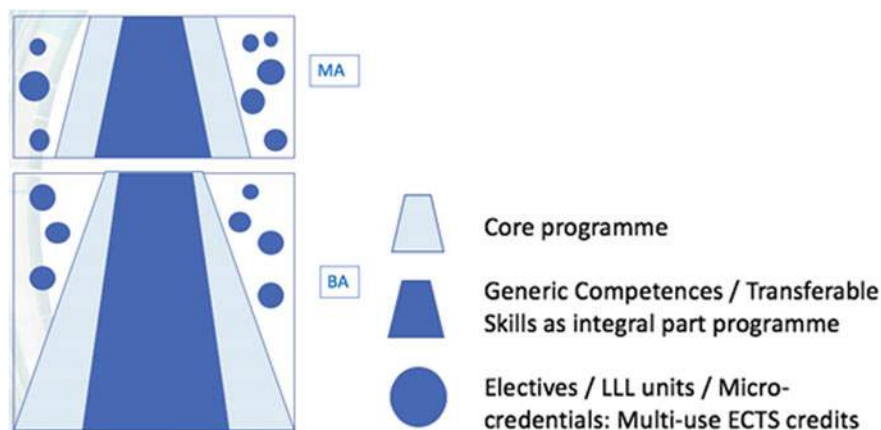
Fig. 1 Described model

accumulation or stacking. While ECTS is most of all an effective instrument to organise studies (in terms of workload and level of learning outcomes), micro-credentials as a term is applicable to express a typical mode of learning, so-called 'pockets of learning'. Of course, it is the remit of the exam boards of individual degree programmes to decide whether—in whatever combination—micro-credentials meet the standards and requirements of a first (bachelor) or second cycle (master) programme. However, these boards will no doubt be much more flexible than at present is the case, recognising the shift in the types of learning packages available.

By applying the CALOHEE Qualifications Reference Frameworks and CALOHEE Assessment Reference Frameworks, these boards will be helped to clearly distinguish and indicate levels of learning and to monitor the quality of learning which can, therefore, be guaranteed.

5   In Conclusion

The world is in a state of flux. Tackling the multiple problems which are complex in nature must surely rely on education at all levels. Higher education must be a central player in this immense task. As outlined, the world of work is changing, how society is reacting to change is now at a high stress level, the physical environment that we all rely on is under great stress and may be reaching a tipping point (hopefully it has not gone beyond the point of redemption), and higher education must lead by adapting its role, purposes, governance, access policies, whilst maintaining the core research function. Access to learning, re-learning (sometimes following unlearning), learning alignment, core competences, knowledge analysis, and the outcomes of learning must, as has been illustrated, be at the heart of the challenge.

Without change, the challenges cannot be met, and the stakeholders will not begin to reach better levels of participation and satisfaction. It is said, "there is no Planet B" regarding the urgency of the environmental aspect. The employment and education surveys show change is rapid, AI is advancing faster than most are able to keep pace with (e.g. driverless vehicles, computers programming computers), the demands placed on society are great and rapid, therefore, flexible learning patterns, methods, and content based around core competences (supra) are needed now. The future is here. Higher education must adapt.

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Toward a Permanent Bologna Secretariat?

Sjur Bergan and Irina Geanta

1 Background

The question of a permanent Bologna Secretariat has been raised both within and outside of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG),[1] mostly after the 2015 Ministerial conference. The BFUG discussed this as one of several options in December 2016 (Bologna Process 2016) and decided to "go on with a rotating Secretariat and not to open the discussion again" (Bologna Process 2017: 8). Outside of the BFUG, the question of a Permanent Secretariat was considered at the 2014 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference (Bergan 2015). Nevertheless, the question of setting up a permanent Bologna Secretariat has been kept alive in informal discussions but has, to our knowledge, never been explored in detail.

[1] The BFUG oversees and governs the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) between ministerial conferences, on the basis of the Declarations and Communiqu'es adopted by these. The work program is developed on the basis of the latest Communiqué, so that, e.g., the 2018–2020 work program is based on the Paris Communiqué (Bologna Process 2018a). The BFUG is made up of representatives of all members and consultative members of the EHEA (Bologna Process 2018a).

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2   Future Development of the European Higher Education Area

The consideration of a permanent Bologna Secretariat cannot be divorced from the ongoing discussion of the future development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) itself, as the role of the Secretariat (Bologna Process 2018c) is to support the EHEA, in particular by serving the BFUG and its bodies: the Board, the Co-Chairs and the various working and advisory groups, some of which go by other names.

The discussion on the future of the European Higher Education Area was launched in earnest in the run-up to the 2010 Ministerial conference (Bergan and Deca 2018), which formally launched the EHEA and marked the transition from a "process" to an "area". This discussion is now again fully on the agenda in the run-up to the 2020 Ministerial conference which will set the course for the next decade of the EHEA (Bologna Process 2019a and Bologna Process 2019c; Isaacs this volume), as well as at the Bologna Anniversary Conference[2] in June 2019 which marked the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Bologna Declaration.

At the time of writing (February 2020), it is difficult to anticipate what priorities Ministers will set for the next decade of the EHEA. We would nevertheless be surprised if these would not include a continued focus on structural reforms—including an emphasis on implementation—as well as renewed emphasis on the social dimension of higher education, teaching and learning, and the EHEA in a global context. Not least, there is likely to be added emphasis on the fundamental values underpinning the EHEA as outlined in the Paris Communiqué (Bologna Process 2018a), and that will hopefully include a commitment to assessing how these values are implemented in EHEA member states (Bologna Process 2019c).

In other words, we see a tendency toward permanent—or at least long term—cooperation on a range of topics. In spite of the controversies around issues of implementation and non-implementation in the run-up to the 208 Paris Ministerial Conference (Bergan and Deca, *op. cit.*, Strand Vidarsdóttir 2018), regular assessment of the extent to which commitments undertaken are converted into policies that are actually implemented, coupled with peer support in key areas, as exemplified by the current Bologna Implementation Coordination Group,[3] is likely to remain a key and possibly strengthened aspect of the EHEA.

These priorities and the fact that the EHEA—or at least the Bologna Process—is entering its third decade make it imperative to reassess whether its governing structure and secretariat support are still fit for purpose. The governance structure has been addressed elsewhere (Bergan and Deca, *op. cit.*: 295–301), Bergan 2015, 2016). It may be argued that a longer- term and stronger EHEA would also require stronger secretariat support.

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[2]See http://bolognaprocess2019.it/, accessed February 4, 2020.

[3]See http://www.ehea.info/page-Bologna-Implementation-Coordination-Group, accessed February 4, 2020.

In this context, two developments are worth noting. One is the fact that the need for a more stable Secretariat arrangement has already been acted on once. The original arrangement was for the country that held the BFUG Chair also to provide its secretariat. In Berlin in 2003, however, Ministers decided that "(t)he overall follow-up work will be supported by a Secretariat which the country hosting the next Ministerial Conference will provide" (Bologna Process 2003: 8) and asked the BFUG to define the further responsibilities of the BFUG, along with those of the Board. Ministers thereby established the current Secretariat arrangements which formally took effect as of January 1, 2004,[4] even if the first Secretariat under the new arrangement, provided by Norway, was already in operation in fall 2003.

The second trend is toward more long-term stability in the BFUG itself. Until 2010, the BFUG was chaired by the country holding the EU Presidency, and chairs hence rotated every six months. The Board was established in 2003 (Bologna Process 2003: 8) and the troika system established so that the Chair as well as the preceding and the following Chair would be members of the Board, along with three elected country members, the European Commission, the Vice-Chair (representing the host of the upcoming Ministerial conference), and four consultative members (EUA, EURASHE, ESU, and the Council of Europe). In 2009, Ministers decided to introduce a new co-chairing arrangement, so that the BFUG would be chaired by the country holding the EU Presidency and a non-EU country (Bologna Process 2009a: 5). The troika system was then extended to include the non-EU co-chairs, so that the Board was composed of a "double troika" of the current, immediate past, and immediate future Co-Chairs, and there were no longer any elected country members of the Board (Bologna Process 2009b: 5).

Establishing a permanent Bologna Secretariat has been proposed as a possible solution, but the discussion has rarely progressed beyond pointing to the numerous obstacles that could prevent such secretariat support from being established. Our main purpose in this article is to identify possible obstacles and suggest how they may be addressed should there be political will to establish a Bologna Secretariat that is more independent of the host country of the Ministerial conference and more directly at the service of the BFUG than has been the case so far.

A recurrent governance issue is the fact that the EHEA has no independent budget but rather relies on activities and projects being financed by national authorities as well as specific - and so far generous - contributions by the European Commission. As this paper focuses on the Secretariat, budget issues are considered in this context. Nevertheless, these considerations could be extended to an operational budget for the EHEA as such to be overseen by the BFUG and managed by the Secretariat under the guidance of the Co-Chairs.

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[4]An overview of all Bologna Secretariats will be found at http://www.ehea.info/page-bologna-secretariat, accessed February 4, 2020.

3   The Meaning of "Permanent"

It may well be argued that no human construct is "permanent" and that an attempt to set up a "permanent" Bologna Secretariat therefore testifies to hubris, ignorance, or both. Benjamin Franklin reputedly said that "in this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes"footnote In a letter to French scientist Jean-Baptiste Leroy on November 13, 1789; the original is in French., but the list of tax evaders is longer than the list of those who evaded death.

More pragmatically, however, "permanent" has been used as the functional equivalent of "medium term". As the Rome Ministerial Conference is likely to consider the priorities of the EHEA until 2030, it would seem reasonable to consider a Secretariat that would be in place through 2030. At the very least, a "permanent" Secretariat would have to serve two Ministerial conferences, but there seems little reason to consider a time frame of less than a decade. If the "permanent" Secretariat is successful, its life span can be extended, albeit not without noting the irony of prolonging a "permanent" arrangement.

It should also be underlined that it is the structure that would be "permanent". Staff may still be recruited on fixed term contracts, although the discussions held so far would indicate that staff contracts limited to a single period between two Ministerial conferences would not be desirable, and it would seem desirable to keep the same location through the period under consideration.

4   Tasks

According to its terms of reference for 2018–2020,[5] the BFUG Secretariat will, as its primary function, "provide neutral support to further the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area under the authority of the BFUG". The terms of reference go on to specify a range of activities that may be summarized as providing administrative and operational support for the BFUG, Board, and working groups and other similar groups, communication (including the EHEA web site), representation, acting as a "one stop" contact point for the EHEA, and preparing the Ministerial conference. A detailed description will be found in the terms of reference. While adjustments will undoubtedly be necessary, and the responsibility to serve all structures and groups need to be underlined, we believe the current terms of reference give a reasonable overview of what would be the tasks of a future "permanent" Secretariat.

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[5]http://www.ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_AU_CH_63_5_ToR_Secretariat.pdf, accessed February 4, 2020.

5 Status

The formal status of the Secretariat has been one of the stumbling blocks so far.

An international Secretariat not bound to a single EHEA country would be less likely to serve—or be seen as serving—the interests of that particular country than one that is nationally based. To achieve this, a new structure would need to be established, and it would need to answer to an international body, such as the BFUG. This is complicated by the fact that the EHEA is an informal framework governed by what is also a relatively informal structure: the Ministerial conferences and the BFUG. Neither is established under international law.

The EHEA is essentially a relatively loosely organized, voluntary intergovernmental process, with a bare minimum of formal arrangements. Its highest decision-making body is a gathering of Ministers that is not rooted in an international agreement beyond a Ministerial declaration, it is governed between the Ministerial meetings by the BFUG, whose legitimacy arises from Ministerial communiqués, and EHEA members have few or any structural obligations beyond appointing a member of the BFUG and its groups.

Therefore, an independent Secretariat would need to be established as a separate entity rather than as a part of a Ministry of Education or any other national public or private body.

In theory, the Secretariat could be established within an existing international structure. However, any intergovernmental or non-governmental institution or organization that could be considered (e.g. the European Commission, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, EUA, EURASHE, ESU) is already strongly engaged in the EHEA and the BFUG and would not be seen as neutral.[6]

This would leave the option of establishing a new intergovernmental organization or an NGO to serve as the Bologna Secretariat.

Establishing the Secretariat as an intergovernmental organization is possible but it would be a cumbersome undertaking which would probably require an international treaty—such as a convention—as the basis for the EHEA and its Secretariat or—in a less ambitious version - as a basis for the Secretariat only. The Council of Europe was established by virtue of a convention (Council of Europe 1949), the Nordic Council of Ministers was also established on the basis of an international treaty (the Helsinki Treaty; Nordic Council of Ministers 2018), and the Regional Cooperation Council is based on Statutes (Regional Cooperation Council, n.d.); the latter contain provisions for the Secretariat and stipulate this be based in Sarajevo.

Establishing a "permanent" Secretariat as an NGO seems to be a less cumbersome alternative, and through European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

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[6]In this regard, it is recalled that a proposal by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe around 2010 that the Bologna Secretariat be entrusted to the Council met with strong and predictable resistance, including from the Council of Europe Education Department.

(EQAR)[7] there is a recent precedent within the EHEA. Even if it may seem para-
doxical that an intergovernmental process be served by a Secretariat with the status
of an NGO, this should not be an intellectually insurmountable obstacle.

6 Location and Practical Arrangements: A Comparative Analysis

While European in scope, an NGO would need to be based on and operate under
national legislation. By way of example, EQAR operates under Belgian law.[8] If it
is decided to establish the Bologna Secretariat as an NGO, the choice of seat would
decide the national legislation under which the Secretariat would be established.
The ease with which any given national legislation allows the establishment and
operation of NGOs with an international scope, including the ease with which they
could be funded by actors outside of the host country,[9] would, therefore, be an
important criterion in the choice of the seat of the Secretariat. The legislation of the
host country would also need to make it possible—and not overly cumbersome—for
nationals of any EHEA member States to be employed as Secretariat staff and to
obtain work and residence permits.

The Secretariat would of course require adequate office space for its staff as well
as adequate meeting rooms. The meetings of the BFUG and Board would still be held
in the countries that hold the rotating Co-Chairmanship, but working groups may
want to hold at least some meetings at the seat of the Secretariat, and the Secretariat
premises should also make it possible to receive some visiting groups.

Other considerations may also be taken into account in choosing the seat, such
as the degree of political openness and the state of the rule of law in the country,
whether proximity to any given European institutions or NGOs is desirable or not, or
the desire—or not—of the public authorities of the host country to see the Secretariat
established there.

The latter may extend to the provision of offices, the location of these offices
(outside of any national public authority), and the conditions for such support (the
real as well as formal independence with regard to national public authorities must
be ensured). Prospective host countries may also offer financial support and/or offer
the office premises. By way of example, the Austrian authorities offer generous
conditions for the European Centre for Modern Languages, a Council of Europe
Partial Agreement located in Graz.

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[7]https://www.eqar.eu/, accessed February 4, 2020.

[8]"EQAR is an International Non-Profit Association under Belgian law (aisbl/ivzw), founded by
the E4 Group", cf. https://www.eqar.eu/about/eqar-structure/, accessed on February 4, 2020.

[9]Cf. the relatively recent trend for some governments of the EHEA to consider NGOs with non-
national funding as "foreign agents".

Accessibility would be an important consideration. The city chosen as the seat of the Secretariat should have good air connections to European capitals. The offices should also be easily reachable and accessible within the city.

7 Financing

Regardless of the status of the Secretariat, it must be financed largely by EHEA members. Today, the Secretariat budget is covered by the host country and the European Commission. Only the Commission can decide whether a "permanent" Secretariat would be eligible for a similar level of Commission funding and the period for which any such funding could be committed.

This raises a number of issues that must be clarified:

7.1 How Is the Secretariat Budget Established, and for What Period?

Ideally, a multi-annual budget would allow the Secretariat to operate with a reasonable degree of predictability and allow it to plan its activities for the entire work period. It is assumed that Ministerial conferences will generally be held every three years. However, many governments operate on annual budgets and may be reluctant to commit funds beyond this annual budget or may even be legally prevented from doing so.

The budget will need to be formally adopted by all payers. A budget covering the entire period between two Ministerial conferences could be adopted by Ministers; otherwise, the BFUG would need to adopt the budget. The discussion so far assumes that the budget would be apportioned between the members of the EHEA, who would then adopt the budget. Should the consultative members also be expected to contribute—which would not seem a realistic expectation—they would need to be given voting rights on any budget issue and possibly also on other issues.

Once it is established who pays the budget—and therefore who votes on budget issues—it must be decided by what majority the budget is adopted. Theoretically, options range from unanimity to simple majority; in reality, either unanimity or a very considerable qualified majority (e.g. $\frac{3}{4}$) would probably be required. It will in practice be difficult to oblige an EHEA member to contribute to a budget with which it disagrees. Depending on the size of the budget and the political situation in member States, budget negotiations could therefore be complicated and protracted.

This also points to the need to ensure the timely adoption of the budget and hence prevent situations in which the Secretariat would be unable to operate because the budget has not been adopted. EHEA members would need to agree on a deadline for the adoption of the budget as well as on measures to be taken if the deadline is not

met. These could include provision for continuing operations on a monthly basis, proportionally based on the previous budget, as well as a binding commitment for EHEA members to finance the budget on this basis until the new budget is adopted.

To increase efficiency and predictability and to reduce the risk of not having the budget adopted in time, one option could be that Ministers or the BFUG agree on a tentative budget for each work period and that the annual budgets are then confirmed on that basis by the BFUG.

7.2 What Should the Budget Comprise?

The budget would above all comprise salaries, social security, and pensions for staff. The number of staff members, the staff structure, and the level of remuneration - important elements in determining the size of the budget—must be determined as part of any decision to establish the Secretariat, and changes to the staff size or structure and hence the size of the budget must also be decided by those who finance the Secretariat. This could possibly be done by including the Secretariat budget as an annual item on the BFUG agenda or by holding an annual General Assembly end-on with the BFUG.

Beyond direct staff costs, the budget must also provide for office costs, including rent, office equipment, and running costs, staff travel, possibly travel by the Co-Chairs and Vice- Chair on behalf of the BFUG (or at least for meetings with the Secretariat), and other costs that will be incurred in the setting up and running of the Secretariat. International recruitment will also entail costs in the form of moving expenses and possibly other allowances, such as home visits as well as costs linked to the recruitment itself.

At present, the BFUG has no budget of its own. As part of a decision to set up a "permanent" Secretariat, it may be considered whether partners would also establish a budget for the BFUG beyond the costs of the Secretariat.

7.3 How Much Does Each EHEA Member Contribute?

This is partly a question of the total size of the budget, which must be determined by EHEA members. EHEA members must also decide, however, how the budget is to be apportioned among its members, in other words, how much each member would pay.

One could imagine several formulas for apportioning the Secretariat budget between EHEA members.

Non-weighted contributions would imply that each EHEA member pays the same contribution regardless of the size of its higher education system, population, and public budget. This may not be easily accepted by the smallest EHEA member countries and would also be at variance with the apportioning of budget contributions

to international institution and organizations, such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO.

A weighted contributions scale would therefore seem more realistic, and several models could be envisaged. Elements that could be taken into account include population size, the size of the BNP, the size of the higher education system (number of institutions, number of students and staff), the number or proportion of students studying abroad, or the national higher education budget. The elements taken into account must be seen as relevant, and the formula established must also not be overly complicated or based on elements that cannot easily be verified. One possibility would be to use the distribution of contributions in an existing organization, in which case the Council of Europe membership would probably most closely resemble that of the EHEA.

Variations of a weighted contributions formula could also be considered, including a combination of an equal contribution by all members up to a given limit and weighted contributions beyond that, and a specified contribution by the European Commission and weighted contributions by member states beyond that.

On the assumption that weighted contributions would be the preferred formula, once the total amount of the budget has been established, the payment by each member would then be decided by the formula established for the weighted contributions.

7.4   Risk of Non-payment

Ministers may be asked to make formal commitments to paying their part of the budget. Nevertheless, as several organizations have experienced, the risk of some members not paying their budget contribution in time cannot be discarded.

Some kind of reserve funds will therefore be needed. This could possibly be established by each EHEA member making a one-off payment to the reserve when the Secretariat is set up. The size of this one-off payment would need to be decided, but a minimum requirement would seem to be that the sum of one-off payments would allow the Secretariat to operate for one year. Thereafter, annual budget contributions could include an amount to strengthen the reserve fund.

The decision to establish the Secretariat may also need to include provision for actions to be taken in case of prolonged non-payment by one or more EHEA members. Besides defining what is meant by "prolonged non-payment" (possibly one year, or any other period long enough for the non-payment to affect the operation of the Secretariat), this decision will need to stipulate measures against members failing to pay their contribution (such as back payment with interest at rates to be determined, suspension of participation in the BFUG or in the EHEA after a stipulated period of non-payment) as well as measures for making up the shortfall, either by reducing Secretariat activities or by other members making extra payments, possibly subject to repayment once the missing contribution has been paid.

8 Staff

8.1 An International Staff

An important rationale for establishing a "permanent" Secretariat would be to ensure that staff members come from various EHEA members. The Secretariat will not be big enough to include staff members from all EHEA countries, but geographical diversity within the staff should be encouraged.

Another key consideration will be the balance between geographical diversity and material competence in higher education policy and practice. While it must be assumed that competent Secretariat staff members could be found in all EHEA members, it may not be equally easy to motivate competent candidates from all EHEA members to apply for Secretariat posts. One option would be to recruit primarily on the basis of competence but to stipulate that no more than a given proportion of the staff, or a given number of staff, may come from any given EHEA member. It would then need to be decided whether such provisions should extend to all categories of staff, since some categories may be in particular need of knowledge of the administration and language(s) of the host country.

In addition to regular staff, the Secretariat could also host interns.

The relationship to recent Bologna Secretariats should also be considered. While a transfer of experience is important, a "permanent" Secretariat is in many ways a new start, and it will be successful only if it is not seen solely as a continuation of any recent Secretariat by other means.

8.2 Selecting the Head of Secretariat

The Head of Secretariat is an administrative rather than political leadership position. The Head should, therefore, be hired rather than elected. The position would need to be published internationally and be subject to an international selection procedure. The BFUG - or a group mandated by the BFUG—would need to develop an agreed job description and competence requirements, including requirements with regard to previous professional experience. At least in the final stage of the hiring process, the BFUG or a group mandated by the BFUG would need to make the final selection, which may or may not be submitted to the full BFUG for approval.

While it is important the BFUG be comfortable with the selection of the Head, it is also important this be seen as hiring for a position and not an election for political office. In this sense, the experience with the relatively recent establishment of the position of President of EQAR is only partly relevant. Establishing a search committee for the Head of Secretariat could, however, be an alternative or supplement to publishing the post.

Regardless of the arrangements for the appointment of the Head of Secretariat, it must be a formal and real requirement that this be a full-time position, appointment

to which is incompatible with other roles, in particular roles that would imply any kind of national mandate.

8.3 Authority Over and Responsibility for Staff

The provision for a "permanent" Secretariat must include a legal and operational definition of the employer. This would include recruitment, oversight and—in the worst of cases—dismissal. It would also include clarification of the financial responsibility for staff, i.e. payment of salaries, social security, and pensions (see also under Finances, above).

The EHEA is governed by its members through the Ministerial conferences and the BFUG, but the Co-Chairs and the Vice-Chair have day to day responsibility for the BFUG and today have the authority to instruct the Secretariat in the preparation of the meetings of the BFUG and Board as well as the working groups. For the latter, the co-chairs of working groups also have authority over the working group concerned. Today, however, these are informal arrangements arising from internal decisions by the BFUG which operates on the authority vested in it by successive Ministerial communiqués.

It is assumed that more formal and legally rooted arrangements will be required to establish who has responsibility as the employer of the staff of a "permanent" Secretariat. If the Secretariat is established through an international treaty, the treaty would specify this. If the Secretariat is established as an NGO, the statutes of the NGO would need to specify this in accordance with the law of the country in which the NGO is established. In the latter case, EQAR would serve as an important example, even if adjustments may be required.

One challenge may be that while in an NGO the President and other officers would normally be elected *ad nominem* for a stipulated period of at least one year with provision for succession should, e.g., the President step down in the period between elections, the BFUG Co-Chairs serve for six months and rotate by country rather than person.

The Head of Secretariat would be responsible for the running of the Secretariat, and further hierarchical responsibilities could be established within the Secretariat. However, the Head of Secretariat would need to report to a person or a body. This could be the Co-Chairs, but it could also be argued that reporting to Co-Chairs who change every six months would not provide sufficient stability. This would be particularly important should the Head of Secretariat be in a probation period or should there be serious issues with his/her performance.

One possibility would be to constitute a board made up of, say, 4–5 BFUG members, appointed for at least the period between two Ministerial conferences (normally 3 years, in some cases 2). This board could be responsible for overseeing the Secretariat, could function as a jury or an appointment board for recruitments and as a disciplinary board. By "overseeing" is meant the (internal) functioning of the Secretariat; the relationship between such a board and the Co-Chairs would need to be

explored. The Head of Secretariat should also have an important voice in recruitment for positions other than his/her own, and the recruitment function of such a board could be restricted to the top position(s) in the Secretariat.

Disciplinary issues with regard to any staff member except the Head of Secretariat would in the first instance be dealt with by the Head. However, instructions for staff will need to be established and provision made for the resolution of serious disciplinary issues—including any such issue concerning the Head of Secretariat— as well as for the resolution of any conflicts between the Head of Secretariat and individual staff members.

A designated member of this board could also be responsible for approving expenses—e.g. travel expenses—incurred by the Head of Secretariat. Similar expenses incurred by other staff members would be approved by the Head of Secretariat, as would purchases or service contracts, at least up to a given amount. The board referred to above could possibly approve expenses that could not be approved by the Head of Secretariat. The Secretariat accounts would need to be audited in accordance with the laws of the country in which it is located, and the audit report needs to be accepted by the BFUG within a reasonable time limit. It is recalled that the EQAR General Assemblies consider the audit reports for EQAR.

8.4   Responsibility for Salaries and Other Financial Obligations Toward Staff

Somebody (or some body) must be legally responsible for the payment of salaries and other benefits (including social security and retirement benefits) to staff. This includes ensuring the future payment of retirement benefits should the Secretariat one day be discontinued, as these benefits will be linked to the life span of the individual Secretariat staff member rather than to that of the Secretariat or the EHEA. Sufficient reserves must be set aside, and insurance contracts must be established and served, to safeguard staff.

8.5   Duration of Contracts

All contracts would be limited to the period for which the Secretariat will be established. With the exception of possible secondments to ensure liaison with the host ministry of the upcoming Ministerial conference, see below, contracts could be established for the entire period for which the Secretariat is established (e.g. 10 years) or for a shorter period. However, one of the main reasons for establishing a "permanent" Secretariat would be to ensure continuity beyond the period between two Ministerial conferences, so contracts should be offered for more than two or three years. Five years would seem to be a minimum, but it would seem desirable to offer con-

tracts covering the whole decade. At the same time, it should be considered whether there should be a maximum duration for contracts. Confirmation of contracts would reasonably be subject to satisfactory performance during a probation period.

In determining the length of contracts, consideration must be given to the need for some flexibility in Secretariat staff (including the possibility of discontinuing contracts should the Secretariat budget be significantly reduced during the period) but also to making positions in the Secretariat attractive for competent candidates from all EHEA members. Prospective candidates may be unwilling to relocate to a new country and leave their current positions for shorter-term contracts.

9 Relations to the Authorities of the Host Country

The Secretariat will need to develop good working relations with the Ministry of Education and other bodies responsible for higher education of the host country and may also require some assistance with practical matters and in relations with other public authorities, including local authorities. The authorities of the host countries should, nevertheless, not be in a position to instruct the Secretariat.

It would be important to make provision for hiring national(s) of the host country. One or more staff members would need to be very well acquainted with the situation in the host country, including its higher education actors, its administrative culture, and its language(s). This would (also) apply to staff dealing with logistical and financial issues.

At the same time, it is important that the host country not exercise undue influence over the Secretariat. While it may be desirable to stipulate that at least one or two staff member(s) be recruited from the host country, it may also be desirable to stipulate a maximum number for such recruitments. It should also be considered whether there should be provisions for recruitment to specific posts. An arrangement whereby the Head of the Secretariat be a citizen of an EHEA country other than the host country, whereas the Deputy Head or a similar position by filled by a national of the host country would not be unusual. It is recalled that at CEPES (the UNESCO center for higher education in Europe, based in Bucureşti), the Director was non-Romanian, whereas the Deputy Director was Romanian. In the early years of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, the Executive Director was non-Austrian and the Deputy Director/Head of Programs Austrian; today both posts are filled by non-Austrians.

10   Relations to the Authorities of Host Countries of Ministerial Conferences

The Secretariat will also need to have good working relations with the Ministry of Education of the host country of the coming Ministerial conference. This implies that it will need to relate to at least four different Ministries of Education within the next decade.[10]

The host Ministry of the upcoming conference should appoint a liaison officer to the Secretariat, who would be the Secretariat's contact person for all issues relating to the conference. This person should carry sufficient weight within the Ministry. The contact person could be supplemented or replaced by a seconded official, who would be identified and paid by the host of the upcoming Ministerial conference. Alternatively, specific costs for such a post could be foreseen in the multi-annual budget of the Secretariat. This person would work as a Secretariat member, under the authority of the Head of Secretariat, but would of necessity maintain a closer relationship with the authorities of his/her home country than other Secretariat staff. It is recalled that an Austrian and a Hungarian staff member were provided to the BeNeLux Bologna Secretariat for the preparation of the 2010 Ministerial conference.

It should be underlined that staff members who are citizens of countries hosting upcoming Ministerial conferences would work under the exclusive authority of the Head of Secretariat and the BFUG. It should possibly be considered whether the country hosting the Secretariat should also be eligible to host a Ministerial conference or be part of a group of countries hosting a conference.

11   Language

Since English is the working language of the EHEA, it would also be the working language of the Secretariat, also in its internal communication. Even if staff members may naturally use languages other than English in their direct oral contacts, communication within the Secretariat must be such that no staff member is excluded from it for linguistic reasons. English should be the language of all written communication.

Proficiency in other languages should nevertheless be encouraged and could be a criterion in staff recruitment. As suggested above, for one or more posts proficiency in the language of the host country may be a *conditio sine qua non*.

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[10]Assuming each Ministerial conference is organized by a single country; it is recalled that the 2009 and 2010 conferences were organized by four and two Ministries of Education, respectively.

12 Conclusion

Without making any claim to being exhaustive, this paper has sought to identify a number of issues that must be clarified if a "permanent" Bologna Secretariat is to be established. It aims to provide clarification rather than argue that a "permanent" Secretariat is a must.

The paper explores issues related to the status, financing, governance, staff, location, and relations to the host countries of Ministerial conferences as well as language arrangements and the period for which the Secretariat should be established. While exploring several options, the paper suggests that the following elements may be part of any further consideration of a "permanent" Secretariat:

– A Secretariat established for a period of 10 years, or at least until 2030 should the Secretariat not be established until the 2023 Ministerial conference.
– It would be less complicated to establish the Secretariat as an NGO than as a new intergovernmental organization, which would probably require an international treaty, or within an existing structure. If the NGO model is chosen, it is suggested that the experience of EQAR may be particularly relevant.
– The Secretariat budget must be agreed by EHEA members and should be based on the priorities adopted by Ministerial conferences and the BFUG work program established on this basis. Even if national regulations may make it difficult to establish multi-annual budgets, arrangements must be found to ensure financial stability for at least the period between two Ministerial conferences.
– Provision must be made for apportioning budget contributions among EHEA members, probably on the basis of weighted contributions.
– Arrangements must be made for establishing a reserve fund to cover the eventuality of delayed or missing budget contributions by EHEA members and to address cases of prolonged non-payment.
– The location of the Secretariat should be decided on the basis of a range of factors including the facility with which the Secretariat can be established and financed by international partners, any restriction on international recruitment (including work and residence permits), the availability and cost of suitable office facilities, the support from but also independence of the public authorities of the host country, and air connections.
– Secretariat staff must be international, and it may be considered whether stipulations should be made as to the maximum number of staff members from any given country.
– Responsibility for employment must be clearly defined, and this should include responsibility for the payment of staff salaries and other staff costs as well as the continued payment of saff benefits such as retirement benefits in the event the Secretariat is discontinued. Provision must be made for the recruitment, oversight and—in extreme cases—dismissal of Secretariat staff.
– While the Secretariat must be independent and serve the EHEA, represented by the BFUG and its Co-Chairs, the relationship to the country hosting the Secretariat as well as to countries hosting Ministerial conferences must be considered carefully.

The need for a longer-term Secretariat more independent of the public authorities of specific EHEA members will be decided by the vision of the EHEA toward 2030. That vision is, however, likely to include continued work on current priorities, like structural reforms and the social dimension of higher education as well as a renewed focus on the values underpinning the EHEA and a continued, possibly strengthened, emphasis on assessing implementation. Such a development is likely to accentuate the need for an EHEA with some independent budget and reinforced governance arrangements, supported by a longer-term Secretariat. While this paper does not claim to have explored all available options for the latter, and while it will have left many questions unanswered, it is hoped it will provide a better basis for considering whether a "permanent" Secretariat should be established than what has been available so far.

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Bologna Process in the Global Higher Education Arena. Going Digital? (Coordinated by Dominic Orr and Adrian Curaj)

Bologna Process in the Global Higher Education Arena. Going Digital?

Dominic Orr

1 Introduction

The Bologna Process has always been about seeing higher education within a national and a global context. This accounts for the 48 member countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which send their ministers responsible for higher education to the ministerial conferences every two to three years and send their high-level civil servants and national representatives into the many working group meetings. European-wide stakeholder membership organisations also play an important part in these processes. All of these actors bring in their own perspectives to the programme of the Bologna Process with regard to their own countries and institutions, the EHEA and the possible similarities and differences between the EHEA and third countries or other regions. This means that the Bologna Process has always been objectively international in its way of working[1] and at least supported through digital communication processes, which facilitated the networks emerging out of these interactions.

Nevertheless, a big change within the two decades of the Bologna Process has been technological. In 1999, no-one had heard of a smartphone, and mobile phones, which enabled their owners to telephone with others on the move, were only just entering the mainstream. Today, in 2020, 'digital' has become a common attribute of descriptions of communication and production processes. Digitalisation in combination with globalisation is making the world figuratively 'spin faster', which brings opportunity and challenges for today's society. Moreover, one of the principles for what is being called the 'anthropocene curriculum' for higher education is to "rethink

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[1] For a discussion of the normative values of the Bologna Process, please reference to the contribution in this volume entitled "The future of the EHEA—principles, challenges and ways forward".

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the implications of modern communication and information technologies for education and the architecture of the university." (Haus der Kulturen 2014b)

According to the Oxford Dictionary, digitisation stands for the conversion of text, pictures, or sound into a digital form that can be processed by a computer. This material process per se would not have a great impact. The Internet and digital networks are the means to connect disparate information, produce new data flows and structure new communication channels for more enriched interaction between people and processes (Castells 2010; Cerwal 2017). Digitisation must become embedded in larger systems ('ecosystems') that harness digital materials to lead to digital transformation (often called for short: digitalisation) (Brennen and Kreiss 2016). It can be said that digitalisation leads to changes in processes which accelerate the scale and intensify the scope of impact. For instance, the terms 'global' or 'international' are no longer restricted to processes which involve physical mobility, which in turn means that these experiences are open to more people. In sum, this means that harnessing new digital technologies is not simply a question of what technology can do, but how they interact with other established practices and routines of people and organisations.

In a commentary on whether the higher education scholar John Henry Newman, who published his famous book "The Idea of a University" in 1873 (Newman 1996), would support the idea of the digital university, George P Landow suggests that he would be most excited about the possibilities of hypertext for knowledge formation (Landow 1996). This technique, which is today so embedded in our digital lives we hardly think about it, facilitates infinite links between disciplinary knowledge and multiple sources of information. According to Landow, Newmann saw true education as "the recognition that every subject, every science, every discipline, exists as part of a network of interrelations" (ibid).

Higher education is both affected by the environment it works in and can have effects on the world around it. In a study for the British government, Ron Barnett describes this relationship between higher education and its environment as a sort of flexibility, where higher education seeks a connection and aims for responsiveness to the outside world. He states: "In a fluid, dynamic and global world, higher education systems cannot but exhibit flexibility and it is right that they should do so." (Barnett 2014) But he also warns that higher education must also be committed to standing up for academic values, truth, and provide an education for global citizens capable and willing to improve society (Barnett 2011). It should maintain a critical link to the outside with some temporal and conceptual distance.

The risks of a focus on digitalisation, without reviewing and rejuvenating the idea of higher education in a digital world, are that this will simply lead to more extreme versions of developments, which are already observed within some parts of higher education. There has been stark criticism that past reforms in higher education according to the new public management paradigm have been based on an administrative understanding of higher education (Dougherty and Natow 2015; Stahlke and Nyce 1996). In this vein, Johnston et al. argue that a version of digitalisation of higher education, that simply focuses on everything being even more measurable than before, will likely lead to strengthening the neoliberal concept of a fully utilitarian version of higher education (Jensen et al. 2018).

The first hype around digital education a decade ago followed this type of vision in discussions on the uses and values of MOOCs (massive open online courses). It was all about providing access to knowledge for all but focussed much less on providing learning environments of a high pedagogical value using digital technologies (Margaryan et al. 2014); although learners and teachers did benefit in diverse ways (Krause and Lowe 2014). This view was likely further amplified by the disruptive paradigm that many promoters of the possible impact of digitalisation emphasised so heavily in the last ten years. They followed what Martin Weller had called the "silicon valley approach" (Weller 2015) of "moving fast and breaking things", as the famous slogan of one social media company goes.

So, a review of how higher education might benefit from the opportunities and possibilities provided by digitalisation will have to start out from a question of what the main goals for higher education should be. This is opportune at a moment, where the Bologna Process has run for two decades, since perhaps some of the mechanisms and ways of doing things developed over the past years are less fit for purpose than they were. An example of this argument is provided by Dominic Orr and Alex Usher, who analyse performance-based funding mechanisms to uncover how these often define student success in a very specific normative way, e.g. the successful student (and by implication: the high performing university) is the one that achieves graduation of a full academic programme within the prescribed time (Orr and Usher 2018). Thus performance-based funding is working as a normative mechanism which leaves little incentive for more flexible ways of organising courses of study in higher education.

This chapter will look at three major spheres of action that together determine how higher education works in and interrelates to society in the digital age. It will investigate the current challenges in each of these spheres and sketch possible responses of higher education and how research in the context of the Bologna Process might help to explore and test these responses.

2 Higher Education in the Context of Labour Market Demands and New Skills

Participation in higher education has grown dramatically in the last two decades (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018). This is one of the main reasons that higher education's relationship to the labour market has become such a key reference point. The Sorbonne Declaration, right at the start of the Bologna Process, highlighted the importance of paying heed to developments in the labour market:

> We are heading for a period of major change in education and working conditions, to a diversification of courses of professional careers with education and training throughout life becoming a clear obligation. We owe our students, and our society at large, a higher education system in which they are given the best opportunities to seek and find their own area of excellence. (Sorbonne Declaration - Joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system 1998)

In the current setting, this description has become even more appropriate. We can expect labour markets in industrialised countries to change dramatically in the next decade. The task combinations required by most people's jobs will change and diversify as routine and predictable tasks are increasingly being automated. One OECD study has shown that the effects are already becoming visible with over one-third of variance in the occupational unemployment rate attributed to automatability of the common tasks by occupation (Nedelkoska and Quintini 2018).

Future business growth in developed economies is expected to be reliant on smart services and smart products (Hüther 2016). Both are examples of extending the value-added through additional services which increase the complexity of the value chain and are likely to be reliant on high-skilled labour. This shift will require closer interactions between computers and humans in order to augment task execution in production and service delivery. It will also lead to people's jobs consisting of a higher share of non-routine, creative and communicative tasks (Davenport and Kirby 2016).

Next to these changes, knowledge and skills fields, citizens of a digital society will need to acquire the knowledge and competencies which enable them to harness the benefits of digital technologies and be aware of their pitfalls. This set of skills is often termed 'digital literacy' or 'computational thinking' (Park 2019; Working Group on Education 2017). Accompanying this development will be new jobs which are more specialist (such as big data analysts, robotic developers etc.), where incumbents will need a balanced set of technical, anthropological and ethical skills to enable them to work on welfare-increasing usage of these technologies (Stifterverband and McKinsey and Company 2019).

In all cases, the evidence shows that broader profiles will be required of new candidates at the start of their employment. Higher education offers students the opportunity to develop so-called transferable skills or soft skills, including problem-solving, communication, teamwork and learning. This gives university graduates—at least implicitly—the skills and competencies necessary for success in a digital and an interconnected world. However, an analysis published on the basis of European data (Cedefop 2018) showed that young graduates self-assess their preparedness for their first job negatively, with more than one-fifth feeling underqualified. The highest proportions of this type of "under-skilling" can be found in the fields of medicine and agriculture. The authors of the study assume that this can be explained by a constantly changing qualification context due to the further development of new technologies, working methods and techniques. Another study, based on the same data set, found that it is not the lack of standard knowledge for these specific areas but soft skills, such as better communication skills with patients and teamwork (Livanos and Nunez 2015).

In an innovative environment, it is furthermore likely that learning curves will be repeated as workplaces are reorganised, and practices changed to make best use of digital opportunities through a person's career (Bessen 2015). Moreover, the expectation for increased frequency of innovation and change in task combinations lead to predictions that large shares of the population in developed countries will have bumpy career pathways, which require frequent periods of reorientation and retrain-

ing (Manyika et al. 2017). This all requires a review of how higher education can embed lifelong learning into our societies.

These are not new challenges for higher education, as the key concepts such as relevance, skills mismatch, lifelong learning and even digital literacy suggest. But they receive a new quality in a digital world precisely because of the extension of learning and workspace through digital environments. Jöran Muuß-Merholz argues that we should start out by thinking of our life-world as consisting of two parts to make the whole, in the same way a penguin lives in the 'green world' on land i.e. here the physical world) and the 'blue world' of the ocean (i.e. here the digital world) (Muuß-Merholz 2019). Citizens should learn to be equally agile in both spaces and utilise the full benefits of each of them. Indeed, the 'learning world' of the student probably doesn't even differentiate between these two spheres. But many learning programmes only focus on one of these (ibid).

Therefore, the question is what could be done to take on these challenges? The contributions in this book section provide some insights here. A first key question is how to include the 'digital world' into students' curricula. In the case of Enrique Planells-Artigot and Santiago Moll-Lopez (in this volume), the challenge was to find a way to extend internationalisation in the curriculum for student groups who would ordinarily not meet. They hoped that this would enable diverse real-life collaborative activities in higher education for the students from two business schools—one in Spain, one in South Korea—as a way to learn the required skills in a professional context. To achieve this aim, the authors established virtual teams of exchange between the students. Inter alia, in hindsight, the authors found that such a constellation of virtual exchange did indeed help students to develop intercultural and team-building skills, but also led to further challenges of how to organise the virtual learning space. For instance, students were asked to use the tool MS-Teams for exchange, but many of them actually used Facebook, which they were more familiar with. This experience can actually be described through the lens of David White and Alison le Cornu's concept of "digital residency" (White & Le Cornu 2011). This states that 'visitors' simply use a certain digital tool to fulfil a task here: as required by their instructors), whereas they might see themselves as 'residents" in another digital space here: Facebook). This insight highlights the new pedagogical ways of thinking that must accompany the use of new technologies to build up skills and competencies.

This challenge is, in fact, the starting point of the approach of Andrew Whitechurch (in this volume). He starts out from the perspective of a person being prepared for life in the informational abundance of the digital world—through pedagogical exposure to this world. He argues that people navigate the abundance of information around them by creating their own "information landscapes". It is the task of higher education to reflect on how they do this and to provide students with support in gaining confidence and certainty in this process. For this, he describes a pedagogical model which introduces and supports students in their discovery and reflection on their own ways of navigation using digital tools, search and curation strategies. He defines the role of the teacher (or indeed: better experienced and knowledgeable peers) in this as "stewarding" (Wenger et al. 2009).

These two practice examples highlight the ways forward in this area for teaching and learning practice in the EHEA. Reaching the potential given by digitalisation for teaching and learning means adopting new pedagogical methods. These should follow the didactical concepts of widening the learning space to include the learners' own spaces, as reflected in the concepts of Rosemary Luckin (2010), Jan Herrington et al. (2010) and David White (White & Le Cornu 2011), bearing in mind recent research that such concepts only work if the learner perspective and their contribution to the learning space is taken seriously (Chiu et al. 2018). More work is required here.

3   Higher Education in the Context of Grand Challenges and Ethical Concerns

Learning is not simply about achieving smoother transition and success in the labour market, but also about contributing to the transformation of society for the good of all. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cover social and economic development issues including poverty, hunger, health, education, global warming, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, urbanization, environment and social justice. The Paris Communique emphasised the ministers' commitment to this challenge:

> We commit to developing the role of higher education in securing a sustainable future for our planet and our societies and to finding ways in which we, as EHEA Ministers, can contribute to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at global, European and national levels. (Paris communiqué 2018)

But taking these goals seriously also requires changes to how higher education is organised and activities configured. The so-called 'grand challenges' present a challenge to science, which is typically organised along disciplinary boundaries. Raising people out of poverty, for instance, is about taking a global view on how food provision, health, education and the labour market work together to explore situations, which may have positive or negative effects on poverty. Here, digitalisation might be starting to provide a dividend for all parts of the population or cementing a greater social divide. Research and development must be creative, interdisciplinary and intercultural in its search for solutions. An analysis of articles published in the academic journal Nature over the past 110 years does indeed show that interdisciplinarity has been increasing in science overall, with the authors stating: "No longer are the scientific disciplines being siloed off from each other." (Thomsen 2019)

However, other analyses are less positive. An analysis of how climate change has been analysed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) showed prominence of quantitative sciences from natural science and economics, with little integration of issues related to the humanities. Mike Hulme states in conclusion: "The view of climate change thus constructed by the IPCC (...) is heavily one-sided.

(...) [T]he analysis of anthropogenic climate change continues to be dominated by positivist disciplines at the expense of interpretative ones." (Hulme 2011).

Further challenges emerge out of research and development itself. Digitalisation is making some developments easier or more sophisticated than ever before. For instance, where molecular biology is focussed on modifying the genes or behavioural patterns of insects to solve one technical problem (e.g. reduce the need for pesticide in agriculture), the ethical question of the knock-on effects for other parts of the ecosystem must be examined. The fields of [ethics + scientific field] are not new, but their importance is growing with the new possibilities for experimentation and adaptation made available through digitalisation. One central focus is the ethical consequences of Artificial Intelligence. This particular challenge is being taken seriously internationally, with the Asilomar AI Principles from the Future of Life Institute, which have already been endorsed by over four thousand academics from across the world. Still, more work is needed here. As a recent UNESCO publication states: "While research is moving full speed ahead on the technical side of AI, not much headway has been made on the ethical front." (UNESCO 2018) It remains a fundamental challenge to ensure that all parts of society are aware of the ethical considerations, which go along with digital progress. The challenge here is, as one article states, that "While technology moves at exponential rates, social policies and values systems tend not to." (Damm and Haan 2016)

Of course, there have been some ambitious projects, which aim to provide a comprehensive view on this, thereby setting out a foundation from which research activities and teaching and learning can be developed. One of these has been an interdisciplinary collaboration initiated by the German Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin) and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (Berlin), which brought together around forty scholars from around the world, working in the natural, environmental, and social sciences, as well as the humanities, arts, and architecture. These academics jointly developed an "Anthropocene Curriculum" as a collaborative and ongoing project (Haus der Kulturen 2014a). Of particular note to this chapter is the work they did on the "technosphere", a term they use to describe the technical mobilization and hybridization of energy, materials, and environments into a planetary system comparable in scale and function to the biosphere or hydrosphere. The project asked: "But where is that ominous technosphere to be found? How does it operate? What impact will it have on the everyday concerns of humans and their experiences? And how did we all end up in this world of technological vertigo?" (ibid).

In this anthropocene world, humanities play an important role in always refocussing on the question of what role humans can and do play. The contribution from Mădălina Chitez, Roxana Rogobete and Alexandru Foitoş (in this volume) looks at the need to establish centres for digital humanities and describes the case of one university. According to Wikipedia, digital humanities can be defined as "an area of scholarly activity at the intersection of computing or digital technologies and the disciplines of the humanities. It includes the systematic use of digital resources in the humanities, as well as the analysis of their application. (...) It brings digital tools and methods to the study of the humanities with the recognition that the printed

word is no longer the main medium for knowledge production and distribution."[2] The authors argue that a central goal of centres for digital humanities should be to ensure a cross-over between disciplines. Quoting Opel et al., they state that it should serve "as a space of contact for graduate students from the humanities and STEM disciplines who are approaching issues of shared concern." (Opel and Simeone 2019)

These references point to the need to find common projects, which encourage students and researchers from different disciplines and therefore, necessarily, different ways of seeing, to work together. This is the only way to move forward on ensuring that higher education can contribute to a better world. Technology is here both object of study, but also facilitator of interconnections and collaboration between these groups, as also shown by the example of the living "Anthropocene Curriculum". Such processes must be enabled and encouraged through policy and practice, and it is to these topics that we proceed in the subsequent section.

4 Higher Education and Strategy Development

Since the beginning of the 1990s as part of new governance concepts, universities are expected to sharpen their own profiles, and digitalisation presents a new opportunity for this (Orr et al. 2019; Schmid and Baeßler 2016). In the context of the development of the EHEA, the Paris Communique formulated a call to action, which requires initiatives on the part of individual higher education institutions and policy-makers to realise:

> Digitalization plays a role in all areas of society and we recognize its potential to transform how higher education is delivered and how people learn at different stages of their lives. We call on our higher education institutions to prepare their students and support their teachers to act creatively in a digitalized environment. (Paris communiqué 2018)

Indeed, a survey of higher education institutions carried out by the International Association of Universities found that two-thirds of responding institutions from across the world saw digital transformation as a high priority (Jensen 2019). Similar results can be found within the EHEA. According to the Trends survey from the European University Association, around half of all responding universities and colleges affirmed that digital learning was "becoming part of the institutional strategy" and just under half affirmed that digital learning was now being used more strategically (Gaebel and Zhang 2018).

However, the university is a special organizational form with several levels of responsibility that are only loosely linked (Kogan and Becher 1980). This has given the institution the capability to maintain overall stability, while on some levels being innovative; a characteristic especially vital for carrying out groundbreaking research and development and being a hub for ideas on societal reform. However, as institutions try to find ways to balance internal stability with unstable (changing) demands

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[2]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_humanities.

from their environment, it also makes coherent strategy difficult (Jongbloed 2015; Stensaker and Benner 2013).

In their book entitled "Organisational Strategy Structure and Process", Miles and Snow proposed a new way of seeing organisational design (Miles and Snow 1978; Sollosy et al. 2015). They argued that organisations must undertake an ongoing process of alignment to their environment, and failure to do so makes organisations ineffective. Adjusting to environmental dynamics is a complex process involving change and development of a myriad of internal activities. Moreover, Miles and Snow offered a conceptual model for recognising the fundamental focus of organisations and classifying them into one of four basic business strategy models—prospector, defender, analyser and reactor, with the first two being the two extremes on a continuum. Their approach has been applied to analysing many organisations across the world (Orr et al. 2019). The book was first published in 1978 but was recently republished to celebrate its 25-year anniversary and to discuss its continued relevance in the field of organisation design.

The authors break down the adaptive cycle into three main strategic problems:

– The entrepreneurial problem is focussed on which product or service should be chosen to reach which target market.
– The engineering problem is about creating a system and choosing technologies to transform the entrepreneurial idea into a concrete product or service.
– The administrative problem is, finally, about reducing uncertainty within the organisation by setting up routines to rationalise and stabilise activities and decision-making.

Within this framework, the most innovative organisations are classified as 'Prospectors' by the authors. These organisations are constantly searching for new markets and new growth opportunities while encouraging organisation-wide change and risk-taking. They follow a 'first-in' strategy for market entry or market innovation. Today, they might be classified as organisations with a start-up mindset.

The counterpart to this organisational type is the 'Defender', which concentrates on protecting its current markets, maintaining stable growth, and serving its current customers. It aims to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness and so is largely focussed on engineering and administrative problems. It appears that many HEIs are currently following this strategy in the context of digitalisation. This fact may explain a central finding from a German study on digitalisation in higher education. According to a study by Gilch et al., although 44% of the surveyed representatives of German universities rate the significance of digitalisation for their institution as 'high', none rate the overall level of realised digitalisation as 'high', and only a fifth of these universities rate it as 'quite high' (Gilch et al. 2019). It would seem beneficial for HEIs to think in strategy more like a start-up and follow the 'Prospector' approach. As argued in the introduction, this means starting out from the needs of higher education students (Orr et al. 2019).

Gabriela Grosseck, Laura Malia and Mădălin Bunoiu recount the story of developments at the West University of Timişoara, Romania (in this volume). They see the

goal of a new strategy for digital transformation in their institution to be adopting a new mindset which embraces digitalisation and innovation on all levels of the organisation. As a basis for their strategic development, the authors started with a survey of students and found that "more than half of the students surveyed expect a change, a disruption in the university model within the next 2–3 years." (ibid) They conclude their paper with a cautious evaluation that this transformation will be a difficult journey, requiring collective actions of different people (academics, administrators) and changes to common processes within their university.

Higher education policy can play a role in helping institutions achieve this change. Policy is always about transferring policy ideas into practice using incentives, regulations and information campaigns (Bemelmans-Videc et al. 1998). Dominic Orr, Florian Rampelt and Alexander Knoth aim to support the development of strategy and policy through the White Paper entitled "Bologna Digital" described in their chapter (in this volume). They start out by recognising the twin issues that: (i) digitalisation has been a hot topic in policy and the media for the last few years, but (ii) that digital transformation does not per se specify what type of goals it is ultimately following—aside from the "adoption" of technologies. That is to say that digital transformation neither answers the 'why' nor the 'how' question—i.e. how this "transformation" will happen. To this aim, and with reference to policy theory, the authors conjectured that reducing goal conflict (i.e. defining 'why') and reducing practice ambiguity (i.e. defining 'how') would help to facilitate a more integrative digital policy and practice. Their White Paper aligns the goals of the Bologna Process to the potential of digitalisation and mentions good practices from across Europe. But it should be noted that this is a largely normative instrument that they are using. It should be backed up and expanded on through future research critically examining the why and how questions.

Overall, then, we should note that thinking about digitalisation in the context of the Bologna Process only leads us back to the old questions of how higher education can efficiently and effectively prepare new generations for a fair and sustainable future through learning opportunities, academic exchange, research and development. The affordances of connectivity, networking and better links between knowledge domains are the benefits that new technologies can contribute to solving these challenges. Future institutional strategies and policies should aim to harness these, while ensuring that research accompanying new initiatives facilitates learning from good and bad experiences within the EHEA and beyond.

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Distant Partners: A Case Study of Global Virtual Teams Between Spain and South Korea

Enrique Planells-Artigot and Santiago Moll-Lopez

1 Introduction and Theoretical Framework

This study stems from a strong belief in preparing university students for the demands of a rapidly evolving business world. Higher education institutions, and business schools in particular, occupy a crucial role where they must adapt to the demands of society constantly. The creation of diverse real-life collaborative activities in higher education is a way to learn the required skills in a professional context. They represent a superb method of bridging the gap between academia and the professional world by implementing activities aimed at improving efficiency and constantly revising best practices in class (Kupriyanova et al. 2018: 616–617). Cross-institutional projects and peer learning offer many opportunities for students and teachers alike to constantly reflect on how to make the most of the programmes and develop ongoing efficient programmes and learning opportunities. International collaborative projects in higher education stand out as unique opportunities to develop learning experiences without encountering additional expenses or material resources, which can prove to be an additional burden both for participants and organisers (Sutanto et al. 2011; Taras et al. 2013; Ubachs and Henderikx 2018). Incurring an extra economic burden could deter many professionals and students from a collaborative experience. Thus, technology provides a wide range of tools that create a realistic rendering of what international projects can be, despite the semi-controlled scenarios where instructors act as facilitators and coordinators of activities. Sutanto et al. (2011) demonstrated the importance of establishing adequate coordination mechanisms for Global Virtual Teams (GVT). Likewise, there must be a constant reflection of the available resources

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together with the expected learning outcomes, leading to an ongoing improvement of educational tools. By prioritising peer learning, collaborative projects and cultural awareness, business students can reflect on some of the skills they will subsequently have to adopt in their careers. At the same time, they will develop and acquire additional abilities which could not be integrated in class without the support of technology.

In order to achieve this goal, new learning methodologies and technology-based activities are being applied with a basic purpose: to transform a passive learning, in which students act as passive receivers of information, into a learning based on active and constructive strategies in which the responsibility for learning is transferred to the student while receiving frequent feedback from the instructors. Active learning can be defined as any instructional method or pedagogy that involves students in the learning process. Digital media technologies, specifically, offer various tools for collaborative learning and student-centred learning (Bozdağ 2018: 680). European Higher Educations institutions can also offer several options allowing physical or virtual mobility among students, from the use of MOOCs to joint PhDs. These activities allow the students to have an alternative to international mobility programmes, in case they cannot afford them, with the advantage of being tailor-made to their curricula needs (Ubachs and Henderikx 2018).

This paper covers a cross-cultural assignment between two higher education institutions aiming at illustrating the importance of time management, improving communication skills and the awareness of cultural differences in business. Training business intelligence and cultural awareness among students can bring up positive results for future careers (Rehg et al. 2012), as it guarantees adequate preparation in abilities that will be crucial in the business world. Equally, cross-cultural awareness is a necessary skill in the business context, and its correct implementation can result in successful business ventures. Thus, business schools undertake numerous efforts to integrate cultural awareness in their study plans, conscious of developing new 'educational tools' so that students are better prepared for the professional world (Jurše and Matjaž 2011; Rehg et al. 2012). Business schools are pivotal in order to establish networks which expand the world vision of their students and, at the same time, improve the efficiency of managing projects and businesses (Jurše and Matjaž 2011).

This project understands interculturality as something "dynamic and continuously changing" (Bozdağ 2018: 680). By working with two different multicultural groups of university students located in Spain and South Korea, the project aimed to explore the contact of distant cultures and students and their integration when working in a collaborative project within their respective business schools.

Learning competence on the use of communication channels can help students establish connections and strengthen their confidence in networking for professional purposes; very important considering previous studies demonstrating reluctance of students to establish new connections (Livingstone and Sefton-Green 2016: 249–250). At the same time, this project was aimed at letting students increase their awareness of intercultural issues, whilst coordinating the task among group members in the best possible form (Sutanto et al. 2011).

This study will use the term Global Virtual Team (GVT) as a more detailed description of the analysed task. Similar to Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiatives, GVT belongs to the category of Virtual Exchange (VE), as described in O'Dowd (2018) and Ubachs and Henderikx (2018). In general, VE is "the engagement of groups of learners in extended periods of online intercultural interaction and collaboration with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programmes and under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators" (O'Dowd 2018: 5). This definition expands on that of Taras et al. (2013), as it includes the figure of the educator in the ongoing learning process. As the article discusses, these activities require close monitoring from the teachers, as failing to do so can cause frustration among the students.

GVT activities can easily encompass the same challenges as a real face-to-face team would involve. "The most obvious benefit of GVT-based projects lies in the opportunity to experience the challenges of working in multicultural virtual teams and practice how to deal with them" (Taras et al. 2013: 416) and exploring the learning cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting (Kolb 1984). As such, these activities develop learning skills, as Ubachs and Henderikx (2018) noted.

For the students, they can enjoy the learning and experiential benefits of having an international experience without the travel costs. It becomes an affordable option to be involved in international projects and benefit from intercultural activities without having to spend money on travel expenses. However, it can still limit the satisfying personal experience of being immersed in another culture.

Institutions can use it to increase and enrich their academic offer and to ensure that all the students involved in GVT can enjoy an international experience. GVT are likewise a method of boosting the reputation of the institution through innovative programmes, with the subsequent improvement of student registration. Besides an enrichment of activities offered by the GVT, it stimulates a more international approach in the nature of the activity and the nationality of the participants. When GVT include several assignments adequately structured throughout several weeks, they can offer the chance to reflect on the learning process repeatedly (Taras et al. 2013).

A large part of the activities carried out in GVT-based projects lies in the development and reinforcement of transversal competencies, which, nowadays, have a very important role in university education. In fact, the focus on transversal competencies "emphasises the intentionality of teaching/learning and higher transferability in different fields and, therefore, the awareness of the possibility of conversion of acquired competencies into the capacity for action" (Zadra 2014:116). Competencies constitute an essential foundation in the professional world, and so they are gaining more emphasis in current educational models (De los Ríos et al. 2010: 1368). Today, enterprises demand competent professionals, and therefore, in universities such as ESIC Business & Marketing School (Valencia campus, Spain) and SolBridge International School of Business (Daejeon, South Korea), it is stressed that one of the measures necessary for achieving employability is developing transversal skills and competencies (communication and languages, handling information properly, solv-

ing problems, teamwork) to lead social processes, as stated in the *Convención de Instituciones Europeas de Enseñanza Superior* (Convención de Instituciones Europeas de Enseñanza Superior 2001).

Competencies can also be understood as an extension of the concept of ability and qualification and the competence of professional action as the sum of the competencies essential to carrying out a professional task well (De los Ríos et al. 2010: 1368). Indeed, a number of transversal competencies are expected to be achieved in addition to the specific competencies of each subject.

Given the digital nature of GVT, the study pays attention to the digital competence framework established by the EU. This consists of 21 digital competencies for citizens grouped in five different dimension areas (Vuorikari et al. 2016):

- Information and data literacy
- Communication and collaboration
- Digital content creation
- Safety problems
- Problem-solving

The case analysed in this paper integrated some of them throughout the several weeks it lasted, concluding in an overall satisfactory implementation and adoption by students and teachers alike. In this particular case, the study developed tasks aimed at information and data literacy, communication and collaboration among peers and internationally as well as solving the unexpected problems which could arise.

2   Methodology

2.1   Data Collection

The present study was carried out between two different Business Schools in distant countries: ESIC Business & Marketing School (Valencia campus, Spain) and Sol-Bridge International School of Business (Daejeon, South Korea). There was a total of 109 undergraduate students (69 in Spain and 48 in South Korea) of 23 different nationalities, distributed in 13 groups of 4–6 people in each institution. The project was divided in two parts, but it started with an ESIC-based activity that was not replicated at Solbridge.

First, ESIC students had to organise a student association developing an extra-academic activity that was missing in their home institution and which they considered sufficiently attractive for their classmates. Some examples at ESIC were organising an e-sport competition, a film club, a cooking club, a paddle tennis club, organising escape rooms nights, or organising events for exchange students, among others. In the case of Solbridge groups, they concentrated on exploring popular culture (karaoke, K-Pop, food culture) among the Spanish students. The assessment of

the project would give additional marks if students were able to successfully organise the event and provide evidence to their classmates.

Second, and this corresponds to the GVT activity itself, students had to explore, with the help of the peer group in the other institution, the feasibility to organize that association in the partner institution. This activity was the only shared assignment in the course and represented 25% of the final mark in the case of ESIC and 15% in the case of Solbridge.

Several months prior to the beginning of the academic year, the lecturers of both institutions had already started exchanging emails, developing the project and making sure that the learning objectives and time organization of the semester would complement the course objectives. Hence both courses focused on the development of written and oral communication skills in a business environment, with tasks such as preparing reports and giving presentations.

Before the start of the activity, the students in both institutions were given a questionnaire asking them about the importance they gave to the learning outcomes developed in the course. The same questions were subsequently asked at the end of the activity to compare their views and observe the learning process, obtaining results on the importance students gave to the learning objectives *before* the activity and how important they were *after* the task, and assessing their learning in a similar way to Taras et al. (2013). The final questionnaire included questions that let them add qualitative information about their views of the activity.

As part of the research, students had to maintain several videoconferences with their peer groups to gather information, discuss their progress and support each other on the research on the partner city and institution. This proved to be one of the most challenging tasks, as the 7-hour time difference (8 hours at one point following Central European Time) between both countries represented a real challenge for most of the students, as they reflected on in their feedback. Some students mentioned that it was the first time they had used skype and manifested signs of anxiety before their first videoconference.

The coordination among the group members and the lecturers was originally devised as transversal, following recommended patters for similar GVT projects (Sutanto et al. 2011). There were two 'quality audits' in which lecturers asked about the documents each group was developing, together with the minutes for the videoconferences and meetings each group was holding. These activities were new for most of the participants, as they had no previous experience of taking minutes in meetings or even maintaining formal videoconferences.

At the end of the semester, students had to present a final report where they had to describe their fictive student association. They also had to give a presentation of their project in front of all the other students and analyse the relationship with their peers in the partner institution. In the case of the Spanish institution, the content of the presentations was going to be part of the final exam, as students would be asked about the relevance of the projects. On the presentation day, students would also decide what the best project was based on a questionnaire and assess the support and commitment of the members of their own group. The winning group would obtain one additional point voted by their own peers.

2.2 Data Collection

In this study, a total of 109 students participated, of which 61 belonged to ESIC Business & Marketing School (Valencia campus) and 48 to SolBridge International University.

The qualitative and quantitative information was carried out through a multiple-choice test, which the students completed twice. The first one at an early stage of the educational experiment and later after its completion, with the aim of comparing the results obtained.

The test evaluates the physical characteristics (origin, gender), the subjective importance that each student assigns to the activities carried out and the degree of satisfaction. Open opinion responses were used as well. 82 students from both institutions completed the survey, and no sampling was performed since all the data is included in the findings.

3 Findings

Among all the information collected in the questionnaires, one of the main estimators of satisfaction in the process is the students' response to the *overall satisfaction* with the methodology employed. The response admitted five levels of satisfaction, five corresponding to the highest satisfaction and one to the lowest. The same classification scheme was employed for the rest of the survey questions. As can be seen in Fig. 1, the final assessment of the project was highly satisfactory: 56% of the students found the activity to be *highly satisfactory* or *satisfactory* meanwhile only 11% found it *not* or *not very satisfactory*. When comparing the results obtained according to the institution, there is a significant difference between the responses of ESIC students and those of Solbridge: the latter valued the experience more positively, and with less variability than the students from ESIC (see Table 1). Taking into account only the students' answers about their overall satisfaction with the activity, it is difficult to deduce how the students determined their assessment.

From the different answers of the questionnaire and the open answers, it is possible to find some indicators of the strengths and weaknesses of this cultural exchange. Also, it should be taken into account that in the global assessment, not only the improvements in the communication and teamwork skills in the local group are evaluated, but part of that satisfaction is conditioned by the performance and communication skills of the other university group.

The lecturers themselves also expressed their overall satisfaction with the experience, despite the shared cultural barriers: "Actually, I really enjoyed the experience. All of the feedback that I received indicated that the students enjoyed the collaboration as well. One of the major problems that the students experienced was the major time differences and language barriers. I explained that major time differences could be expected in almost all globalized economic partnerships and collaborations
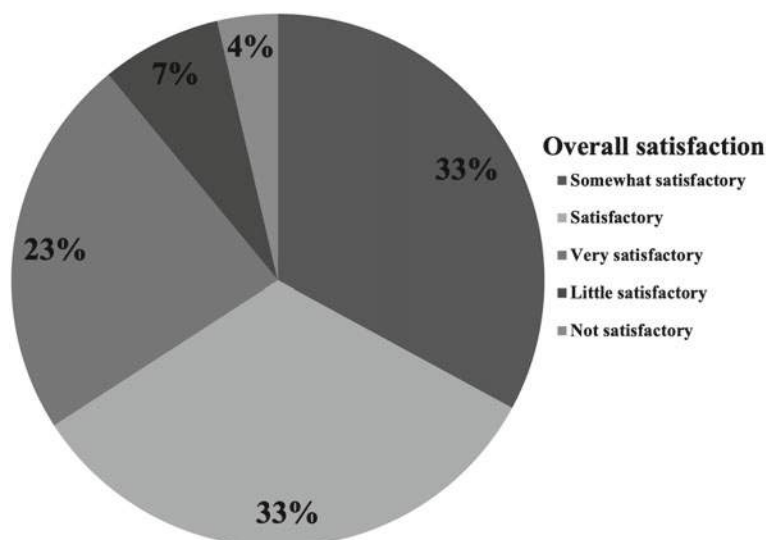
Fig. 1 Overall satisfaction of the virtual exchange between Spain and South Korea

as well as language problems. So, essentially, I explained to the students that they may experience similar problems in real-life situations. Overall, it was an excellent experience for myself and my students" (Quinn, SolBridge lecturer, personal communication).

The students of both institutions were asked about the importance in the learning process of the different activities carried out. The items evaluated were: *writing e-mails in an adequate style*, *taking minutes in a meeting* (taking min), *writing reports and proposals leading to making decisions, being aware of cultural differences, clearly illustrating in writing and orally the most relevant issues in a situation* (illustrating), *debating on current events with increase ease* (debating), *explaining and describing the socio-political situation of a country* (explaining), *identifying the different points in favour and against in any given situation in order to adopt a position* (identifying), *analysing situations in order to negotiate successfully* (analysing), *speaking in public in English fluently* (speaking).

From the answers obtained in the previous items, some will be studied in more detail. The results for *writing e-mails in an adequate style* (Fig. 2) showed that 83% of the students considered it to be important or very important to write e-mails in a proper style; meanwhile, only 17% thought that was not important. Exchanging e-mails was not, however, as important to collaboration of the students as expected, given that many of the students resorted to other means of communication, including their favourite social networks, once the contact had been established. Those who maintained e-mails as a form of communication kept a casual style throughout the project. As in the previous case, there existed a significant difference between the answers when the factor institution was considered. SolBridge considered this activ-

Table 1 ANOVA for the different items evaluated depending on the institution

Dependent variable	Average		Std. deviation		P-value	Difference
	ESIC	SolBridge	ESIC	SolBridge		
Overall satisfaction	3.26	4.35	1.01	0.67	0.0000	Significant
Writing e-mails	2.87	3.32	0.83	0.79	0.0131	Significant
Taking the minute	2.64	3.27	0.74	0.65	0.0002	Significant
Writing reports	3.12	3.41	0.76	0.68	0.0825	Non-significant
Cultural differences	3.34	3.72	0.78	0.45	0.0175	Significant
Illustrating in writing	3.32	3.27	0.70	0.59	0.7707	Non-significant
Debating on events	3.04	3.21	0.59	0.56	0.2084	Non-significant
Explain and describe	2.55	3.17	0.89	0.66	0.0014	Significant
Identifying points	3.28	3.38	0.77	0.682	0.5738	Non-significant
Analysing situations	3.28	3.45	0.69	0.63	0.2889	Non-significant
Speaking in public	3.73	3.38	0.52	0.78	0.0155	Significant

ity more important than ESIC students (Table 1), and this higher result can also be due to cultural differences. Whereas at ESIC, the lecturer stressed the importance of emailing students from the other institution in a proper manner, many of the students resorted to one or two emails and continued conversation through various social networks. This trend in the use of social networks has been manifested repeatedly in recent years during activities carried out in class. It should be noted that the lecturers did not disagree on the use of different communication channels, including the most innovative and globalized social networks. In this context, however, the item that was intended to be evaluated is the formalization of a text (in the form of an e-mail) following some standards of correction and formality.

Cultural differences are an expected issue that adds complexity to the activity, and overcoming these strengthens intercultural communication skills. Indeed, 91% of the students considered cultural differences as important or very important (Fig. 3). Both participating groups consisted of students of different nationalities and distant cultures. It is interesting to measure the appreciation that students themselves had about cultural differences during the activity and to study the different weights in the answers, according to the origin group. There was a slight difference between
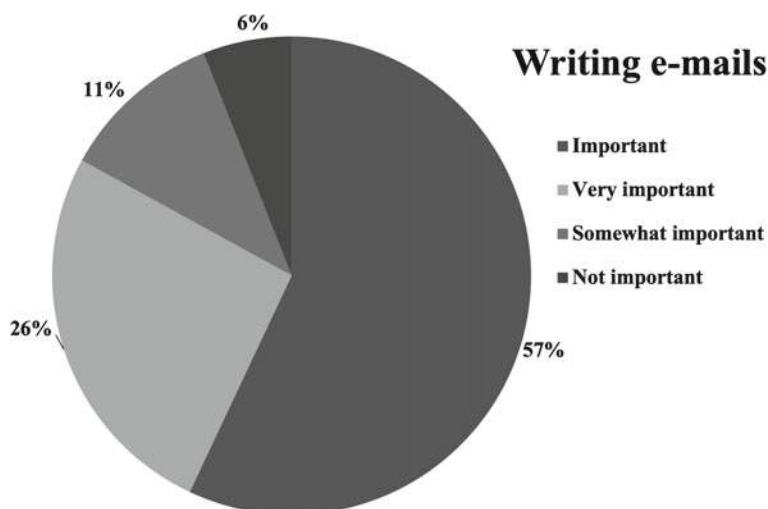
Fig. 2 Students' opinion on the item *writing e-mails in an adequate style*
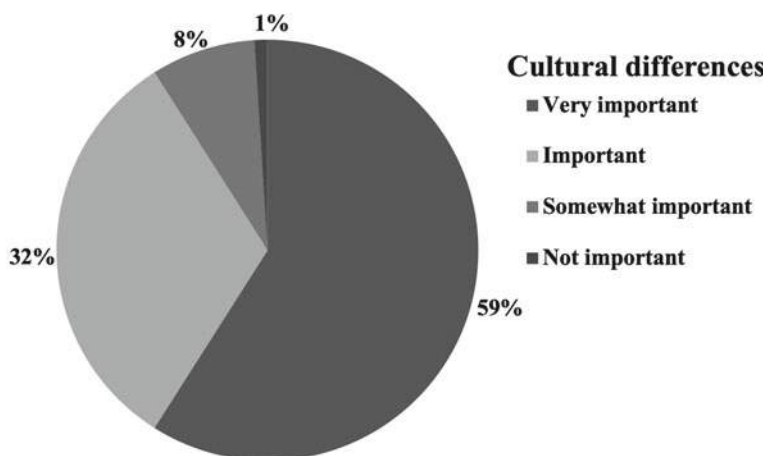

Fig. 3 Students' opinion on the item *being aware of cultural differences*

the means obtained (3.34 ESIC vs. 3.72 SolBridge). To verify whether the difference between the means is significant or not, an ANOVA test was performed, obtaining a significant difference (p-value = 0.0175) between the averages and standard deviations of the answers of both groups.

The awareness of cultural differences among ESIC students may stem from the lack of access to cultural references of the two major nationalities of SolBridge students (South Korea and China). This opens new possibilities for further research
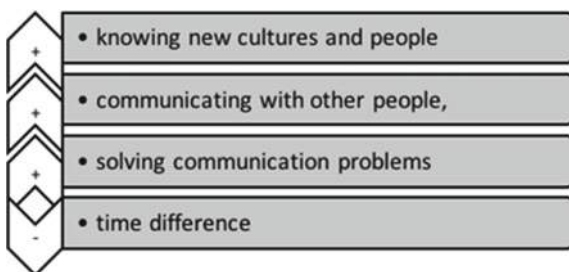
Fig. 4 Students' opinion on the best part of the virtual exchange activity

and is particularly welcome, as most ESIC students were majoring in International Business.

When asked about the other items in the survey, students from both institutions also showed significant differences in *taking minutes*, *explaining and describing,* and *speaking in public.* However, non-significant differences between students of both institutions were found in the items *writing reports, illustrating in writing, debating on events, identifying points* and *analysing situations* (Table 1).

The results on the best part of the virtual exchange activity show that getting to know new cultures and people, communicating with other people, and solving communication problems have been pointed out by 90% of the students as the most important outcomes. On the contrary, the part of the activity that caused most problems to the students was indisputably the time difference (8 hours), forcing them to adapt to each other to avoid obstructing communication (Fig. 4).

In order to numerically evaluate these findings, the study divided the responses into four main categories: (improvement in) teamwork, (improvement in learning how to deal with) cultural differences, (improving) communication skills, (improvement in learning strategies of) problem-solving (Fig. 5).

From the answers obtained, 31% of students perceived an improvement in their teamworking skills, 46% perceived an improvement in their communication skills, 18% learnt strategies to better deal with cultural differences in communications, and 7% claimed to have improved problem-solving skills.

The item "What have you learned from working and communicating?" in the survey was intended to obtain information on the skills that the students have improved during this cultural exchange. Figure 6 shows a word cloud, in which the size of the words is proportional to the number of times these words are mentioned in the answers. It clearly emphasizes the communication, teamwork and public speaking skills.
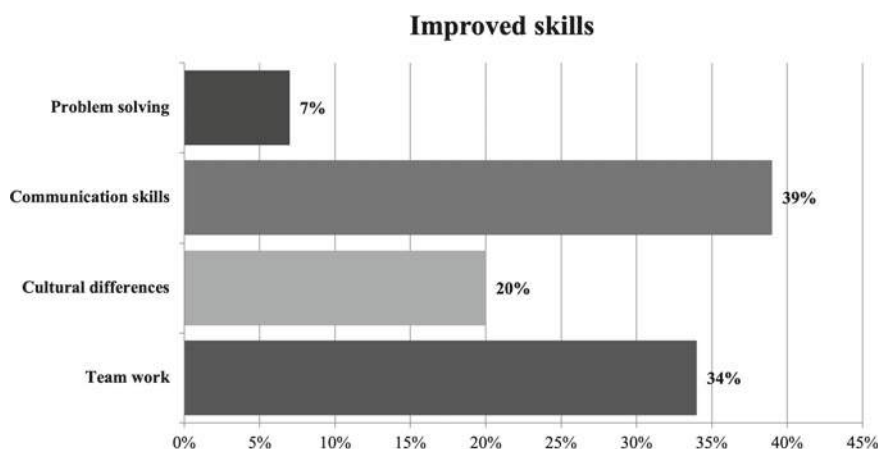
Improved skills

Fig. 5 Students' opinion on the best part of the virtual exchange activity

Fig. 6 Word Cloud on the
enhanced skills after the
virtual exchange activity

4   Conclusions

This case study has contributed to a broader understanding of virtual exchange activities in higher education in different cultural contexts in terms of the types of activities engaged, the perceived value and learning outcomes as well as shared challenges. This understanding will help to define common strategies in the practice of virtual exchange and to achieve greater integration within university curricula, given their demonstrated improvement of the skills of the participants (Taras et al. 2013).

Virtual exchange activities contribute not only to the improvement of students' language and digital skills but to other transversal competencies such as, data literacy, problem-solving and teamwork, which have become more important in an increasingly complex and competitive world of global connections. Students described how effective the project had been in improving their teamwork and communication skills. However, subsequent projects could evaluate the real improvements for a better understanding and comparison of the results. Designed in a more participative way, these activities could open up a space for various forms of intercultural learning. Through this collaborative communication space, students could not only improve a

wide range of digital competencies needed in a professional level, but also to be part of international learning networks, which can become formal or informal networks that form and inform their future career pathway.

4.1 Limitations and Implications for Future Research

One major hurdle in the activity is that the students were aware that they were working on a fictional objective. Had they been working in a real-life task in which they had to establish a student association in their own institutions, their enthusiasm for the project would probably have been higher. This could trigger an additional motivating factor when establishing subsequent similar projects, where students collaborate in a real activity which they build from scratch, and in which they understand the requirements of its real implementation. Additionally, some students misinterpreted the elaboration and expectation of the activity, despite the effort made by the instructors to establish the objectives and activities. Of course, misinterpretation of the shared project could still take place in a real environment. Nevertheless, some conclusions for the future can be drawn.

Students may have benefitted from more pedagogical support, greater clarity in the tasks to be performed and in the objectives of the activity. Problems may also result from a lack of motivation and confidence in the project they were working on. As a matter of fact, some ESIC students expressed a growing lack of confidence in the feasibility and implementation of the project in their own university throughout the semester. When they were first asked about how confident they were about their project being implemented in the university, they expressed an overwhelming confidence, but, as days passed, and they realised how time-consuming the organisation of activities were and the little impact some decisions had on their peers, there was an increasingly dismal view. Hence it is of paramount importance to offer adequate monitoring and support of students and their activities to ensure their enthusiasm and learning attitude does not disappear. Likewise, teachers in both institutions agreed on the necessity to describe even more carefully the tasks and set clear objectives for future projects. In addition to the perception of improvement in some skills, such as teamworking, expressed by the students in the survey, subsequent projects could assess how the improvement takes place and how they apply newly acquired abilities in the performed activities.

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Fostering Digital Skills and Competencies Through Discursive Mapping of Information Landscapes

Andrew Whitworth

1 Introduction: A Statement of the Problem

The digitalisation of society requires the fostering of new skills and competencies in learners. Higher education (HE) institutions across the EHEA are expected to develop these, preparing graduates for positions in industry, civic and private life in which they will be expected to make informed judgments using a range of information sources and tools for finding, organising and communicating information, whether individually or in collaboration. These tools and sources are arrayed around the learner in what Lloyd (2010) calls an "information landscape", and the skills and competencies involved—*digital and information literacy* (DIL)—are those which help learners *map and navigate* this landscape (Whitworth 2020).

This paper describes how this view of DIL, as mapping, can be observed emerging in learners as they work on collaborative tasks in a HE environment. This is DIL as more than just technical competencies, considered present if a learner can use particular software applications (as defined, for example, in the European Computer Driving License or ECDL), and beyond whether students know how to access information sources considered appropriate in the academic setting (such as journals). Rather (Polizzi 2019. 1, emphasis added):

> *In order to contribute to the active participation of well-informed and critically autonomous citizens in democracy in the digital age, critical digital literacy needs to* include knowledge about the digital environment where information circulates.

This broader view aligns with the EU's vision of a curriculum that ensures that not just the young but all citizens are "able to creatively, critically and productively take part in a digital society" (Redecker and Punie 2017, 12). The EU's Digital Competence Framework (Carretero et al. 2017: hereafter, DigComp) includes both 'information and data literacy' and 'communication and collaboration' as core elements. When

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the digital competence of educators is also considered (Redecker and Punie 2017), digital teaching and learning skills include collaborative learning and self-regulation, as the competent digital educator, in turn, facilitates learners' digital competence through engaging them with DIL, communication, content creation, responsible use and problem- solving with digital technologies (ibid, 8).

However, the pedagogical structures and didactic approaches needed to develop these competencies in learners are not yet fully understood or addressed in HE. The work of Lloyd (2010, 2012) emphasises that instilling DIL skills in ways that support students' academic studies will not necessarily be transferable beyond the university. Workplace and civic information landscapes and the informational problems to which they give rise are structured in different ways (Lloyd 2010; Bruce 2008). In HE, learning outcomes are more stable and regulated, more individual, and more structured. In the workplace, although information needs are often more tightly defined, learning is also a 'fuzzier', less definable and more collaborative process. In other words, the information landscapes of HE and work are different in form, and the skills required to navigate them successfully are also different.

Early on in *Information Literacy Landscapes* Lloyd says (2010, 2, emphasis added):

> *Information landscapes are the communicative spaces that are created by people who co-participate in a field of practice. As people journey into and through these landscapes they engage with site-specific information.* This engagement allows them to map the landscape, constructing an understanding of how it is shaped. *It is through this engagement that people situate themselves within the landscape.*

Just as one can learn about a physical landscape, its general configuration and the specifics of the resources within it through mapping the landscape, so Lloyd is suggesting that the same principles can apply to an information landscape. But she does not offer detail on what might be happening when learners learn to map information landscapes in this way, and what the implications are for course and assessment design within HE.

Transferability of knowledge from place to place must be more than just replication of a learned process because in different places, different practice architectures inevitably exist. But being an effective user of diverse information systems, knowing how to navigate a landscape, making effective use of communications media to disseminate insights: these are reflexive capacities that help learners (Alkemeyer and Buschmann 2016, 11, emphasis added) 'become able to adjust and improve their participation in the context of not just one practice but many similar practices in a process of *learning self-structuration*'. This is an educational process that requires attending to different modalities of information outlined by Lloyd (2010, 161ff);

- the *epistemic* modality, meaning disciplinary knowledge appropriate to a given setting. This is the modality typically emphasised in HE assessment.
- the *social* modality, that is, "sources from the situated experience of collective participation, practice and reflection on action…. closely associated with reflection and reflexivity about professional practice and professional identity" (ibid, 164).

- the *corporeal* modality, "disseminated through demonstration and observation of practice or accessed through the tactile and kinaesthetic activity associated with actual practice" (ibid, 165).

This paper provides an outline of mapping as a discursive, dialogic process involved in exploring and constructing information landscapes, via engagement with all of these different modalities. Discursive mapping is a pedagogical concept that can help explore the development of digital competencies as outlined in the Dig-Comp framework, particularly those of information/data literacy and communication/collaboration. Via an example in an online HE setting, the paper then explores how DIL can be integrated into assessment design.

2 Theoretical Basis

Despite stating more than once that mapping is beneficial for developing information literacy skills (see also Lloyd et al. 2013, 11), Lloyd provides little detail on what mapping might entail pedagogically. This detail is added by Whitworth's investigation (2020), where examples of mapping are analysed. He concludes that: "mapping has value in learning to use, nurture and steward information landscapes because it is a means by which representations of relationships between relevant landscape elements can be developed, communicated and scrutinised within communities."

Whitworth notes that the *products* of mapping are not limited to graphics, that is, maps in the everyday sense, including concept or mind maps. Mapping is also a fundamentally *discursive* practice; a way of forming knowledge and creating cognitive schema (Bartlett 1932), ways of thinking that can be used as the basis for later judgements. Making a map requires the mapmaker(s) to be positioned at focal points of information flows, to gather information, determine relevant elements, and represent these elements on the map field. All maps make propositions that can then be explored in the world (Kitchin et al. 2009, 13–14), propositions that are dialogic in form before they are graphical. Harvey states that (1996, p. 111):

> *The discursive activity of 'mapping space' is a fundamental prerequisite to the structuring of any kind of knowledge. All talk about 'situatedness', 'location' and 'positionality' is meaningless without a mapping of the space in which those situations, locations and positions occur. And this is equally true whether the space being mapped is metaphorical or real….*

Harvey also notes that (1996, 283–4):

> *…multiple windows on a same reality, like the multiple theorisations available to us, can constitute a way of triangulating in on this same reality from multiple perspectives. Learning to see the world from multiple positions – if such an exercise is possible – then becomes a means to better understand how the world as a totality works …. This technique of conjoining information from different positionalities is a basic principle of all cartographic construction: to make an accurate map (representation) of the world we require at the very minimum a procedure of triangulation that moves across multiple points.*

This view of how knowledge—and maps of information landscapes—might be constructed is reflected in the work of Christine Bruce, who invokes the value of 'experiencing variation' (Bruce et al. 2006; Bruce 2008) in teaching DIL. Bruce exhorts those working in the 'relational frame' of DIL education to employ methods that give learners this experience of variation when making informational judgements, or as Harvey puts it, learning to see a situation from multiple perspectives and combining these perspectives into a map, a representation that can be communicated to others. Bruce suggests that this helps learners develop cognitive schema akin to those of professionals in a given discipline: she calls this *informed learning* (2008).

In HE, informed learning approaches must expand beyond teaching only the epistemic modality of information: the DigComp and DigCompEdu frameworks also make this move explicit. Other modalities must come into play when knowledge is successfully employed in a real-life situation (Badke 2012, 135–6, emphasis added): "Accumulated data require sense-making skills on two fronts— *determining what is reliable/significant/relevant* and *organising the data into a structure* that is manageable so that it can be used to address the issue at hand." These determinations are the practical manifestations of DIL. To make such determinations, and thereby select and organise relevant data and information, is a function of how individuals and groups bring cognitive schema to bear and articulate these schemas to discursively map the information landscape within which they are working.

Schemas are learned, stored ways of thinking and (Blaug 2007: 30):

> *function to pick out relevant, "schema-consistent" data from the rush of information we regularly confront. As such, they are pre-existing selection criteria that manage cognitive overload and enhance the capacity to solve problems.*

Understanding and revealing the cognitive schemas which structure not just the epistemic knowledge relevant to a given discipline, but how it is shared, practiced and related to professional identity in that discipline (that is, the social and corporeal modalities), is an important aspect of higher education in that discipline. However, if learners are expected merely to accept the cognitive schemas with which they are presented, this would be surface learning, a (power-laden) transference of knowledge from the 'authoritative' disciplinarian (that is, the tutor) to the passive learner. DIL, however—a practical, material capacity that would empower learners to become and remain digitally competent, adaptable and responsive to problems they will face in the future—requires pedagogical practices that allow learners to make their own independent, *justifiable*, judgements about information and technology and thereby generate their own cognitive schemas.

The emphasis in the last sentence indicates that it is not the case that 'anything goes', cognitively, as long as it comes from a learner working independently (cf. Thompson 2008). There remains a role for the 'more able partner' who can review and, if necessary, critique the judgments, justifications and discursive maps that have been *articulated*: this partner may be a tutor or peer. Hepworth and Walton (2009, 156) describe the educational benefits of articulating judgements and the basis for them:

Cognitive constructivist learning, from an individual perspective, relates to building a mental map of the information landscape. Presenting, explaining and justifying this 'map' helps the learner concretise and internalise this view. From a social constructivist perspective the learner is learning about the information artefacts and tools that a specific 'community' uses and values…. They learn to use the general language of sources, such as 'portal', 'full text', 'open access' or 'creative commons', or those specific to the domain.

3 Research Basis

In academic years 2015–16 and 2016–17, the SPIDER project (Stewarding and Power In Digital Educational Resources) studied 20 groups of 5–7 learners on a postgraduate course at a large UK university. These learners used discussion boards within a Blackboard virtual learning environment to complete a series of assessment tasks. The tasks (described in more detail in Webster and Gunter 2018; Whitworth 2020) gradually reduced the amount of information that was provided to groups, meaning members had to collaborate to gather information and make judgements of relevance, in order to propose collective solutions to problems posed. The course recruited a mixture of on-campus and distance learning students (Webster and Whitworth 2017), and every group contained representatives from both modes. Consequently, groups could not meet face-to-face in their entirety, and members were obliged to use these boards (and, as will be seen, other online platforms) to communicate.

A substantial proportion of these discussions in Blackboard were therefore recorded, and these accumulated into the SPIDER dataset. Over two years, this corpus amounts to over one million words, and in ongoing work, the SPIDER team are analysing these data to determine whether and how students use discursive mapping techniques as they integrate found information into their landscapes. Webster and Gunter (2018) also interviewed some of the students and the course tutor.

In formal educational settings, we should not expect shared goals and a sense of cohesion to emerge simply because a discussion board is presented to a group of students. Rather, thinking about how the learning activities can be structured and facilitated in ways that might give rise to this sense of community, is a pedagogical design task essential for developing collaboration and communication skills as called for by Digcomp. Pai et al. (2015, 80) note that "[s]tructures, such as scripts, roles, and group rewards, have been identified as critical for fostering greater learning in groups than in individual contexts…"; such "scripts" can be (ibid, 81): "designed to increase specific cognitive behaviours associated with learning, such as summarizing, providing explanations, or asking questions…". They cite Aronson's "Jigsaw" approach, in which (Pai et al. 2015, 81):

Each group member studies a subtopic of the material, meeting in "expert groups" to share information with peers from the other jigsaw groups specializing in the same subtopic, and then returning to their groups to teach their peers about their subtopic. Each student is like a piece in a jigsaw puzzle. Each part is essential for full understanding of the final product (Aronson 2002).

To succeed at a task like this requires group members to develop effective information selection and management skills. Therefore, and, most importantly (ibid, 82–3, emphases added):

> *when working in groups,* multiple perspectives on the problem need to be negotiated to a common representation. *Therefore, the representation tends to be abstract to be able to bridge various views. Collaboration provides an environment to generate more abstract representations which is not normally available when working alone…. While working collaboratively,* individuals have to generate and explain their thoughts to each other. *Vocalizing one's thoughts can help to produce* an organized cognitive structure of the material…

These emphasised points strongly allude to discursive mapping, and the value it can have. Pai et al. suggest that by articulating their positions, a common representation, or 'organised cognitive structure', can emerge among the student group. And the fact that these positions are being explicitly articulated and recorded on the online discussion boards is also significant (Walton and Cleland 2017). The online environment—Blackboard, in this case—is not just an inert space, nor even just a recording device; it is a constitutive part of the information landscape, and has a variety of features and affordances which students can bring to bear when it comes to selecting, mapping (or organising) and communicating information. The board becomes the "basis for shared meaning" and permits these *educational* practices.

Students were assessed with reference to a marking rubric (made public to them) that valued practices such as citation of the literature, taking on particular roles in the discussion, sustained rather than sporadic participation and so on (the full rubric is given in Whitworth 2020). In all, the assessment specification, the marking rubric, and structures of facilitation and support within this course are designed to promote certain informational practices, conducive to informed learning (Bruce 2008), over others. The design of these activities offers a framework, or practice architecture, in which students get practical experience in building an information landscape that helps them meet collective learning goals. They must set up a sociotechnical information system, one that helps them make selections, organise information and disseminate findings. And as postings on the discussion boards are graded, the dialogues taking place as the group work together are not happening *in camera*, but are visible, open to scrutiny by the course tutor, the students themselves, and finally, the SPIDER research team.

4   Findings

The groups' initial information configuration can be termed their 'starter' landscape (or habitat—Wenger et al. 2009). It is provided by the tutor but is a habitat without inhabitants. For the first task—the discussion of an academic paper (viz, Mishra and Koehler 2006)—groups are provided with all the information they need to complete it (the paper itself). But in the second task, a role-playing simulation, and the third, a design task, groups must develop and extend their 'starter' landscape by gathering more information than is provided to them.

Based on their prior experience and judgments of relevance, oriented by their subjective understanding of tool affordances and their interpretation of how best to configure the landscape so the group can meet its shared learning needs (Wenger et al. 2009), groups introduce new resources into this 'starter' habitat. These resources may be informational and come from online sources or the literature, as these quotes illustrate (see also Whitworth and Webster 2019):

> *Here is the link for the text "Knowledge for Literacy" as a reference:* http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/knowledgeliteracy.

> *In my university... to be innovative in technology or deliver teaching in a different way is questioned, not by the faculty, but by higher management who see it as not conforming to the standard norms students are used to.*

> *Since technologies are changing very fast, we must also relearn and readapt our own teaching practice. Mishra and Koehler say that technological knowledge is 'the ability to learn and adapt to new technologies' (page 1028).*

We see here, respectively, the provision of information via URL; via narrative and personal experience; and via academic citation.

As well as these informational resources, students introduce technological tools into the landscape. This is rare in the first activity, but after that experience, groups frequently note that the discussion boards have limited functionality, and so, through a series of informed judgments, introduce other tools to colleagues. For example:

> *Me, [D] and [S] just had a Skype planning meeting to think things over; here's a summary of the discussion and what we will be doing.*

Other groups use different tools. For example, Padlet becomes part of the habitat configured by four groups but not the others. Student [B] here introduces Padlet to his group. He draws on his professional experience and suggests associated information practices:

> *In class, I like to use padlet.com to create discussion boards and students have even used it to do group work. I've created a padlet with the information. It's a huge poster board where we can all add information. I've added all the information [tutor] has provided and a quick comment. Let me know what you think? Should we give it a try?*

On occasion, individuals suggest reasons to avoid particular technologies (remember, these utterances are not made *post hoc* to an interviewer but to group members, via the boards):

> *The main problem I find with LinkedIn is that it's overrun with recruitment agents, so I rarely use it. Twitter is OK for some stuff, but because it's so transient I find I miss things a lot and it feels like a lot of effort to keep up with it.*

This from Webster and Gunter (2018, 79) who quote an interviewee (unlike the ones above, then, this comment *is* made *post hoc* rather than on the boards):

> *Our own VLE proved to be tricky sometimes. ...I valued that, as a team, we made use of different ways to communicate, group our ideas and give shape to our preliminary decision and strategy. Gmail, Facebook, Google Drive, and the chat room in Blackboard helped us explore the use of social media and Web 2.0 tools to better communicate and write collaboratively.*

By the end of the series of activities, each group's learning environment thereby looks different from those of other groups and different from the 'starter habitat'. The group's information landscape has evolved, becoming a record of the judgments of relevance that have been made by members. The landscapes have layers that sediment out (Lloyd 2010, 9–10) of discussions and interactions that students have with each other and with the tutor and teaching assistant. Judgments are based on the prior experience of individuals, and their application of DIL in work and everyday life, and are validated by colleagues according to their relevance for the specific, shared task that the group has to complete. Group members learn practices that help them work together and are in a dynamic, mutually reinforcing relationship with the technologies and sources that they introduce into the landscape. As Wenger et al. (2009, 137) write: "Shared assumptions about how to use [the technologies] constitute practice."

Groups also reflect on their performance and consider how the practices, technologies and resources in the habitat might be better used subsequently:

> *Me, [Y] and [S]... have already discussed on how we should form our thread in this forum so that it'll better organized than our previous discussion (Hehehee.. we think it was pretty cluttered).*

In each group, what emerges is a set of shared assumptions about the landscape, and ways of navigating it most effectively. Thus far then, these illustrations have shown how group members establish a structure for their information landscapes.

Groups also apply a mapping process to the material contexts—that is, the places—which are foci for these activities, giving group members a *single, shared* focus for the judgments of relevance they must make. Through discursive mapping, members co-create a representation of a landscape that becomes the basis for further judgments. This aligns with Steinerova (2010) findings regarding information behaviour in academic settings and the value of graphical and discursive mapping in helping with both phases of such work—the initial *orientation* stage, in which learners survey the field and gather information into a landscape, and the *analytic* stage, where on the basis of what was found and structured in the orientation stage, decisions are reached. (See also Kuhlthau 1993.)

These stages are most evident in activity 2, in which the groups must make judgments about a context that is fictitious, as it first exists only as the scenario presented by the tutor, outlining a problem faced by "Mackenzie College". But students can be observed working to map and, thus, reach agreement on their views of this context and the problems it faces. As noted in Whitworth andWebster (2019, emphasis added);

> *Members of the groups can be observed introducing and validating informational and technological resources to other group members, and working to configure their information landscape in ways that then allow them to make judgments about found or encountered information in ways that* could not have been possible for them prior to the dialogue.

The scenario outlines the problem and offers advice about issues that the groups might consider. But the landscape provided in these notes is limited, and students are

told this. In the orientation stage, groups must bring further information into their landscape, incorporating resources that they judge to be relevant, including citations from the literature, and information gleaned from other groups, playing different roles (the groups in each simulation are: senior management; IT services; the student body; an innovative group of 'tech-savvy' teaching staff; and other teaching staff).

As a result of this information search and subsequent discussion, groups develop their own perspectives on the scenario, answering for themselves the question of how "Mackenzie" should formulate its e-learning strategy. Contrast these posts, from two different groups playing the same role, the IT services department. Both groups started with the same initial information (the scenario), but come to agree on different priorities. For the first group, these are speed of access and students' accessing the VLE after graduation; for the second, wifi, training and teaching.

> *Questions we (the IT team) have to deal with by the end of this week: What should/can we do to make the VLE a faster platform? Can we get in touch with the provider and see if they have any updates coming up next year? For sure, we don't want to move into a different VLE. Is there a possibility for us to help the students maintain their access after they graduate? This might be a real satisfier for the students.*

> *So far our ideas seem to be around: Changes in infrastructure: potential investment in wifi; Changes in teaching: potential changes in the adoption of apps as an IT team we need to look at how we could support this both through infrastructure and possible training. This might be a potential digital change agent project (students and staff working together).*

What is significant is how these interpretations of the context—that is, groups' discursive maps of "Mackenzie College"—are carried forward and used as the basis for judgements made in the analytic stage. The transition takes place after the 'management' group communicate the outcome of their own group deliberations, a draft e-learning strategy for Mackenzie. Other groups then publish their collective reaction to this decision. Take this quote, for example, made by the group playing the 'tech-savvy' academics:

> *… this is good information for us to use and saves us time…. this strengthens our argument for 'going it alone' and they recognise us as being well trained.*

This judgement—that the conclusions reached by the management group strengthen this group's argument for "going it alone" with educational technology—is *authentically* made, even though it refers to a *simulated* context. There is no external "reality" to Mackenzie, and therefore, any criteria against which the group (or any other group) bases its judgments must be that which *they negotiate and agree upon* through intra- and inter-group dialogue. These dialogues allow groups to agree upon basic informational constructs, such as priorities and problems for Mackenzie. These constructs become the basis for the judgments of relevance that each group makes when it comes to analysing the 'management' decision.

For example, largely because of its containing student [R], a distance learner employed as an academic librarian, the group quoted here was the only one of the 20 groups to draw attention to the fact that the library was not discussed in the original scenario. The rest of the group concur with [R]'s judgement, and thereafter the library

becomes an evident part of this group's discursive map of Mackenzie in a way it does not for other groups. Responding to the management group's decision, [R] writes:

> *Have the management integrated the librarians, the students want this, and we do too. How is the new situation an improvement for us? Will it make any difference to our teaching and delivery of our courses and our research? I think we need more support from the management and more recognition.*

In the same group discussion, student [A] here quotes information from the scenario (the indented paragraph) and builds on it with a judgment about what is the best next step for the group to take within this simulated situation:

> *we already have long experience with this issue because we manage to teach distance learners. In other words, our expertises have formed as a response to learning process which is distance learning.*
>
> *' Mackenzie's distance learning programmes are highly rated and are led by a team of academics/researchers who are internationally regarded as innovators in the teaching of History at a distance. '*
>
> *So, I suggest to contact with managers team to discuss the idea of introducing our experience to other colleagues either IT team or other academic team?*

[R] agrees with [A] that this will have benefits for their group:

> *this could be a good opportunity for us to improve our profile at the university and therefore to get some recognition for the quality of teaching we deliver in the department.*

Although the context is simulated, these things can be confidently stated because the discursive map that they have negotiated and reached consensus on has been integrated into their information landscape, and for each group, is now no less "real" than the assessment task itself. A "register of correspondence" (Cosgrove 1999, 1) has developed between the place about which decisions are being made (in this case, Mackenzie) and the discursive map that the group have performatively created via their discussion on the boards, which can guide their own self-assessment, help them scrutinise judgments made. The map helps the group make connections between informational resources, becoming an agreed-upon basis for action that does not need to be renegotiated and can serve as the basis for group judgments of relevance regarding found and offered information. A map makes propositions; and these propositions can be explored in the world, that is, the place represented upon the map. It does not matter that Mackenzie has no physical cognate: it nevertheless acts as an *information ground*, a *"sociophysical location"* (Hultgren 2009, 140) which both facilitates access to information and makes it relevant.

5   Discussion and Conclusion

For a student to make any proposition to their peers—asserting the value of an online resource, say, or offering an idea for how Mackenzie should develop its digital strategy—they must articulate that proposition on the discussion board, making

an utterance of some kind that contributes to the discursive map. Responses to these utterances, whether they come from the tutor or, in more in-depth ways in this setting, from peers, validate and position each claim to knowledge. As exhorted by Bruce (2008), they are learning to see the world from multiple positions, 'experiencing variation' and thus *triangulating* on the landscape (Harvey 1996, 283–4); bringing multiple perspectives together in a single interpretive framework, or discursive map. At least for the duration of the activity, the map becomes a *locus of collective memory* (Harvey 1996, 417). The technological tools in use (Blackboard); the regime of assessment; and the subsequent SPIDER research methodology: all are processes that (in different ways) have given the dialogue permanence and revealed the dialogic moves that are made by the learners as they construct, map and navigate their information landscapes.

Effective pedagogical design for informed learning involves this *placing* of the learner, giving them a *position* from which they can develop a perspective on the landscape. That does not mean it is desirable for students to stay in this place. Instead, the position should be seen as a starting point from which they can learn to navigate the landscape: a map that they can expand upon, review and redraw if their investigations require it. In the example discussed here, these possibilities are opened up firstly by the design of the activities, and then the signposting by tutors and peers of additional resources that may be useful in the landscape. Learners in these groups teach one another mapping and other information practices, rather than being reliant on the tutor. These stewarding processes (Wenger et al. 2009) turn the assessment specification from a plan (which 'extinguishes contextual potential') into a map, a tool for exploration, 'a generative means, a suggestive vehicle that "points" but does not overly determine' (Corner 1999, 228). This is illustrated by the variety of 'Mackenzies' which come into being and the different practical settings in which students actively apply their knowledge.

While the disciplinary context explored must be different in each case, this is an approach to the development of and assessment of informed learning that could be applied across the EHEA. The DigComp elements of information/data literacy and communication and collaboration are directly reflected in the pedagogical framework explored in this paper. The SPIDER research indicates how informed learning approaches like this one integrate DIL into teaching in a way that would improve the chances of institutions meeting their obligations to graduates, preparing them more fully to enter the workplace and civic life and developing a broad set of competencies in DIL. As Badke notes (2012, 93):

> … *educators are going to need to move from teaching about their disciplines to enabling their students to become disciplinarians. The expression, 'welcome to my world', encapsulates the goal … We must invite students into our world and there reproduce ourselves in them, turning our students into active practitioners in our disciplines.*

As Lloyd has noted, to "turn students into active practitioners" requires engagement with more than just the disciplinary knowledge or epistemic modality, but the social

and corporeal modalities. Through work with all the modalities, digital and informational competencies can be addressed in ways sympathetic to the DigComp and DigCompEdu frameworks.

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Digital Humanities as an Incentive for Digitalisation Strategies in Eastern European HEIs: A Case Study of Romania

Mădălina Chitez, Roxana Rogobete, and Alexandru Foitoş

1   Introduction

The emergence of digital technologies has been changing the educational landscape in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the last decade. Transformations have occurred at multiple levels of digitally enabled products and processes, from the creation and preservation of information to the level of information transmission (Pfeffer 2003; Rampelt 2019) and exchange, thus fostering new learning ecologies (Galvis 2018). It is now widely agreed that "the current goals of the Bologna Process can be better achieved through harnessing digital technology" (Orr and Rampelt 2018: 2), which makes digitalisation a key strategy in building a common European framework for HEIs.

In order to synthesise, support and guide digital initiatives throughout Europe, a policy for the provision and management of digitalisation strategies has been proposed in the White Paper *Bologna Digital 2020* (Rampelt et al. 2019). This position paper argues that, among the Bologna Process strategies, a priority should be made of the digitalisation of the educational environment and offering "skills for the Digital Age". Although the 48 EHEA states have committed themselves to implement common policies by building a set of "structural reforms and shared tools" (as the official website of EHEA informs[1]), the asymmetries between the perspectives, needs and capacities of different cultures still vary greatly. The "significant differences in

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[1]More information at: http://www.ehea.info/.

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the effect that the advanced technologies are having in different countries" (Guri-Rosenblit 2009: 69) have led to disparities in terms of not only infrastructure and priorities but also practices. These particularities have led, ultimately, to an uneven embedding of the digitalisation reform at the national level with digitalisation paths varying massively from one country to another.

The group of countries that struggles the most to "break with the old system" (Horner 2014: 7) and adopt the new European policies is the Eastern European (EE) ex-communist group. In contrast with Central and Western European countries, the primary challenge of EE higher education (HE) systems is to move away from the post-communist context. They also have to find "a mission for the system in itself, and not lusting for the quality of other systems" (Vasilache et al. 2012: 318), before reflecting upon further developments.

However, several steps related to digitalisation strategies at EE universities have already been undertaken, which is an indicator of shifts in perspective. The most representative universities (according to university rankings[2]) from countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Republic of Serbia and Ukraine have stated that they have policies and strategic planning regarding digitalisation and future actions. In almost all cases, e-learning strategies and platforms such as Moodle are mentioned, as well as digital libraries, digital communication systems and university management information systems (see Fig. 1). DH projects, however, are still rather underrepresented, even at the level of strategic policymaking, and many DH initiatives lack an institutional anchor or support.

In this paper, we will contextualise the situation of a particular set of digitalisation-related initiatives, falling under the aegis of digital humanities (DH), for the EE academic community. DH is a cross-disciplinary field by its very nature, integrating knowledge and approaches from several disciplines, derived either from the humanities (such as languages, literature, history, and arts) or the information technology spectrum.

> The first practices that emerged from this interdisciplinary convergence were based on its statistical processing in order to distinguish patterns and features that could assist in issues of stylometry and lexicography. More recently, digital humanities increasingly use computing methods to produce information visualisation, network analysis, text mining, databases, digital publishing and even the design of software dedicated to assist the work of digital humanists. (Reyes-Garcia 2015: 237)

The emergence of "the humanities computing" (ibid.) has resulted in significant challenges for HE institutional management and human-resource policymaking. In the Eastern European contexts, such challenges are even more severe, considering that universities in the region tend to lag behind their Western counterparts (Rogobete and Chitez 2019). That is why strategies are needed in order to reduce HE disparities within the EHEA (ibid.), including disparities at the level of digital reforms. Such strategies have the potential to strengthen attempts to modernise higher education systems and to promote values of equality, fairness and inclusion throughout the EU.

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[2]More information at: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2020/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats.
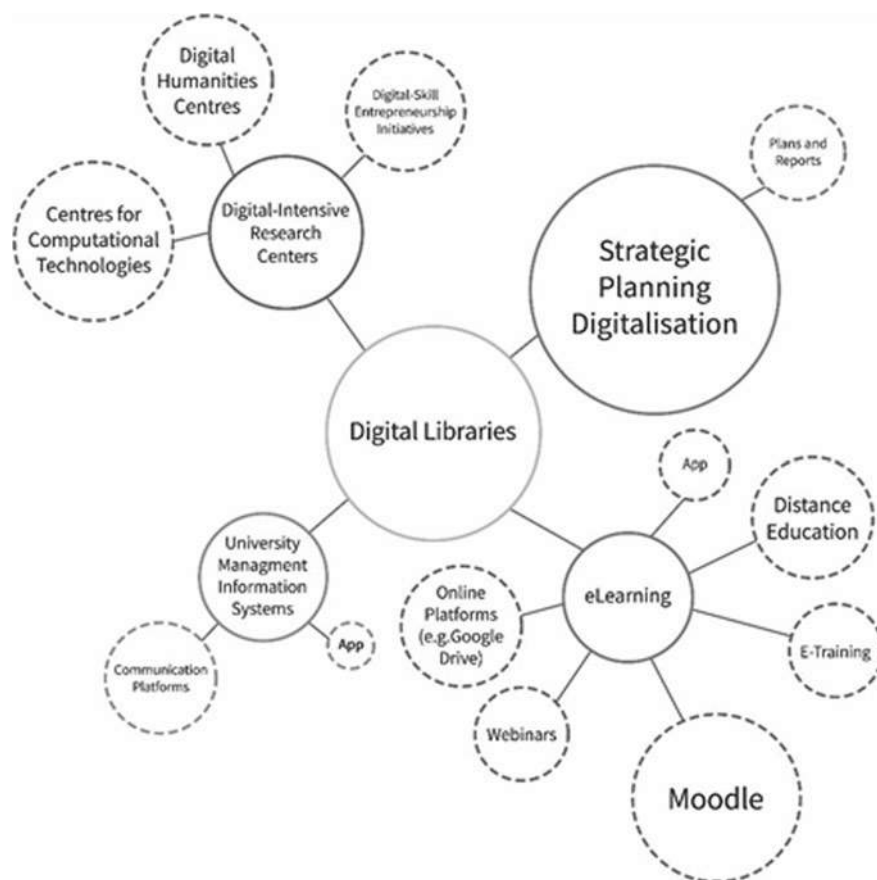
Fig. 1 Distribution of digitalisation strategies in Eastern European HEIs

2 Shift from Traditional to Digital Humanities

If digitalisation is today an expected trend, research fields are embracing it in various ways, depending on their ability to transfer and develop the potential of new methods used in learning and teaching. The area of research we consider more in need of strategic support and policy embedding in this context is the humanities. Humanistic inquiry is considered to be classical, having a defensive position towards reforms or re-evaluations. Whether literary studies, linguistics, cultural heritage and history, or other manifold branches are taken into account, humanities are held as having traditional perspectives, and their educational relevance is to bring insights and understand values and cultures. It has been argued that, in the last decades, there has been a "gradual process" of "marginalization of the humanities" (Costa 2019: 2), but it is undeniable that they are constantly endorsing a reflexive society. "[T]he

comprehensive knowledge, skills and mindset that come with studying the field […]
are not easily outdated" (Costa 2019: 3), and "the effort of interpreting and attributing
meaning to ourselves and that which surrounds us" (ibid.) is responsible for building
scholars who incessantly challenge the world around.

Moreover, precisely because the field is considered classical, and the general per-
ception (including the field's own self-perception) is that it does not intersect with
digital methods, the computational turn was not seen as being able to foster a regen-
eration of the humanities. However, within HEIs, the use of digital technologies
in the humanities has led to the inception of a new trend extending towards digi-
tal humanities. This brought the shift from "how to do things with words" (as J.L.
Austin's influential work is titled) to "how to research things and words with digital
tools". Embracing digital humanities practices can approach and answer old ques-
tions, breaking boundaries in science and research in general. Although the topic has
also brought a sceptical view and concerns that non-digital related studies would be
dismissed or excluded, digital humanities facilitate the intersection between "tradi-
tional" humanities research and new technologies. This means "doing the work of
the humanities, in digital form" (Schreibman et al. 2016: xvii), bridging scholars,
creating cross-disciplinary contexts and, more important, better adapting to current
educational needs. The convergence between quantitative and qualitative points of
view reinforces the critical thinking so necessary in this "post-truth" society. In this
sense, the field of digital humanities "includes not only the computational mod-
elling and analysis of humanities information, but also the cultural study of digital
technologies, their creative possibilities, and their social impact" (ibid.).

The inclusion of digital humanities research within HEIs responds, therefore,
to the technical innovations that require new skills in the 21st century: "The use
of digital content, tools, and methods is transforming humanities research through
greater access to materials and new modes of collaboration and communication"
(Hughes et al. 2016: 153).

3 Integration of Digital Humanities Initiatives in the Eastern European Educational Landscape

3.1 Starting Point

Several studies (e.g., Terras 2011) indicate that most of the European DH centres are
concentrated in the UK, Germany, France, Sweden and Finland. As a group, West-
ern European HEIs[3] embraced digital humanities in 1990–2000, with first initiatives

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[3] According to the UN, Western Europe comprises the following countries: Austria, Belgium, France,
Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Switzerland. More information from
the Statistics Division of the UN and its publication (Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical
Use, M49 standard), at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/.

dating back to the 1960s.[4] In the history of DH centre opening in Europe, a few milestones have paved the way for further developments: the establishment in 1964 of the Literary and Linguistic Computing Centre (University of Cambridge), the foundation of Centre Informatique de Philosophie et Lettres (Université de Liège) in 1983 and the first department or centre dedicated to this emergent field, the Department of Digital Humanities, Centre for Computing in the Humanities (University College London), established in 1991.

Eastern European universities seem to have started launching DH initiatives in the 2010s, at least 10–15 years after similar developments in Western European countries. In this context, a cursory look at the website of the European Association of Digital Humanities[5] reveals that, among over 220 European projects listed, very few represent Eastern European HEIs, which can be correlated with the small number of visible DH centres: the Centre for Digital Humanities at Eötvös Lorand University (Budapest, Hungary, founded in 2017), DigiHUBB (Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, founded in 2015) and the Belgrade Center for Digital Humanities (Belgrade, Serbia, founded in 2009).

Departments at EE universities experience a double disadvantage that can potentially hinder innovation systemically. Traditional teaching methods are still very much prevalent (i.e., traditional academic genres produced, delivered and assessed "like in the old days"), and research related to humanities is conducted by established research groups whose main priority is not the shift towards modern approaches, which would undermine their prestige and authority. Tradition, cognitive conservatism, nostalgia and institutional inertia (Moldovan and Puscasiv 2017: 249; Schnapp and Presner 2009: 11) still dominate the EE university landscape.

3.2 Digital Humanities Survey

Since infographics regarding digital humanities initiatives in Eastern Europe are non-existent at present, we created a survey, DIGITS (Digital Humanities Survey), aimed at mapping and discussing digitalisation, particularly perceptions about digital humanities initiatives in HEIs in Eastern Europe. DIGITS was administered to scholars in the humanities from Eastern European HEIs by collaborators from universities in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Republic of Serbia and Ukraine in October-November 2019. This survey collected information from the target research community concerning their digital experience in order to get a fuller understanding of digitalisation means, its implementation and the survey subjects' understanding of digital humanities.

The results of the survey revealed that scholars associated the field of DH with the existence of e-libraries or e-learning platforms at their universities, even if their university did not have a specialised centre in DH. The respondents had a few diffi-

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[4]See a map developed by Tomsk State University at: http://huminf.tsu.ru/dh-map/.

[5]See the entire list at: https://eadh.org/projects.

Fig. 2 Word cloud on DIGITS responses regarding DH

culties in providing short and consistent definitions of the concept of DH (See Fig. 2). Many of them acknowledged that DH implies digital resources or technology instruments in teaching and research, for example.

- "I think digital humanities refers to the usage of digital resources in order to study certain subjects of the humanities in a different manner".
- "Using digital technologies in humanities, in presentations, publishing, research, teaching"
- "Digital humanities represents the complementarity of technology and humanities (language, literature, etc.), which aims to effectively process diverse corpora that can be explored via digital tools".

Some of the scholars also saw the long-term potential and institutional advantages offered by taking the path of this research field:

- "Providing help to researchers and teachers in humanities and perhaps making their expertise known internationally so they can better collaborate with members of other HEIs".
- "DH is about facilitating studies and research in humanities with the help of digital resources and tools available on the Internet and local nets of educational and research institutions".

Altogether, informants agreed that the juncture between humanities and technology has to be foregrounded, as it "contributes to the epistemological potential of human society in fundamental ways" (Smithies 2017: 241).

3.3 The Case of Romania

The situation in Romania appears fortunate, as reputable reform-friendly universities have launched initiatives centring on the field of digital humanities. DigiHUBB (Tran-

sylvania Digital Humanities Centre[6]) from Cluj-Napoca has already been accepted in the European Association for Digital Humanities (EADH), and in Fall 2019 the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Bucharest introduced a master's program, Digital Humanities, in English,[7] and other faculties or research centres have also been involved in DH projects. More and more inter-university networks and projects have been created, such as the INTELLIT Platform (Romanian literary patrimony preservation and valorisation using intelligent digital solutions for extraction and systematization of knowledge)[8]; the *Distant Reading* COST Action CA16204[9]; CoRoLa, the Reference Corpus of Contemporary Romanian[10]; the series of DH meetings conducted by IRH-ICUB[11]; ReaderBench[12] and the Astra Data Mining project, the digital museum of the Romanian novel of the 19th century (Baghiu et al. 2019).[13] All these initiatives focus on exploring new tools, text mining techniques and advanced natural language processing and creating digital repositories.

4   The Story of a New Digital Humanities Centre in Romania

4.1   *Codhus Vision and Mission*

The long-term institutional strategy of the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology of the West University of Timişoara, Romania, includes pursuing a new direction for the further development of its philology departments. In this context, a team of researchers, the majority of whom are members of the first departmental research project (ROGER 2017[14]) focusing on digital method use, founded a digital humanities centre, CODHUS (Centre for Corpus Related Digital Approaches to Humanities,

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[6]More information at: https://digihubb.centre.ubbcluj.ro/.

[7]More information at: https://www.facebook.com/aslsro/photos/a.10152173484968722/10156527298718722/?type=1&theater.

[8]More information at: https://intellit.ici.ro/en/about-intellit/impact/.

[9]Which aims to create a multilingual European Literary Text Collection (ELTeC). More information at: https://www.distant-reading.net/eltec/.

[10]More information at: http://corola.racai.ro/.

[11]Morei nformation at: https://irhunibuc.wordpress.com/digital-humanities/.

[12]More information at: http://www.readerbench.com/.

[13]More information at: https://revistatransilvania.ro/mdrr.

[14]The ROGER project (Academic genres at the crossroads of tradition and internationalization: Corpus-based interlanguage research on genre use in student writing at Romanian universities) is running from 2017 until 2022 at the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures of the West University of Timişoara, Romaniamathrm; it is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (PROMYS grant awarded to the project coordinator, Dr Mădălina Chitez). More information at: https://roger.projects.uvt.ro/.

see CODHUS 2019a[15]) in October 2019. CODHUS is an applied DH centre supporting studies, course implementation and testing and the development of digital methods and tools (mainly corpus-based) for the humanities disciplines. CODHUS is in line with international practice, as "HEIs across the world are currently in the process of experimenting with digitalisation and applying next technologies to certain parts of their operation" (Orr et al. 2019: 10).

The motivation for the initiative resides in the need to keep up with new teaching and research developments in the rapidly evolving field of humanities. The vision of the new centre is to carry out research where traditional philological approaches should not be abandoned but rather supplemented with digital methods, content and tools. CODHUS also aims at fostering understanding of the processes related to humanities computing. The applicative character of the centre is highlighted by two directions: (a) connection between corpus-related digital methodologies in the humanities and the wider topic of applied linguistics and (b) building synergies with other disciplines (see following section) with the purpose of obtaining research results that can be effectively integrated in teaching or large-scale applications.

CODHUS is designed to be a transversal scientific organization that includes scholars and incorporates competencies from different departments. Up to the present, CODHUS has gathered researchers interested in applied linguistics, translation studies, foreign language teaching and literary studies. Other departments where expertise is sought after are dialectology, history, archaeology, geography, journalism, and political, social, and computer sciences. Working with colleagues from the IT department is essential as they are able to support the CODHUS team in developing technology-based solutions to be implemented in the research and teaching of the other disciplines.

4.2 Challenges of Founding a Dh Centre in Romania

The teaching and research at the West University of Timişoara (WUT), a comprehensive educational institution, is characterised by a mixture of traditional methods and modern innovative trends. Acknowledging that digitalisation is an essential "part of overall strategies for teaching and learning" (Orr and Rampelt 2018: 3), WUT grasped the opportunity of founding the CODHUS research and teaching-support centre and offered its valuable institutional support.

Although the majority of the teachers and decision-makers involved in the founding of the new DH centre have been in agreement as to its importance, the inclusion of new members proved to be a difficult task. This was due to a general lack of know-how in the field and reluctance towards working with new methods. This situ-

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[15]CODHUS (Centre for Corpus Related Digital Approaches to Humanities) was created at the initiative and under the presidency of Dr Mădălina Chitez, Senior Researcher in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures of the West University of Timişoara, Romania. More information at: https://codhus.projects.uvt.ro/?lang=en.

ation is similar to other centre-founding experiences: Moldovan and Puscasiv (2017) reported that "members lack[ed] . . . systemic education in digital humanities" (258) and that there seemed to be an apparent mismatch with IT stakeholders' agenda (to whom humanities seem old-fashioned) when they presented the "the story" of DigiHUBB (Transilvania Digital Humanities Centre, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania).

However, in the case of CODHUS, through departmental events and workshops, several young researchers were convinced to start experimenting with digital methods and tools for the investigation of their own topics. The challenge of attracting members was overcome by opening up possibilities of research in their own areas of interest instead of proposing approaches that are completely out of their expertise.

A second major challenge is the financial and administrative support for the functioning of a new DH centre. Until the centre can be financed institutionally or through third-party grants, the use of existing funded projects as a launching pad was identified as a solution (e.g., ROGER for CODHUS). We used the expertise of the ROGER team members (especially early-stage researchers) already involved in thematic digital-intensive research, in areas such as corpus linguistics, academic writing, language teaching, translation studies and literary studies, in order to organise the first training and dissemination activities in CODHUS. They acted as digital-competence multipliers and ensured the sustainability of the initiative.

A third strategic challenge is logistical in nature: DH centres are digital labs that need generous rooms and quite expensive equipment (digital devices, manuscript printers, software programs, etc.). Solutions for CODHUS to solve this problem still need to be identified and implemented.

4.3 Good Practices

Even though at the beginning CODHUS was greeted with "an ethos of suspicion" (Ursa 2015: 81), the centre rapidly gathered attention and clustered research efforts in various directions. Since its foundation, members and collaborators have been involved in both trainings/workshops and disseminating activities.

From the very first month of existence, CODHUS members have been engaged in pedagogical practices, conducting a series of workshops for students named the Digital Linguistics Talks in Timişoara (DIGITT) series. Either carrying out practical activities regarding corpus linguistics methods with the help of online tools (CODHUS 2019b)[16] or presenting case-study results (analysis of media discourses, CODHUS 2019c[17]), the events were organised collaboratively with other departments, with the goal to innovate the faculty's teaching activities and increase stu-

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[16]More information about DIGITTworld, the Digital Linguistics Workshop, is available at: https://codhus.projects.uvt.ro/news/septembrie-2019-digittworld-digital-linguistics-workshop-powered-by-roger-and-codhus/?lang=en.

[17]How do digital instruments help us in linguistic studies and in analysing discourse? More information is available at: https://codhus.projects.uvt.ro/news/december-2019-workshops-for-

dents' interest in research. DIGITT also led to numerous requests for internships in the centre.

Moreover, CODHUS has been promoting academic skill support by offering training in areas such as academic writing that contribute to scholarly success. We conducted a case study where we evaluated the efficacy of electronic feedback on texts written in Romanian (ROGER 2019a),[18] a practice that can also be implemented in other departments. Another case study, whose results can inform other disciplinary groups, concerned the use of expert corpora and digital linguistics software in discipline-specific writing (ROGER 2019b)[19] for the improvement of workspace-specific literacy skills. Also, a CODHUS expert member offered a module on "Digital tools useful in academic writing for publication" to colleagues from different departments (CODHUS 2019d).[20]

In addition, CODHUS, like any other DH centre, is particularly inclined towards cross-disciplinary studies. For example, we conducted an analysis of the election discourses in Romania (Fall 2019) using digital methods and combining digitally supported linguistic knowledge with theoretical views from political science and media (ROGER 2019c).[21]

Last but not least, CODHUS is a platform which stays connected to European initiatives, since its members participate at international meetings and conferences as agents of networking (CODHUS 2019e).[22] In less than six months, CODHUS has achieved promotion of DH practices and itself as a successful provider of digital solutions in the humanities.

4.4 Institutional Impact

A cross-disciplinary research centre, especially one that proposes digitally enabled approaches to traditional educational fields, has an impact on institutional develop-

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students-of-the-faculty-of-letters-history-and-theology-year-1-linguistics-studies-in-the-digital-era-digitt-series/?lang=en.

[18] https://roger.projects.uvt.ro/news/september-2019-the-eighth-international-conference-on-writing-analytics-academic-writing-in-digital-contexts-analytics-tools-mediality-winterthur-switzerland/.

[19] https://roger.projects.uvt.ro/news/aprilie-2019-prezentare-la-conferinta-globelt-2019-kyrenia/.

[20] Workshop "Publish or perish": competences of academic writing in English; more information at: https://roger.projects.uvt.ro/news/september-2019-the-eighth-international-conference-on-writing-analytics-academic-writing-in-digital-contexts-analytics-tools-mediality-winterthur-switzerland,   https://codhus.projects.uvt.ro/news/november-2019-module-on-digital-methods-for-academic-writing-workshop/?lang=en.

[21] https://roger.projects.uvt.ro/news/november-2019-timisoara-workshops-on-research-methods-text-to-data-timisoara/.

[22] https://codhus.projects.uvt.ro/news/4-6-december-2019-the-seventh-digital-humanities-estonia-conference-use-of-digital-cultural-heritage-in-research-and-education-tallinn-estonia/?lang=en.

ment at multiple levels. In the case of CODHUS, as previously mentioned, the first results have appeared:

Creation of a research-intensive unit at the faculty level. Before CODHUS existed, it was the ROGER project that created the premises for establishing a team of full-time researchers at the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. This was innovative in the sense that while most faculty members have until recently been engaged in research activities, they have performed these activities as part or in relation to their teaching activities. ROGER and its co-initiative, CODHUS, have thus created a different, more research-intensive environment in which further skills can be trained and integrated.

Emergence of collaborative research initiatives. As the centre was already in the planning stage, first initiatives have been taken to create "concentric circles" of shared expertise around the topics that CODHUS was promoting. This resulted in close collaborations with fellow faculty members who do not normally use the digital methods proposed by the new centre. Several joint studies have been conducted, and conference paper proposals have been produced. Some of these have been submitted for publication (e.g., comparative translation studies).

CODHUS as an expertise-building unit. The most visible effect of the centre creation has been the growing awareness that new competencies can be acquired within its framework. For example, in the six months after the official approval by the University Senate, the centre has received more than 10 applications for student internship and volunteer positions. Similarly, some of the centre's researchers have been invited to host university-level workshops that train digital skills integratively, for instance, digital skills as an integral part of academic writing skills.

CODHUS as a promoter of digital skills. The activities of the centre have been progressively changing the attitude of the faculty members, both CODHUS members and collaborators, towards the acquisition, experimentation and use of new digital methods. It has been generally acknowledged that when technology-supported teaching methods have been implemented in otherwise traditional disciplines, the learning motivation of the students has been positively affected.

Besides the results that have already been achieved, creating a digital research centre increases the chances of the university to have access to:

University funding. The creation of a research centre should also result in more funding (research centres are funded additionally) for research projects, which will, in turn, finance research-support units.

Attraction of top-level researchers. The prestige and financial sustainability of a DH research centre will attract top-level qualified researchers, which will further contribute to an increase in the university's capacity to attract funding and in its appeal to students.

Better ranking. Improving research capacity will trigger an increase in national and international rankings of the university, which will also attract more funding from the Ministry of Education.

More research projects funded. The number of approved research projects should increase considerably. For example, a quick look at the most recent list of approved projects in the humanities in Romania indicates a low rate of projects focusing on dig-

ital methodology use (out of 165 projects, only one project deals with digitalisation of data, and two projects deal with corpora). The analysis of European-approved projects (CORDIS) has also indicated a scarcity of Romania-specific research projects dealing with digital methods (or digital humanities, corpus linguistics, digital linguistics and applied humanities studies) in the humanities.

5 Digital Humanities as an Incentive for Digitalisation Strategies

5.1 Digital Innovation Through Digital-Intensive Research Methods

The White Paper *Bologna Digital 2020* (Rampelt et al. 2019) suggests that digital education can be best achieved through learning and teaching strategies. An additional pathway that can enhance the impact of the digitalisation-related policies is the integration of digital-intensive research: "The full potential of digitalisation has not been reached on systemic level. This is partly due to digitalisation being viewed as an additional challenge, rather than a means to meet existing challenges for higher education" (Orr et al. 2018). Why digital-intensive research? For two main reasons, both of them concurring to create the premises for the acceleration of the *Bologna Digital 2020* pace of implementation:

Digital-intensive research automatically triggers the use of the latest technologies, tools and methods. In this context, we define digital-intensive research as research in which either digital methods or tools prevail (e.g., the use of digital methods for the collection, analysis and evaluation of data), or the end result of the research process is a digital product (e.g., digital methodology, digital tool). It is also important to understand the limits and potential of the notion of "digital": We see it as a continuum (see Fig. 3) starting from standard digital literacy skills to complex abilities involving the use and manipulation of digital tools and technologies.

One could argue that all research nowadays is digital, considering the indispensability of digital means (such as communication and information-extraction platforms and software) for the latest discoveries in science and technology, but we should also include disciplinary distribution of digital skill expertise into the equation: Disciplines such as ICT, information management, engineering and economics are at the core of the digital-intensive discipline range, and disciplines such as biology, chemistry and health involve both classic (e.g., lab experiments) and digital (e.g., data processing) activities, whereas disciplines such as the humanities still primarily rely on traditional research methods (e.g., perspective-based comparative studies). For this reason, delimitations within the digital skill continuum are meant to clarify the degree of sophistication with which digital users (students, teachers, researchers and the wider public) operate.
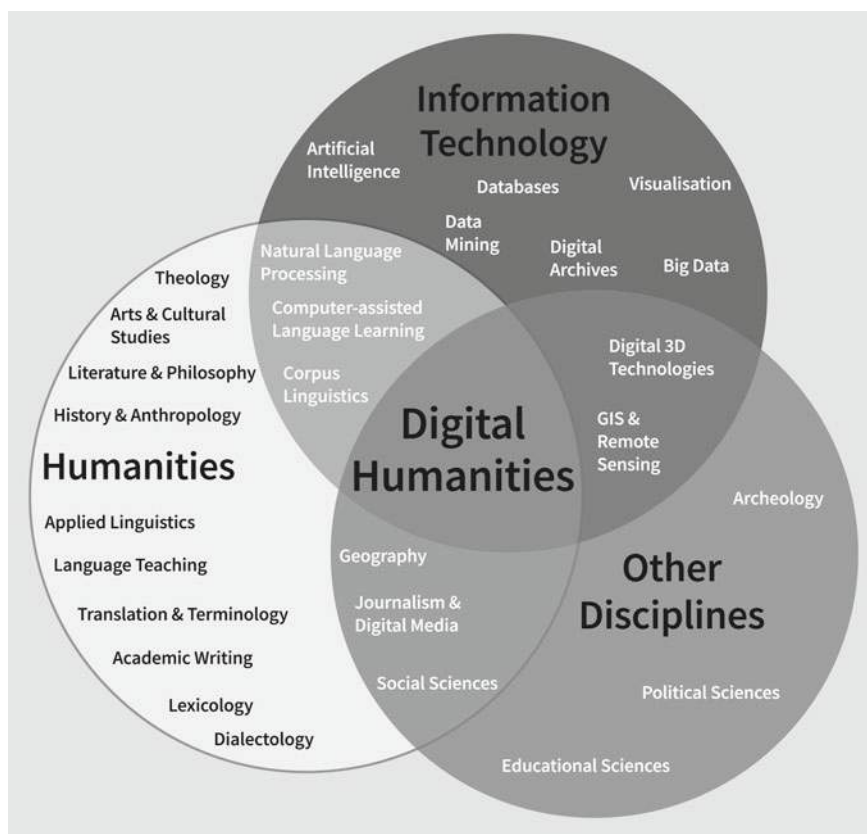
Fig. 3 Continuum of digital skills integrating digital-intensive research skills

Digital-intensive research agents (e.g., researchers, HEI teachers) act as multipliers of digital competences. If more and more scholars were undertaking research that incorporates digital-intensive methods, they would likely be exposed to training in new skills, start re-thinking their approach towards their disciplines and import innovative methods and technologies into their everyday teaching activities. Thus, students would have instant access to the latest developments and digital competence-building strategies. By this, we do not mean only training in basic digital literacy skills (e.g., work with digital information systems, communication and task fulfilment via e-learning channels), but also students' hands-on practices of discipline-specific digital tools and methods (e.g., linguistic analysis tools, literature visualisation apps) that have a high motivational impact for learners (see Tong et al. 2018).

European education, including research, has to go digital: This is a desideratum of all decision-makers on the continent. Major steps have been taken to make it a reality, and digitalisation is prioritised in one of the European Commission's Multian-
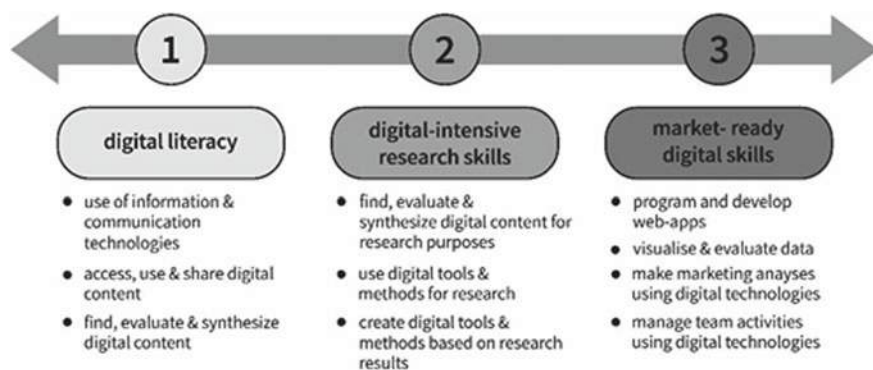
Fig. 4 Cross-disciplinary convergences within DH

nual Financial Frameworks (Digital Europe Programme, 2021–2027[23]). Awareness seems to have been raised towards practical strategies, turned into financial-support actions for research initiatives, which could potentially lead to an efficient and rapid implementation of the ongoing digitalisation processes. Digital humanities centres will only benefit from such strategies, with their impact potential (see also previous section) manifesting in both research and digitalisation achievements.

5.2   Cross-Disciplinary Convergences

As previously stated, digital humanities is a research-intensive, cross-disciplinary field. The range of possible discipline combinations to fall under the purview of "digital humanities" is quite broad (see Fig. 4). A quick look at the project section of the webpage of the European Association for Digital Humanities[24] reveals the "heterogeneous knowledgescape" (Papadopoulos and Reilly 2019) of the domain.

The particular nature of each centre is determined by its scientific or applied objectives. Many DH centres have been preoccupied with the digital preservation of cultural assets, such as the digital archive of literary studies (e.g., RCH, Athens, Greece[25]), the online repository of old and modern manuscripts (e.g., projects of UCLDH, London, UK[26]) or databases of artistic works (e.g., Centre for Digital

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[23]More information at: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/digital-europe-programme-proposed-eu92-billion-funding-2021-2027.

[24]More information at: https://eadh.org/projects#block-views-project-list-block-1.

[25] Webpage of the Research Centre for Humanities, Athens, Greece: https://www.rchumanities.gr/en/our-mission/.

[26] Webpage of the UCL Centre for Digital Humanities, London, UK: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/digital-humanities/projects.

Humanities, Göteborg, Sweden[27]). Quite often, DH units/labs/centres have placed the methodology of corpus linguistics at the core of their research profile, as they conduct projects that use or compile corpora, in other words, computer-processed linguistic databases that can be used for lexico-grammatical searches and quantitative analyses with the help of software programs (self-developed or available) whose complexity varies from simple intuitive interfaces to specific syntax queries (e.g., SQL). Other centres have opted for a well-defined computational direction in which big data and data analytics projects dominate (e.g., Data Intensive Digital Humanities, Kalmar/ Växjö, Sweden[28]). The mission of all these centres is to include a wide variety of disciplines with a view to stimulate convergences towards the latest research topics:

> We believe that information scientists; literary theorists; media scholars, designers and practitioners; social scientists and historians can collaborate to develop humanities and social science research—to explore the human condition and its evolution, and the social and material worlds we make. We wish to make the humanities fit for purpose in a digital age. (Sussex Humanities Lab; source: webpage, n. d.)

Essentially, the DH field brings together the two major disciplines that have for a long time worked independently: humanities and information technology. The sub-disciplines in the humanities that have quite frequently been encompassed in the DH area include language studies, literature, education studies, history, geography, culture, art and design studies. Geoinformatics and natural language processing technologies have been, on the other hand, the sub-disciplines of information technology that have been quite often integrated into DH studies.

5.3 A Synecdoche for New Learning Models

The strategic planning efforts of EE universities seem to indicate that they are interested in improving the quality of teaching being offered in order to prepare students for the new digitized workplace and strengthen their economic position, thus reaching competitive levels of development. The digital-intensive research initiatives of Eastern European HEIs are representative of the struggle for digitization in the region since they offer the possibility to reflect upon the cultural and social dimensions of strategies that create an innovative bond between computational skill and the disciplinary research areas.

From this perspective, any DH centre or initiative "is fairly well understood as a mechanism for advancing individual research goals, supporting faculty enrichment, striving for institutional alignment with scientific paradigms for enterprise-level research" and as a hub for training (Opel and Simeone 2019). Such centres

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[27] Webpage of the Centre for Digital Humanities, Göteborg, Sweden: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/digital-humanities/projects, https://cdh.hum.gu.se/english.

[28] Webpage of the Data Intensive Digital Humanities within Linnaeus University Centre for Data Intensive Sciences and Applications, Kalmar/ Växjö, Sweden: https://lnu.se/en/research/searchresearch/data-intensive-digital-humanities/.

represent "precisely the place where this professionalization work can take place, as a site of experiential, cross-disciplinary, cross-rank, academic-industry collaboration", "a space of contact for graduate students from the humanities and STEM disciplines who are approaching issues of shared concern" (ibid.) and a space of contact for both "digital natives" and "apprentice-research assistants" (Murphy and Smith 2017), creating a network of "decentralized learning and teaching processes [along with research strategies] which are detached from spatial and temporal constraints" (Heidkamp and Kergel 2018: 43).

5.4 Synergies with the Bologna Strategy

Digital competencies have become indispensable qualifications of a successful student or academic. A new DH centre supports the development of such qualification while pursuing several major objectives. In fact, many of them intersect with the aims of the Bologna Process: Building expertise in digital method use in teaching and research in the humanities contributes massively to the enrichment of the digital skill portfolio of both students and teacher-researchers. Currently, students, faculty members and researchers need to be interconnected via the Internet and need to use mobile applications, computer-mediated tools and interactive platforms in order to obtain/exchange information, practice/deliver/assess learning content, compile/analyse datasets and, ultimately, design/test/construct new digital products.

Even though digital-intensive research is not directly related to the policies proposed by the Bologna Process (such as ECTS and digital transcripts of records), it encompasses the use of computing infrastructures that enable the transfer from raw information to scientific outputs. "Sharing of database, IT infrastructure, knowledge and skills and much more" (Gupta and Muller-Birn 2018: 1663), associated with digitalization, are aspects that offer numerous improvements that engage both teachers and students in taking further steps towards the Europe of Knowledge. Dominated nowadays by the digital turn, HEIs' dynamics reveal that digitally enhanced environments contribute to organizing, processing, and analysing data and knowledge; facilitating higher visibility, transparency and accessibility for students from all backgrounds; creating equality for all learners, allowing comparable degrees and qualifications; and allowing for cooperation in quality assurance and harmonisation of the measures used in this process. All of these aspects succeed in providing a learner-centred and open HEI (focal points of the Bologna Process): an "education area with digital solutions" (Rampelt 2019). Moreover, the Bologna Process brings an increased demand for innovation and excellence in teaching and learning, which cannot be achieved without high quality of scientific work and research (Aparacc-Jelusić 2016: 76).

6   Conclusions

Digital humanities centres have the chance to become powerful education-support environments favourable to the proliferation of digital competences. At Eastern European HEIs in particular, any type of digital-intensive research strategies could foster developments in implementing digitalisation policies, thus echoing broader transformational changes. In our study, we have assessed the potential of DH centres, with a particular focus on EE systems, to act as an incentive for further progress in digitalisation reforms.

In order to do that, we have presented the challenges and opportunities in founding the CODHUS DH centre at a Romanian university. We envisage CODHUS to be a replicable project in any other EE university. The newly founded DH centre, like numerous others which have been more and more active and prominent lately on the European continent (see, for example, the project database of EADH[29] or ACDH-CH[30]), has an immense impact potential at the institutional level. Among other benefits, it facilitates cross-disciplinary collaborations in breakthrough areas while simultaneously creating visibility for international networking that can result in digital training and expertise building.

Launching such digital-intensive initiatives in the humanities aims at filling a Bologna Digital strategic gap by empowering research agents with the role of facilitating the access to and training and expertise building in digital methods and tools. Prioritizing the involvement of early-stage researchers can lead to their engagement as multipliers of excellence in their home institutions and countries. In our view, building research capacity that relies heavily on digital competences in humanities departments, especially in Eastern Europe, can have a bootstrapping effect on the Bologna Digital strategy at the regional level. Their existence should encourage the adoption of the latest developments in digital methods and tools, including the ones aimed at improving basic digital literacy skills in a change-reluctant research community, both as a historical-geographical group, i.e., the EE educational system, and a cultural-disciplinary group, i.e., the humanities. We argue that the founding of a DH centre is as a practical and effective digitalisation-promoting strategy that contributes to the rapid improvement of digital skills and technology-enhanced research expertise of all research agents—researchers, university teachers, and students—and their close academic environment.

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[29]More information at: http://eadh.org/projects.

[30]More information at: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/acdh/acdh-home/.

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Higher Education Institutions Towards Digital Transformation—The WUT Case

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Gabriela Grosseck, Laura Maliţa, and Mădălin Bunoiu

1 Introduction

We are now experiencing the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterized by the blurring of distinctions between technologies, physical, digital and biological spheres. Digital technologies are embedded in our everyday professional and personal lives (Schwab 2016).

How prepared are universities to embrace this industrial revolution? How prepared are educational leaders to harness the full potential of Industry 4.0 to the benefit of higher education's customers (students, faculty, staff, alumni, etc.), communities, and the society in general? Not really prepared.

Traditionally, universities are places where innovation is planned, tested and implemented; therefore, a continuously interdependent relation between universities and technologies should be envisaged. If they want to be successful, higher education institutions must combine technology with strategy in all areas. Recent studies (Wilms et al. 2017; Bond et al. 2018; Seres et al. 2018; Curaj et al. 2018) show that universities should provide learners with the skills and knowledge they need for a very different future. Moreover, as Rampelt et al. (2019) highlight, it is necessary to provide "a clear understanding on how digital technologies can enrich the student experience in the European Higher Education Area". The key element that will enable this is *digital transformation*.

What does digital transformation mean? As Clark (2018) indicates, digital transformation is a series of shifts that enable the transformation of "an organization's

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core business to better meet customer needs by leveraging technology and data". Beyond these things, digital transformation also requires changing an organizational culture, embracing new approaches, and a permanent evolution towards new and not yet well-defined practices. Thus, it is not just about disruption or technology it is about understanding that "technology and digitalisation are becoming a basic necessity for the society" (Curaj et al. 2018) and that they presuppose a significant change in terms of people's skills and jobs, the type of work they do, aiming to significantly impact all aspects of human life.

There is no consensus regarding a common definition or a commonly agreed model of *digital transformation*. This is partly the "consequence of the term in itself" (Mirea 2018), due to its use in almost any context, often superficially and without consistency. However, Ismail et al. (2017) indicate that digital transformation determines the rethinking of the role and impact of digital technologies from different perspectives: an individual, an institution or organization, a network, an industry or an entire ecosystem, society or economy as well as the digital era. Furthermore, there is no clear recipe for adopting and implementing such a strategy (Andrea et al. 2018).

Probably the most objective and accurate definition is given by Rampelt et al. (2019). As they see it, *digital transformation* is a "transformative process that substantially influences all activities of higher education institutions. It permeates all processes, places, formats and objectives of teaching, learning, researching and working in higher education. This digital transformation includes the development of new infrastructures and the increasing use of digital media and technologies for teaching and learning, research, support services, administration and communication, but also the need of students and staff to develop new (digital) skills for their current and future workplaces". Therefore, digital transformation is a complex and continuous transition where numerous education stakeholders—learners, teachers, the administrative staff (including the IT department), as well as the broader community—must work together closely.

In order to meet the demands of the future, universities must evolve and be driven by competition (Pucciarelli and Kaplan 2016), profit (McCowan 2017; Sperling 2017), customer experience and agility (Zervina and Stukalina 2019), and a strong focus on students (Curaj et al. 2018, Orr et al. 2019). To achieve these imperatives, tomorrow's higher education institutions will need to adapt and embrace technology (Crittenden et al. 2019), action-based models and life-long learning (Christensen and Eyring 2011). In many ways, students have digital skills, starting from online shopping using a smartphone and going as far as remotely adjusting the temperature in their homes. As a result, they expect the universities where they are enrolled to also widely adopt new digital technologies like virtual and augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), etc. There are many ways to apply a digital transformation: recruiting students digitally (by using social media), enrolling and registering them digitally (i.e. via their mobile phones), providing a variety of online services and learning options (including blended and flipped courses), monitoring their learning progress as well as partnering with the industry to enhance their career opportunities.

As indicated in the DESI report (2019), compared to other European countries, Romania is among the countries with the lowest investment in the field of digital education. Unfortunately, although different initiatives have been taken lately, and various policies and strategies have been proposed in the last years, progress towards real digital development in higher education (such as the digital transformation of the Romanian university space, the governance of the university in the digital age, the certification of competences and the recognition of diplomas, pedagogical innovations or digital skills training) is still slow.

Following recommendations put forward by, for example, HEA (2019), Curaj et al. (2018), Menendez et al. (2016), PWC (2015) every university should set up in its strategy clear and concrete goals towards its digital transformation, taking into consideration three main areas (Code for Romania 2019): its digital infrastructure, the development of its academic staff's skills to use digitally-based methods in their teaching and the improvement of its students' digital skills.

The present paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, the digital portrait of West University of Timisoara (WUT) is briefly made in the next section. In the third section, we describe the research methodology that we have applied in our study, while in the fourth part, we present and interpret the research results. In the fifth section, we touch upon what we perceive to be limitations of our study, and we make suggestions for further research. The article is rounded off by a conclusion section.

2 WUT Digital Portrait

West University of Timişoara is the main higher education institution and research pole in Western Romania. Its community comprises roughly 16000 students and 700 academics. A comprehensive university, it hosts 11 faculties with their respective departments, as well as a Department of Teacher Training. WUT's faculties offer nationally accredited study programmes at Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. level in STEM, Humanities, Social Sciences, Performing Arts, Economics and Law. WUT is thus a comprehensive university fostering a multi- and inter-disciplinary approach to higher education and research, an innovative institution that aims at broadening its students' professional and personal horizon.

The university's strong focus on quality within an increasingly international and globalized academic world is endorsed by its affiliation to various regional, European and international higher education associations, as well as its position in world rankings (for example, the Times Higher Education Emerging Economies University Rankings Top 201–250, in 2018, the QS Rankings by Subject Top 150–200 in the field of Modern Languages, in 2017, or the Shanghai Ranking by Subject Top 301–400 in the field of Physics, in 2018). Additionally, the university's international recognition comes from alumni, with a notable example being Herta Müller, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009. WUT offers its students the opportunity to combine theoretical and practical knowledge in a multi- and inter-disciplinary

environment, preparing them to become successful actors on the globalized labour market.

WUT has signed over 450 bilateral agreements that allow exchanges in the Erasmus+ and EEA Grants programmes and with HEIs worldwide. Moreover, WUT benefits from a modern and fully equipped library as well as language and culture centres (Chinese, Portuguese, German, Spanish, etc.). Last but not least, the student campus is constantly growing, in keeping with the principles of sustainable development. The campus (located in the heart of the city) is in itself an attraction, with various opportunities for leisure and living in a city which was elected European Cultural Capital for 2021.

With digital transformation, WUT is facing a great paradigm shift to be implemented at organizational, cultural and technological level. The university provides complex digital services to its staff and students, to educational stakeholders and visitors, through several departments (IT, Continuing Education and Distance Learning, Communication, Image and Institutional Marketing). Thus, in order to keep its relevance and remain competitive in today's digital era, WUT makes efforts connected to investments in information technology infrastructure and advanced infrastructure systems, the digitalization of operations, the implementation of smart campus infrastructure, the increase and constant improvement of digital literacy amongst its academics, students and administrative staff, the change of the current working style while concurrently adding new techniques, tools and capabilities, the reshaping of its digital culture, strengthening trust in new technologies like cloud computing, artificial intelligence or blockchain, investments in its social media presence, etc.

Generally speaking, for WUT, digital transformation is not only a technological change but also an organizational change at the intersection of technology, business and people. It actually means developing a digital way of thinking by adopting and perpetuating a new mindset. We can say that, on the one hand, WUT's top executives think digitally, they are open and embrace innovation in the university. On the other hand, the academic community is encouraged to constantly seek active solutions in order to streamline activities with the help of digital tools, proposing new functionalities via the university intranet system. Moreover, WUT is also actively anchored in the digital life of the city's broader community, every semester holding various events related to digital and emerging technologies (workshop on blockchain or open robotics, open cultural hackathon, etc.).

3   Methodology

For this study, we resort to a series of digital transformation and strategy elements mentioned in the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Digital Education Action Plan, the EU Agenda for Higher Education and Bologna Process, the National Competitiveness Strategy 2014–2020, the National Strategy of Romania 2020–2030, and WUT's Rector management program for 2020–2024 (Pirtea 2019) that place emphasis on the modernization of the educational infrastructure.

The conceptual journey for digital transformation starts with an exploratory study meant to clarify, define and identify the basic issues, problems and opportunities related to WUT digital transformation based on its students' opinions. Here are some questions addressed, some still awaiting final answers:

– Is WUT creating an inspiring digital environment for students? (What are the tools, apps and technologies that help them do their work more effectively in a digital ecosystem?)
– How does WUT engage and communicate with its students in a digital way?
– Do students easily find information about courses and drill down into richer course content and communities?
– Do students have a range of options for where to learn and how to make use of learning materials?
– Are teachers digitally prepared?
– Are there any digital channels that support students in their academic achievement?
– Do students understand their performance and potential?
– Are there any possibilities to initiate research, track their progress and collaborate with other students? Does WUT encourage digital collaboration across disciplines for research purposes?
– Are there any platforms highlighting student communities, extra-curricular activities or discounts in the local area?
– Are students prepared for a digital life after graduation?

3.1 Method

In this study, we have used the COBIT Model (Control Objectives for Information and Relevant Technology). COBIT is a business optimization tool that can help academic institutions tackle the current challenges in the arena of digital transformation (Gunawan et al. 2018) by offering effective practices (Khther and Othman 2013) through a framework, and lays down activities in an organized and flexible structure (ISACA 2018): What are the Drivers? Where are we now? Where do we want to be? What Needs to Be Done? How Do We Get There? Did We Get There? How Do We Keep the Momentum Going?

Based on the recommendations of Zahari et al. (2018) and Rampelt et al. (2019) to draft a conceptual university digital transformation design, we address here the first three steps only: 1. understanding the context and strategy by placing emphasis on the drivers and game changers towards digital transformation. 2. evaluating where our university is now, and what the current trends towards the acceptance of digital transformation are and 3. defining improvement targets, analysing gaps and identifying potential perfection.

3.2 Data Collection

For collecting the research data, we distributed an online questionnaire with 33 questions, via our learning management system, to Bachelor's and Master's students. Data collecting was performed between the end of October and the beginning of November 2019, with 111 respondents. Of the 111 respondents, 101 are Bachelor's students and only 10 are enrolled in Master's programs. Most students (82) come from the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, and some are enrolled in the Communication Studies program (20), while the remaining of them represent a range of other fields of study. 26 of the students indicated that they were males, 80 said they were females, and 5 did not want to specify their gender.

The results obtained, the size of the research sample and the length of the questionnaire renders our small scale research a useful starting point for further and more complex analysis, which we intend to carry out at our university in the spring of 2020.

4 Data Analysis and Interim Results

Digital Communication for Educational Purposes
Valuable insights can be gained and reflected on by starting out from listening to the students. The students who completed the questionnaire are savvy, better connected (especially mobile), digitally sophisticated, they bring their own digital world expectations into the university, and they are more vocal than their predecessors. Given that 92% of the students use mobile Internet for social activities, we would have expected that they use the world wide web for other purposes extensively, too. Unfortunately, their answers to the questionnaire indicated that their use of academic services is not as wide as we expected it to be (see Fig. 1), with one exception, however—most of them (105) check their email daily, this being their main means of communication and getting academic information.

The students enrolled in remote study programs are especially interested in learning options, as they can take advantage of more flexibility when it comes to their study time. Distance learning programs may make WUT more inclusive and appealing to those students who need to work or to support their family while studying, to mature and international students who may find it difficult to take part in a full-time degree.

As can be seen in Fig. 2, the students prefer to gather information and to communicate via the email discussion groups (SD = 1.61), WhatsApp groups (SD = 1.58), via students' organisation website (SD = 1.57) or the department website (SD = 1.45).
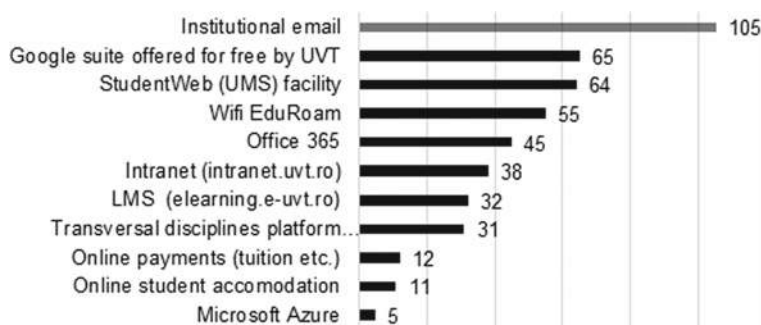
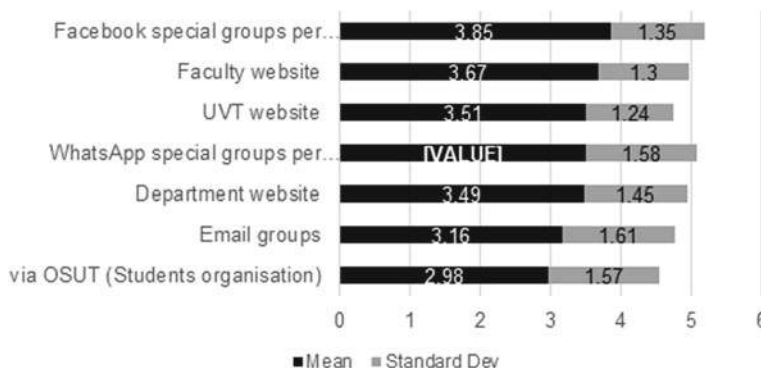**Fig. 1** Use of institutional IT services by the students

Fig. 2 Distribution of responses to the question "My information on the requirements of student activity is available ..." (on a scale from 1 to 5: not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely)

4.1 Impact of Digital Technologies in Education

Although WUT shows a clear interest in digitalization, the students find the use of technology for educational purposes not to keep up with the latest technological developments. A small percentage of the WUT teachers integrate digital applications and tools into their pedagogical practices (see Fig. 3).

Moreover, the students feel that not all teachers have the necessary skills and confidence to use digital tools in their teaching activity. Thus, a major concern for the university becomes how to effectively implement these technologies so that both the students and their teachers should make the best out of them. The progress made in introducing technology into education is still low in the case analysed.

As one can see in Fig. 4, the students would like a better use of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment activities. For this purpose, they want to have digital media, including interactive digital textbooks, they want the use of Augmented, Virtual and Mixed Reality, 3D technologies and experiences, holograms and even drones.
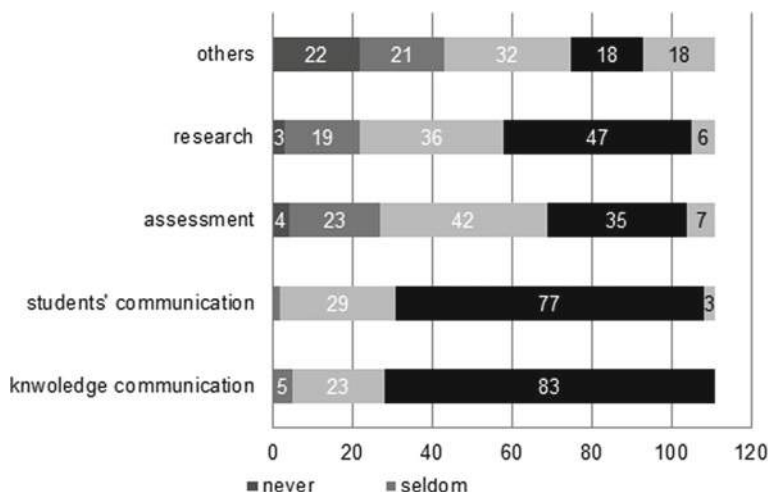
Fig. 3 Distribution of responses to the question "How effectively are your teachers integrating digital technologies in their pedagogical practices to enhance student experience?"
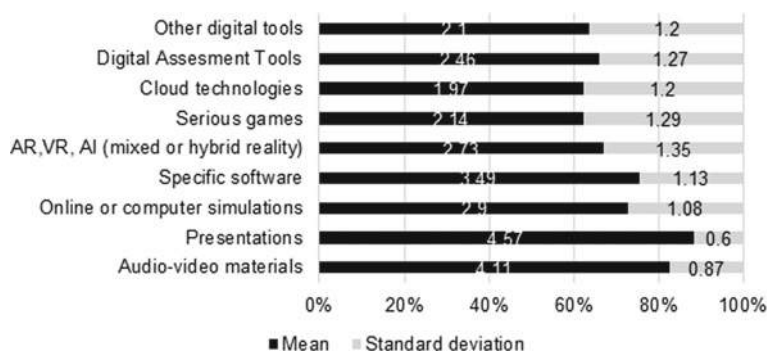

Fig. 4 Distribution of responses to the question "Which of the following digital tools and applications are used in teaching activities?

The students seem to be no longer interested in PowerPoint presentations (SD = 0.6) or YouTube videos (SD = 0.87). If the students suggest the use of augmented and virtual reality (SD = 1.35), of serious games (SD = 1.29), different digital tools for assessment (SD = 1.27) or cloud technologies (SD = 1.2), then why not introduce specific software into WUT that may bring direct benefits to geography or history students for, let us say, virtual tours in China, to physics students, for an astronomy course in virtual reality or to psychology or physiotherapy students, for a 3D course in anatomy?

Almost 40% of the students claim that there is a lack of online resources in Romanian language, and that there is no system for curating educational content such as bibliographic references which can be downloaded and shared. How to encourage

sharing of Open Education Resources and Open Educational Practices is an issue that needs to be addressed in the future.

4.2   Learning and Teaching with Digital Technologies

It follows from the students' questions that they want to explore new teaching methods, hybrid teaching models (flipped classrooms, blended learning, etc.) and that they usually take it for granted that they should benefit from innovative teaching techniques, personalized learning, and digital experiences. The greatest majority of the students (82%) declared that they do not have the opportunity to work on laptops or other portable devices in the classroom and, therefore, they cannot take digital notes during the courses. Moreover, there is the impediment that some of the teachers do not even accept such methods in their classes.

4.3   Digital Literacy (Knowledge, Skills and Confidence to Use New Technologies)

The students perceived both their teachers and the administrative staff to lack confidence and become nervous when it comes to using new digital technologies and engaging in digital spaces. On the other hand, not all students use technology effectively for learning or in other educational contexts. An equally important fact that they pointed out is the adaptation of the IT department team's competences, 71% of the students saying that it is necessary for them to be obviously open to the needs of the academic community and to support digital initiatives more willingly.

The most important obstacle (Fig. 5) that the students mentioned is the lack of sufficient computers (16%) and of portable devices (12%) with an Internet connection. However, in order for WUT to embrace the digital world and to make sure that its students are getting the most from new technologies, it should take into consideration the students' expressed desire for setting up of an e-learning centre (15%) that should offer them the possibility of developing their digital skills (e.g. not all specializations have a curriculum that includes computer science or ICT disciplines), of printing, photocopying or binding documents (13%), software applications and skills of analysing and solving problems with the help of digital technologies (6%); the extension of the Transversal Competencies Program offer (8%); the recognition of the credits obtained via MOOC courses (13%), etc.
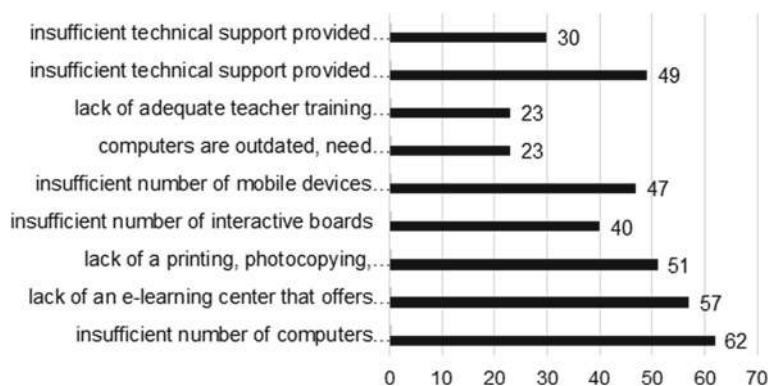
Fig. 5 Distribution of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the obstacles hindering the digital transformation of WUT?

4.4 Teachers' Adaptability to Change

In order to introduce innovation and technology into their activities, teachers need the right environment, infrastructure, devices and technical support from WUT. A recent measure taken by the WUT management is the "One laptop for each teacher" program. Thus, the purchase of 540 laptops was finalized (the status of the purchase can be tracked on https://achizitii.uvt.ro/dashboard, as proof of the transparent decision-making process in the institution). This is, undoubtedly, a big step forward as far as the digitalization of WUT is concerned, but the process is by no means concluded. As noted by 78% of the students, an approach is needed that combines teacher training, educational programs and appropriate educational materials so that digitally supported didactic processes should extend.

4.5 Digital Learning Environments

The students seem to no longer be satisfied with the typical classrooms, with banks lined up, a teacher in front of them, books and copybooks on the desks, etc. 63% of them would like alternative furniture that encourages creativity and digital collaboration, proper ventilation of the classrooms (especially of the large ones, such as amphitheatres), adequate sound systems, and the possibility of darkening the rooms for film or video clips. 73% of the students indicate the need for comfortable seats in the classrooms. Also, 64% of them require mobility (good wireless connectivity, especially in the amphitheatres), more electric plugs in seminar classrooms and smartboards. Basically, the students express their wish for redesigning the learning spaces in the university.

4.6   Digital Campus

34% of the students say that they want a vibrant campus with appropriate digital facilities. Thus, alerts about potential difficulties encountered (and thus prevention of dropout), the collection of data on the duration and timing of projects or other activities would be done in real-time. Another interesting aspect suggested by 29% of the students is that digital technologies can also be used during WUT Open Doors Days when prospective students come to the university and have the chance to explore the academic environment in depth.

4.7   Digital Technologies to Support Administrative Activities and Mobility in Education

Most students identify improvement of the services addressed to them as the main benefit of implementing new technologies in the university. Overall, students want electronic cards and a "paperless WUT", a university that equips students with knowledge, skills and competencies, which will turn them into conscious advocates of a sustainable Europe and hence, into active EU citizens. They expressed their desire for:

– easy access to the information systems available in the university, other than those offered by their own faculty (13%);
– integration with industry 4.0, collaboration and partnership with international organizations and industries (preparing students for the job market—19%);
– an online admission to the university (13%);
– a simplified enrolment procedure (16%): the students underlined that the enrolment process must be unsophisticated and clear, and that the students' progress should be easy to track online;
– soft-skills practice as part of their curriculum;
– digital assessment (16%);
– dedicated apps (18%): mobile orientation applications in WUT physical spaces, the possibility to schedule meetings with their teachers online, to send requests to secretaries, to be able to make contactless and mobile payments, etc.;
– secure use of student data and access to academic results (15%) (in this sense, WUT has completed the acquisition of an IT monitoring service for course attendance and for electronic catalogues);
– reduction of administrative procedures (19%);
– a platform on which all kinds of documents can be accessed (18%);
– ERASMUS students want access to the services to which the Romanian students are entitled (6%);
– other online students' services (21%): cultural passports, orientation in the city, etc.

4.8   Data Protection, Security and Confidentiality

42% of the students say they know what GDPR is, 17% do not know and 41% say they have an idea but do not know for sure what it is. On the other hand, some of the students do not know what kind of data is collected by WUT (there is no clear reference on this matter), and what the operations and activities required to process this data (including evaluation) are. In addition, the vast majority of the students expressed their concern that, at the level of WUT, there is no online code of conduct, nor the possibility of reporting abuse or harassment in the online environment. However, there is an online service via which complaints, suggestions or recommendations may be filed, but it is not specifically dedicated to matters connected to the digital environment (https:// www.uvt.ro/ro/sps-uvt/).

4.9   Social Media Presence

One positive thing mentioned by the students is that WUT has a "voice" on social media platforms. There are Facebook pages of WUT and its faculties and even of some of its departments, Instagram accounts, live streaming of events, etc., administered either by the Students' Union (OSUT) or by the Image and Communication Department. The information is constantly updated, and its direct impact on potential and current students and graduates (alumni) is thus guaranteed.

As can be seen in Fig. 6, 80% of the students are familiar with and use the Facebook pages. To a lesser extent, students use Instagram (11%) or other university social platforms (less than 10%).
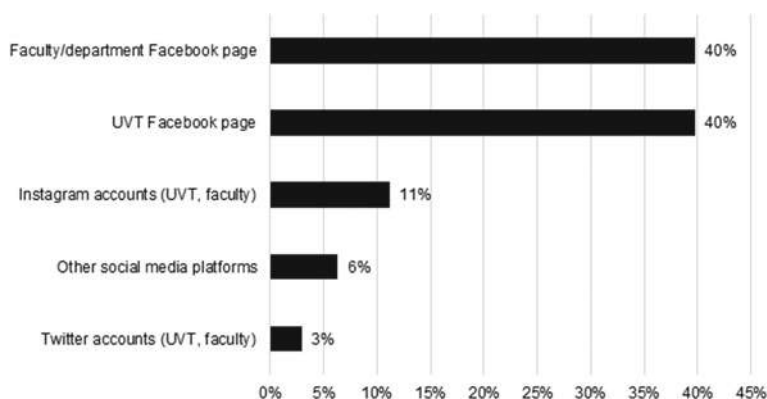

Fig. 6 Distribution of responses to the question "Do you follow the social media accounts of the university?

On the other hand, if students want teachers to have blogs or informal spaces of expression, to interact with them through digital and social media, not all teachers feel comfortable to be involved in students' social media communities (Facebook or WhatsApp groups). Some are afraid of negative reactions or criticism posted as comments. Too much involvement can also be harmful (for example, if the content of the courses is extensively talked about in the online media, the students may consider that, once they already know much of what is going on, attending them becomes unnecessary).

4.10   Lessons Learned and Discussion

As far as possible, we prefer to refer to barriers to going digital as *action priorities* for digital transformation. Based on our findings, some of which are highlighted in the WUT Rector's Managerial Program for 2020–2024 (Pirtea 2019), we identified some opportunities which can be easily implemented in our university. Overall, more than half of the students surveyed expect a change, a disruption in the current university model within the next 2–3 years. These students' optimism regarding such a narrow time span for change will be interesting to track in the future research we intend to carry on in the spring of 2020.

Along the journey to digital transformation, there are some specific action priorities to be considered in order to **develop a digital strategy**; or, more precisely, a business strategy that fits the digital age:

– **Developing a digital teaching and learning policy** that clearly and relevantly reflects the support for high quality education, for the development of the digital skills of the academic community, the stimulation of innovation in the institution, the provision of a framework for the issuance of certified digital qualifications and for the validation of the acquired digital skills (e.g. MOOC courses) that are reliable, multilingual and can be stored in professional profiles (e.g. CV EuroPass). In addition, there should be a clear policy for social media use in the university.
– **Changing the teaching methods currently in wide use is becoming a necessity**. Thus, in order to be able to align with the rapid pace at which the world is changing, the traditional methods of teaching in WUT must be changed with new ones that promote the students' digital skills and abilities as well as their flexibility of thinking.
– **Creating a new team structure** consisting of both teaching and administrative staff from various in-house departments as well as external consultants and experts from fields such as learning and knowledge, research in leading areas such as AI, blockchain, etc., marketing and communication and, of course, business digital transformation, software architects and User Experience Design specialists. We must focus on assessing the digitalization needs and the digital maturity of our institution in order to understand what triggers them both and to be able to design functional and viable digitalization solutions:

- *Development of top strategies and practices aimed at introducing and applying digital technologies in education* (but not only), which meet curricular standards not only in Romania but also at world level.
- *Testing how the WUT brand is perceived on the educational market* (by applying surveys, monitoring the social channels, etc.).
- *Support ongoing development of digital literacy skills* for the entire academic community.
- *Adjusting, modernizing educational forms and practices to take advantage of new digital technologies.* For that, it is useful to have a training portal for digital tools and apps, support content and access to all WUT e-learning platforms, a hub of interactive open educational resources that may become a place where students' educational projects have their own space for dissemination (and obtaining funding).
- *Development of career guidance methodologies focused on the needs of the* students, correlated with the skills needed in the IR4.0 era but also taking into consideration the age and individual characteristics of each student.
- *Optimization of study offers to support of employability* (in the 2019–2020 academic year, WUT launched the first Digital Media program at bachelor level).

- **Improvement of existing digital platforms.** The Moodle e-learning platform needs to become more user-friendly. In addition, it is necessary to create and implement integrated digital educational tools to enable innovative management at the institutional level.
- **Working with industry partners.** For example, the partnership with Google can be extended, not only to provide G-suite (Google Apps for Education) to students and educators but to offer different programs, projects and resources to develop applied skills for the future.
- **By using advanced (learning) analytics**, the university can support and improve academic performance, employability rates, student progress and student retention. Currently, Moodle is used rather as a repository of lecture notes from which the students download materials. Thus, it provides little benefit to the students and restricted provision of data for use in analytics. On the other hand, students' analytics are a great ally for university IT leaders to improve their experience. Regarding the learning environment, it is necessary to have *informal learning and functional research spaces that are fully equipped from a digital perspective* (functional Wi-Fi in each room, projector and laptop, etc.).
- **Exploiting innovations in the field of mobile technology** in order to improve the educational process (for example, there is eduroam, but mobile applications are needed for orientation, communication purposes, etc.).
- **Reinforcing cyber security** by adopting appropriate safety measures and accreditations. For instance, WUT may make use of IoT for assuring physical security on campus by using drones for surveillance.
- **Launch of artificial intelligence pilot projects.** An AI conversational interface for the admission process, or for online talks with the teachers, the existence of a chat bot to answer queries via the web or the phone or other virtual assistant

technology which can allow students to be engaged in constructive and helpful dialogues may prove vital for the implementation of the digital transformation envisaged.

- **Leverage cloud technologies** to drive innovation. Although WUT currently has this possibility, it is not resorted to widely enough, there is lack of trust in it or concerns for reliability, security or resilience.
- **Increase financial allocations** (significant fundraising and development) for programs that support the digitization of education but also for those academics concerned with continually developing their digital skills and developing new innovative teaching techniques.
- **Continuing to strengthen a climate of digital culture** across a range of social channels, web sites and apps.

This digital journey is a complex process, which has not been completed yet. Although the data we analysed provided interesting insights into WUT digital transformation and respond to our research questions, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, our study is an exploratory one. Secondly, it is based on a small set of answers from a limited number of respondents that do not include potential future students, postgraduate students, and alumni. Thirdly, the respondents came mainly from two subject groups (sociology and psychology)—this limits our analysis since students in other fields of study may see things differently and thus alter the results obtained so far.

To conclude, this research aimed to identify how digital transformation affects West University of Timisoara and its nearest academic community. Based on a quantitative analysis of students' experience how WUT can prepare and transform in order to adopt an integrated digital approach, it can be concluded that WUT must take significant steps toward implementation of digital transformation, being also watchful and cautious of its hidden implications.

5 Where to Next?

In the future, digital transformation should concern areas and stakeholders other than merely the academic community (board members, teachers and researchers, undergraduates, postgraduates, alumni, potential future students, the administrative staff). The government and public institutions, the civil society, the business industry may all be looked at through the digitalization lens.

Despite the visible steps forward already taken, there is still a long road ahead, but for the moment, WUT can be considered a university that wishes to transform itself into an agile and vibrant institution with its own digital personality. In this respect, WUT is committed to being a leader in establishing strong digital goals and programs for its own practices and has already tied these efforts to education and research programs. The WUT Strategic Plan for 2016–2020 (WUT 2016) emphasizes both student inclusion and academic excellence in the conviction that well-educated

students from all backgrounds are needed to build a sustainable future and a fit for the digital age university.

The current and future digital transformation solutions implemented by WUT are focussed on creating new learning experiences, new learning paths, new ways of collaborating for research purposes, developing policies to better connect open educational resources, open science and innovation. The experience gained here and in other universities undertaking similar journeys can constitute the basis of a national strategy for the digital transformation of all higher education institutions in Romania and can be relevant to the European Higher Education Area, too.

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"Bologna Digital"—Actively Shaping the Digital Transformation in European Higher Education

Dominic Orr, Florian Rampelt, and Alexander Knoth

1 Introduction—The Challenge of Digitalisation

Digitalisation has been a hot topic in policy and the media for the last few years. At its most ambitious, it should lead to: "The transformation of all sectors of our economy, government and society based on the large-scale adoption of existing and emerging digital technologies." (Randall et al. 2018). But this citation, although helpful, also highlights the challenge. Digitalisation does not specify what type of goals it is ultimately following—aside from the "adoption" of technologies. It does not answer the 'why' question. Furthermore, it also doesn't answer the 'how' question—i.e. how this "transformation" will happen. This insight uncovers a first set of key factors to consider in the context of digitalisation in higher education.

It might be said that on a theoretical and strategic level, the term 'digitalisation' is conceptually empty—well nearly. In his recent book on digitalisation in society, the sociologist Armin Nassehi charts 'digitalisation' as a social process which began with modern society's wish to create sociological types through quantitatively classifying information—in order to build the societal institutions and practices which make up our daily lives: e.g. to build tax systems, health systems, legal systems and the education system (Nassehi 2019). With the increasing amount of information, even more categories can be constructed, and societal institutions further differenti-

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ated. This uncovers opportunities for creating new user groups, for developing new practices and can lead to social and economic change.

However, digitalisation is usually seen in connection with technical innovations—as best shown with the term "blockchain", which could currently be characterised as an innovation trying to find a problem to solve (YouTube could be viewed as an early example of this, too). Many of these types of innovation have been documented for higher education annually in the Horizon Trends reports (cf. Adams Becker et al. 2017). This has been typical for the innovation debate in most societal fields. In his analysis entitled "The innovations of society", Walter Rammert criticises this narrow view of innovation (Rammert 2010). He shows that no technical innovation would have had an effect without accompanying changes in societal processes and vice versa. So what this means is that reports such as the Horizon Trends Report and similar may increase the awareness of the potential for innovation, but they do not link current practice to these technologies. This would be a key precondition for ensuring that digitalisation can really unfold the types of potential expected of it. A shorthand way of saying this is that digitalisation should be seen as a social innovation.

There is a second set of key factors which are important to consider in the context of digitalisation. These refer to the type of organisational structures common in a higher education system. A central tenet of governance concepts for higher education that were developed in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the early 1990s was the objective to ensure that HEIs could be autonomous institutions, steered, but not directly governed by the state. They should also diversify their funding streams and develop sharper institutional profiles along the lines of being entrepreneurial universities. However, the university is a special organizational form with several organisational tiers that are only loosely linked, and this makes a coherent strategy difficult (Jongbloed 2015; Stensaker & Benner 2013). This situation is no different for digitalisation, which indeed presents new opportunities for further profile building—but does not solve this inherent challenge of the organisational form 'university' (Orr et al. 2019b; Schmid & Baeßler 2016).

This fact may explain a central finding from a German study on digitalisation in the university. According to a study by Gilch et al., although 44% rate the significance of digitalisation for their institution as 'high', only a fifth of the universities in Germany rate the overall level of digitalisation as 'quite high' (Gilch et al. 2019)—see Fig. 1. This problem leads to the current development in the field of digitalisation of universities: most universities are increasingly incorporating digital technology into existing processes (Orr et al. 2019b). In organizational theory, this is called an 'operational approach' (Evans & Wurster 1997). But technology also enables completely new models in higher education, which represent a transformation of higher education—a 'strategic approach' (ibid.). These strategic approaches are currently largely developing outside or on the edge of the university system (Orr et al. 2019a).
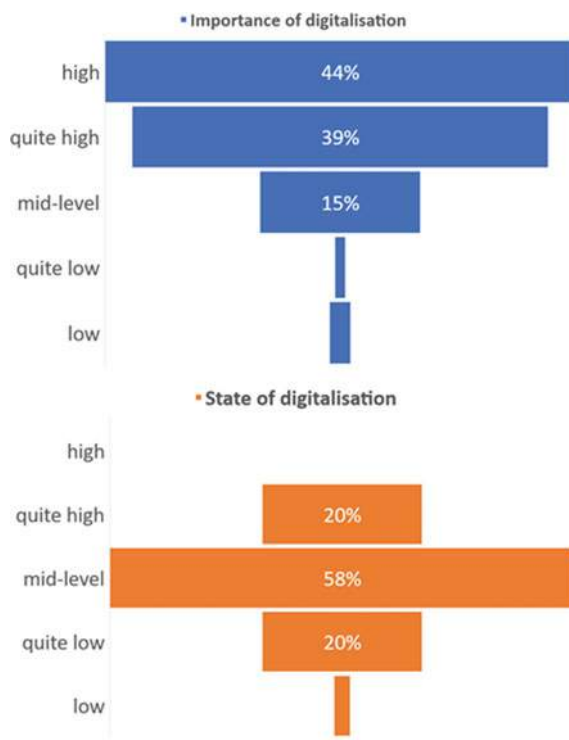
2 How Directed Policy and Strategy Might Help

Within the context of the Bologna Process, the potential of digitalisation for improving learning has been recognised. Indeed, the Yerevan Communiqué of 2015 stated: "We will encourage and support HEIs and staff in promoting pedagogical innovation in student-centred learning environments and in fully exploiting the potential benefits of digital technologies for learning and teaching." (Yerevan Communiqué 2015)

However, as argued in the previous section, this can only happen if the 'why' and 'how' questions are more clearly defined. This paper describes the initiative entitled 'Bologna Digital', which was launched in 2017 by the authors and some of their colleagues, with the goal of further specifying this potential.

'Bologna Digital' was a process initiated by a small group of authors,[1] who were active in the area of higher education research, policy and practice and unilaterally felt that the topic of digitalisation in higher education was not being given enough attention in the European Higher Education Area. The initiators were concerned that this

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[1]These people were, in alphabetical order: Alexander Knoth (University of Potsdam, then DAAD), Dominic Orr (FiBS Research, then Kiron), Florian Rampelt (Kiron, then Hochschulforum Digitalisierung), Ronny Röwert (Kiron), Renata Suter (Kiron) and Peter van der Hijden (external consultant).

important topic was being neglected in the agenda-setting parts of the Bologna Process (in the Bologna Follow-up Group and the thematic working groups),[2] although digitalisation had a lot to offer for fulfilling the main objectives of the Bologna Process. Moreover, the group had noticed a development whereby technologies were being applied within HEIs but not in a systematic way, which meant that digitalisation would not be able to fulfil its potential for improving teaching and learning for students in Europe. For this reason, the authors chose to launch a White Paper in 2019 as an agenda framing instrument, in the hope that this might lead to digitalisation entering the European higher education discussions in a more systematic and strategic way. With this, the authors followed a common route encouraged by the mantra of evidence-based policy, but with few certain rules for securing success (Oliver & Cairney 2019).

The White Paper entitled "Bologna Digital 2020" (Rampelt et al. 2019) was drafted by the authors of this article after two international expert workshops in 2018 and 2019 and published in May 2019. It goes back to a first iteration of a paper from early 2018.

Right from its first iteration, the drafting process of the paper followed the rules of agenda-setting laid down by John Kingdon is his classic theory of 'policy windows' (Kingdon 1993). Here Kingdon argues for an evolutionary approach to understanding policy implementation under the assumption that at any one time, there are competing issues, which could attain a policy focus, but only some of these actually do. His approach predicts that the success of an issue becoming a policy focus relies on the confluence of three 'streams'. They are: problem definition, policy streams and political streams.

Problem definition: According to Kingdon, under certain conditions, special configurations of social issues come to be recognised as a 'problem' by policymakers. To achieve this aim, the authors structured the White Paper around issues that had been highlighted in recent ministerial communiques as continuing challenges that needed to be solved to improve teaching and learning within the Bologna Process. An example is the goal of achieving a higher education system which reflects the diversity of national populations. Countless studies in the past had shown that this had not been achieved (Hauschildt et al. 2018; Orr & Mishra 2015) and the goal had been regularly expressed under the term "social dimension" in most of the ministerial communiques of the last 15 years (Yerevan Communiqué 2015).

Policy streams: Within a set social space, there are many problems which could be linked together in the form of a policy with a clear goal for change. Kingdon theorises that, at a certain time, some of these gain more attention than others. The authors of the White Paper were convinced that many policymakers and institutional leaders were, in fact, worried about the issue of digitalisation, but were not aware of how to utilise it in the higher education space. Perhaps they were even afflicted by the state of affairs described by technology adoption theory. It states: "The most important thing to observe [about technology adoption] is that at any point in time

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[2]For a debate of the agenda-setting and soft governance approach within the Bologna Process see: (Deca & Harmsen 2019).

the choice being made is not a choice between adopting and not adopting but a choice between adopting now or deferring the decision until later."(Hall & Khan 2003) So, it was the goal of the White Paper to make a clear link between the (unfulfilled) goals of the Bologna Process and the potentials held by digitalisation in order to encourage practice.

Indeed, digitalisation is a difficult topic to formulate as a policy that can achieve sufficient support. This is partly because the last ten years have been dominated in the educational space by the argument that higher education is broken and needs to be disrupted through digitalisation in order to fix it (Barber et al. 2013). There was a dominance of what can be termed a "Silicon Valley narrative" which highlighted the potential of technology to revolutionise sectors and expected very little of current incumbent institutions (Weller 2015). For instance, Christensen took his analysis of the difficulty for established institutions to adopt new innovations and applied it to higher education. He suggested that new entrants to the market could serve learners better through less "fussiness" about formal educational prerequisites and more agility (Christensen 1997; Christensen & Eyring 2011). It goes without saying that in most countries the 'policy window' for such a radical programme will be tightly shut.

The Bologna Digital initiative was, however, able to link to an emerging change in the general perspective on digitalisation. This change is perhaps best exemplified by the most recent Horizon Report from 2019. While this report has for nearly two decades been singularly focused on the new technologies expected to be adopted in the near future (see above), this year's edition places an emphasis on "rethinking how institutions work" (Alexander et al. 2019) and recognises that there is likely to be a slow evolution of organisational and procedural change in higher education not a radical disruption. Within the European space, the Trends Report from 2018 published by the European University Association showed a growing interest in the application of digitalisation to teaching and learning by the membership universities, who now "tend to see digitally-enhanced learning as a strategic element in developing and innovating learning and teaching" (Gaebel & Zhang 2018).

Political stream: The Bologna Process has been typified as a 'policy forum'. It sets out an agreed programme of action at the ministerial meetings every three years, and this plan is used to structure the work of working groups in the following three years. However, there are no sanctions foreseen within the process for countries that do not follow this programme. That is to say that it can only implement 'soft governance' (Deca & Harmsen 2019). That means that actual policy change will only happen at national level in the 48 member states, so the Bologna Digital initiative and White Paper too would not be able to directly affect policy but could only hope to shape it on national and institutional level. For this reason, the initiators aimed to involve national networks in the dissemination of their ideas and used national examples in the White Paper.

The next sections will lay out the main components of the Bologna Digital initiative. In Sect. 2, the authors present one of the six focal areas of the White Paper to show how Bologna goals were linked to the potential of digitalisation.

With this approach, the authors recognised two aspects about the discourse on digitalisation in higher education, which can be aligned to the policy space described by Matland. His model combines the dimensions of policy goal conflict and ambiguity of practice (Matland 1995). Firstly, regarding goal conflict, this tends to be high in the case of digitalisation as it is not yet agreed what central objectives should be pursued through digitally enhanced higher education. To this aim, the White Paper aimed to reduce the level of goal conflict by aligning its objectives to the central Bologna objectives. Secondly, regarding ambiguity on where and how to use digitalisation, it is also high, and this has led to many individual experiments, projects and small-scale initiatives. However, for a policy to be formalised and become more impactful, it should reduce the level of practice ambiguity. This can be achieved by highlighting examples of practice and encouraging peer learning. Section 3 describes approaches to peer learning by key stakeholders, which the initiators of Bologna Digital are linking to in order to shape a clear and less ambiguous policy and practice space for digitalisation within the EHEA. The final section presents some of the first outcomes and next steps connected with the Bologna Digital initiative.

3   Bologna Digital: Linking Bologna Goals to the Potential of Digitalisation

Using the framework described above, the Bologna Process initiators focused on the following key question for agenda-setting: *What are the needs and priorities of different stakeholders in the discourse on digitalisation in European higher education and how can they be linked to create a policy inertia, which leads to better integration of digitalisation in European higher education?*

Based on the streamlining of key processes in higher education and substantial feedback from different stakeholders during two workshops and an online consultation phase, six focus topics were identified and discussed as first priorities for the Bologna Digital discourse:

1. More Proactive Preparation, Admission and Transition
2. Skills for the Digital Age
3. New Mobility Patterns: Virtual Exchange and Blended Mobility
4. Recognition of (Prior) Learning
5. Quality Assurance
6. Strategies for teaching and learning

These were chosen as a focus for the White Paper to serve the purpose of consolidating support. To provide an insight into the White Paper discussion and the findings that have followed, one of these six focus areas is briefly presented in the following subsection.

3.1 Quality Assurance in the Context of New Providers and New Credentials

The establishment of quality assurance as a key element to higher education provision has been one of the success stories of the Bologna Process. It is also one of the key areas, which is being challenged by the digitalisation of learning provision.

In fact, quality assurance systems were seldom in 1999, when the Bologna Declaration was signed, but today there is a consensus that quality assurance is necessary to ensure accountability and support enhancement, and twenty-two countries have established external quality assurance agencies since the Bologna Process was launched (European Commission 2018). The agencies have the remit to assure the transparency of provision and to set threshold norms that must be fulfilled by higher education providers for the learning experience. These relate to infrastructure, staffing levels and qualifications, methods for developing curricula, but they also pay attention to performance indicators such as student completion rates and student satisfaction. It is recognized that quality assurance has been a key element in trust-building for higher education within society and for recognition between member states of the EHEA (Szabo & Tück 2018).

But digital approaches to learning provision remain subject to uncertainty—and this is why the authors chose it as a key issue for the White Paper. On the one hand, new forms of learning provision enable more flexible and more personal learning support. On the other hand, there are concerns about degree mills (i.e. providers with low-quality learning provision and assessment), fraud (i.e. the verification that a person really did complete a course or programme) and indeed lack of control and oversight in the formal education system. The White Paper argues that within the framework of the Bologna Process, clear standards and guidelines (cf. European Standards and Guidelines) have been established and these can be applied to digital learning in principle. But also that quality assurance systems will need to be adapted (cf. Huertas et al. 2018).

Existing criteria and measures for quality assurance must be renewed and supplemented to take appropriate account of digitalisation in teaching and learning and to ensure security and transparency for all student groups. If digital learning leads to students acquiring learning in many different settings, this less institution-focussed provision means that quality assurance must also be less institution-focussed and more learner-centric. Additionally, quality standards for digital technologies (and data) used in HEIs need to be discussed, as they contribute to the real *de facto* learning environment of the learner.

The White Paper also makes a link between quality assurance and recognition of learning, which have traditionally been seen within the Bologna Process as two separate (but linked) topic areas but which merge more strongly under the learner-centric perspective. In this context, stakeholders have discussed new methods and quality standards for qualification, certification and credentialing in recent years (Camilleri and Rampelt 2018).

A particularly interesting topic is the various concepts for so-called 'microcredentials'—i.e. small chunks of learning for which learners can obtain recognisable credentials. The European MOOC Consortium led by major MOOC platforms in Europe[3] had already suggested a 'Common Microcredential Framework (CMF)'. The White Paper adopted this concept but aimed to make it fit better into the existing Bologna study structures by proposing it as a new 'Fifth Cycle', to complement the existing short cycle, bachelor, master and doctorate cycles (first, second, third and fourth cycles, respectively).

So, the aim was to make a clear link between the challenges posed by digital learning and the capabilities and limitations of current quality assurance and recognition practices. In this way, the authors hoped to 'soften' the challenge of digitalisation and encourage work which would lead to trust-systems that could also be applied to digital learning.

4 Encouraging Peer Learning and Exchange to Shape Policy and Practice

There are two things we know about the topic of higher education and digitalisation: (1) higher education is multi-layer with a large amount of responsibility for activity at a low hierarchical level within universities and colleges, i.e. at faculty, school and individual level (Chou et al. 2017; Jongbloed 2015; Kogan & Becher 1980) and (2) innovation and digital transformation in teaching and learning is occurring at present, but it is just seldom reaching a widespread and organisational or strategic levels, e.g. it is more likely to remain the domain of projects (Orr et al. 2019b).

It is for this reason that an initiative hoping to change the mainstream higher education sector through new digitally enhanced policies and practices should try to link to these initiatives and 'pull them in' to the debates on strategic change on institutional and system level in the formal sector. This requires a so-called 'bottom-up' approach. The starting point of this approach is to support practitioners in the field, and its clear advantage is that it can benefit from the self-directed motivation of the initiators and their networks and is very focused on specific contexts in the field. This approach must then adopt activities to spread practices from a small group of active enthusiasts to the mainstream.

Bottom-up and 'grassroots' initiatives, being focused on their own context of practical implementation in the field, tend to have the disadvantage that they lack a realistic view of the whole system, and this might inhibit an adoption of their practices at scale (Punie et al. 2013). Furthermore, specific administrative or regulatory procedures might further restriction such adoption.

So, the Bologna Digital initiative focussed on the question: *Which approaches have proven to be particularly effective and transferable so far?* To this aim, the initiative used the White Paper to disseminate information about good practices in the

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[3]See: https://emc.eadtu.eu/partners.

field, while sketching key elements of the whole education system, including quality assurance and strategy building, to increase awareness of potentials, possible limitations and key success factors. Moreover, the initiative has additionally worked to foster network structures which encourage peer-learning and peer-exchange, e.g. in the hope spreading knowledge on how regulative and administrative issues that tend to clash with new digital initiatives can be overcome. The initiative consequently functions as a 'Living Lab', bringing together different stakeholders, gathering insights and examples and developing concrete outcomes for the future of European higher education. The initiators of Bologna Digital are actively involved in the following two peer learning approaches with the aim of achieving a cross-over from bottom-up practice to top-down strategy and policy.

4.1 HFD—Enabling Peer-to-Peer-Learning and Strategic Cooperation in Germany

Since its inception, the Bologna process has supported a kind of "educational cooperation" (Bologna Declaration 1999) that focuses on working together on strategic issues and learning from each other. This applies not only to the need for interinstitutional and intergovernmental cooperation but in particular to the need to work together on an individual level among key stakeholders.

In Germany, the Hochschulforum Digitalisierung (HFD) provides such networks for collaboration to different higher education stakeholders from students to teachers to HEI leadership (Hochschulforum Digitalisierung 2017). Among other activities, it has developed a unique peer-to-peer strategy approach for German HEIs. This peer-to-peer strategy consultation service is a developmental tool geared to HEIs that want to actively shape the digital transformation in higher education and strategically reinforce the digitalisation of teaching and learning. Accordingly, it is addressed in a targeted manner to HEI leadership and each HEI's individual profile and goals. Central to this free-of-charge programme are so-called peer experts, who accompany the HEI by contributing their own practical experience in the strategy process. From 2017 to 2019, more than one hundred different HEIs from Germany applied for the opportunity. A regular series of conferences allow for an even broader dissemination of the peer-to-peer-approach (Hochschulforum Digitalisierung)

The HFD work has become closely aligned to similar activities in the Netherlands by SURF. SURF is the collaborative organisation for IT in education and research and in 2017, SURF, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen, VH) presented the 'Acceleration Agenda for Innovation in Education'. This agenda intends to promote digital change in Dutch higher education and is, therefore, a perfect partner to HFD for enabling cross-country peer learning in this field.

4.2 DAAD—Enabling Peer Learning Within International Networks

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has recently developed a new funding instrument for HEIs and their international networks to foster collaboration through digitalisation. Digitalisation allows better networking and connectivity, but even with unconstrained information and data flows, the local conditions for access to higher education and open learning opportunities are usually limited to single institutions. Therefore, the programme "International mobility and cooperation through digitalisation" aims to strengthen cross-campus cooperation in Europe and beyond. Core to the programme is the removal of organizational obstacles, development of common standards and the implementation of interoperability of IT infrastructures. This initiative too includes a peer-to-peer learning approach within supported HEI networks to facilitate methodological skills development for faculty, lecturers and staff in order to develop shared and networked curricula. These objectives mirror and build on the Bologna Digital discourse.

Beyond these close links, Bologna Digital is becoming a reference point for the work of other organisations. For instance, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) is among several stakeholders who support peer learning across national and institutional borders. During in peer-to-peer activity in Warsaw (March 2019), they made explicit reference to Bologna Digital.[4]

5 Conclusion: The Topic of Digitalisation as an Enrichment for the Bologna Process and Its Future Relevance

All current theories on policy development concur that policymaking is not a linear process and policies and agendas will always be weighed up against each other. For this reason, it is also difficult to fully evaluate whether a specific initiative like Bologna Digital can really influence the policy building process and practice in higher education.

However, there are signs that this initiative has made it easier for policy and practice to work on the topic and, in this way, has contributed to minimising policy goal conflict and ambiguity of practice by making direct links to common themes from within the Bologna Process and providing realised examples of practice.

The current White Paper is partially based on a Position Paper that stimulated the discourse on digitisation in the European Higher Education Area as early as 2017. This first paper was shorter than the current White Paper and aimed explicitly at influencing the discussions leading up to the Ministerial Communiqué within

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[4]More information here: https://www.eurashe.eu/calendar/reversed-peer-learning-activity-learning-teaching-in-professional-higher-education-phe/.

the Bologna Process, which was released in May 2018. This version was able to obtain endorsements from the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), the Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) and the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), and it was being discussed within Bologna circles in the lead up to the ministerial conference. It appears that the work of the Bologna Digital initiative helped enrich and broaden the scope of discussion on teaching and learning and the Bologna goals in general as well as digitalisation in particular. Certainly, the draft communiqué from December 2017 had much less to say about digitalisation than the final communiqué from May 2018 (as evidenced by internal documents). The latter presented in more detail the opportunities digitalisation presents for teaching and learning and the need to adjust some of the regulations to facilitate the benefits. This may be the most that can be achieved within the complex negotiations for a ministerial communiqué agreed by 48 ministers responsible for higher education.

Also, in preparation for the work programme of the Bologna Follow-Up Group 2018–2020, there were discussions on how digitalisation could be taken forward in the next working period. It was decided that it should be a transversal topic for all work. This agreed with the principle of 'digital second' in the work of the Bologna Digital initiative, i.e. focussing on the social innovation regarding teaching and learning first, then thinking of how digitalisation can contribute to solving it (Rampelt et al. 2018).

Even with an interim assessment of the Bologna Digital initiative, there may be first lessons that can be learnt for other similar initiatives.

A heavy top-down approach to agenda-setting contains the risk that neither policymakers nor HEIs will explicitly take up the challenge of an integrative approach to digitalisation. That is why the Bologna Digital initiative and the White Paper specifically focus on encouraging activities in practice, to build a ground-swell of engagement and a wide exchange of successful practices.

Bologna Digital can be seen as an initiative which aims to combine discussions on top-down policy design and strategy development with bottom-up goal-setting and practice learning. With this combined approach, the initiative aims to create a stable policy framework and to recognise the practice space for implementing digitally enhanced higher education provision. Moreover, it wants to be an initiative supported and co-initiated by various strong actors in their respective national contexts. The informal character of the Bologna Digital initiative has increased the flexibility through which it can align with and encourages activities. However, it is of particular relevance that the results of such informal processes are transferred into the formal framework and the bodies of the Bologna Process. This is achieved, for example, through concrete impulses for the relevant working groups, in this case, especially the Advisory Group on Teaching and Learning, among others.[5]

On reflection, it is clear that the timing of the initiative (an important factor in the Kingdon model) was particularly opportune to achieving (at least in part) the

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[5]More information here: http://www.ehea.info/Upload/AG2_Learning_Teaching_2_Hearing_2.pdf.

Bologna Digital goals. The intention is that the link between Bologna goals and the potential of digitalisation will be even more visible in the communiques to come. But, the real impact of the initiative can only be assessed in the future. Certainly, on an informal level, it is noticeable that the topics and recommendations are already being broadly discussed. The initiators hope this also contributes directly to strengthening the future of the Bologna Process, as cooperation and collaboration will become even more central to higher education in the coming decade.

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