Graduate Education and the Promises of Technology: The European Policy Context

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European Policy Frameworks for Higher Education
Two distinct, occasionally overlapping, European policy frameworks have influenced developments in higher education on the continent over the last almost 15 years. The first one is represented by the Bologna process, an intergovernmental process currently involving 47 countries and the European Commission, with the aim of creating a European Higher Education Area. The second one has emerged as part of the European Union's overarching development strategies, first Lisbon (2000-2010), and then the Europe 2020 strategy (2010-2020). The EU's policy framework for higher education had as its main goal to stimulate, if not compel, higher education institutions to make a direct contribution towards the explicit targets and priorities of the respective overarching strategies.

The higher education dynamics in Europe during this period have not been exclusively a result of initiatives, regulations or, more generally speaking, "conditions" related to these two policy frameworks. Far from that, the work of higher education institutions has also been influenced, to different extents in different parts of Europe, by their own internal dynamics, decision-making, and initiatives; by national evolutions (including national higher education policy making); by larger international trends and developments; or by interactions between these factors. The fact remains, however, that the European policy frameworks played a very significant role as well. Higher education in Europe cannot be understood without taking them into account. They will also continue to have an impact in the near future. This is true for all levels of higher education (or "cycles", using the Bologna vocabulary), including its graduate layers, and for many particular aspects within each level. One could ask if this is also true with respect to technology.

We begin with two questions: Are there any relevant provisions as part of these policy frameworks with regard to the use of new educational technologies in graduate education? If such provisions exist, what is their impact to date and potential future impact?

The Impact of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon/Europe 2020 Strategies on Graduate Education
The very notion of "graduate education," the way it is currently understood in Europe, is largely a Bologna creation. The concept of a "master's program" did not exist at all in most European countries before Bologna. The understanding, organization, and delivery of doctoral education have been thoroughly transformed by Bologna. The Bologna process made possible a new, in fact unprecedented, space for dialogue in European higher education. This had a series of major consequences for graduate education. For example, it made it possible to arrive at a European definition of doctoral education, reflected primarily in the so-called Salzburg I and II principles (2005 and 2010). Beyond the mere definition, in operational (pedagogic, institutional) terms, the Bologna process supported a transition to a new model of doctoral education, reflected in the concept of the doctoral school. The adoption in 2005 of the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area contributed to further clarifying the distinctions among various cycles, and to the emergence of a common European reference for

both graduate and undergraduate education, by adopting European-wide, generic descriptors formulated in terms of learning outcomes, competences, and credit ranges. It can be stated that one of the main impacts of the Bologna process was conceptualizing graduate education (master's and doctoral,) broadly speaking, in the European Higher Education Area.

The impact of the EU's higher education policy framework was different, resulting from a different institutional anchoring of this framework and from a situation of direct subordination of higher education policy to the larger objectives and priorities of the Union. This includes the fact that, unlike Bologna, the EU policy framework for higher education was supported by relatively effective means and tools (including legislation and budgets). The EU's attention in graduate education was largely focused around the notions of research, mobility, and careers. For example, through a series of formal regulations and funding initiatives (and conditions) the EU finally defined doctoral education as being almost strictly about the production of research (even excluding the training of researchers). The EU embraced the position that doctoral students are actually not *students* but simply *researchers* (early stage), and that their role is not so much to learn but to produce research (immediately), a status that should be honored through a salary rather than a stipend. The EU promoted and funded a major series of initiatives to stimulate the mobility of doctoral students (or early stage researches) and master's students, primarily but not exclusively within the EU, such as the Marie Curie fellowships program, and the Erasmus Program. The EU promoted or supported an array of initiatives meant very specifically to promote the career advancement of doctoral graduates (for example through the EURAXES "researchers in motion" platform). The main concern as part of this policy framework in the area of graduate education appears to have been about mobility, careers and research, which in turn and together were expected to contribute directly to the economic (and also possibly social) strengths of the Union.

European Policy Frameworks for Higher Education and the Promises of Technology
It can be stated that for a long time only very little attention, if at all, was paid to matters of learning, pedagogy and contents as part of the two policy frameworks discussed here (this situation is changing currently). The focus was primarily on structures, for Bologna, on structures and on the research output for the EU. This was also reflected in the nature and magnitude of the provisions with regard to educational technologies. In the context of Bologna, one could come across some generic statements about the importance of ICT for higher education. Somewhat more specifically, at their last meeting (2012), the ministers responsible for higher education mentioned the need to promote "innovative methods of teaching that involve students as active participants in their own learning" (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012) but there is no mention of educational technology *per se* in this context. In short, there are basically no statements, initiatives, or any kind of major provisions regarding the link between graduate education and educational technology under Bologna. The situation is different for the EU.

The European Union endeavored to pay systematic attention to the use of technology in education in general. An e-learning program was adopted and funded starting in the early 2000's. The concern regarding the role of ICT for learning become a priority of what is called a "transversal" part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Program under Europe 2020 (which is not only about higher education). For the specific area of graduate education, one could observe recently that while the EU priorities remain focused around research (also connected with mobility and careers), the EU started to pay more and more attention to aspects relating to teaching and, in this context, also to educational technology. A recently appointed EU High-Level Group on teaching

in higher education is itself a premiere. The group's report put forward far-reaching recommendations to be considered by the EU member states. (High Level Group Report, 2013) They include recommendations regarding the use of new technology and pedagogic tools (by the teachers), language about the importance of online and open online courses. Although this particular development is still to be reflected in actual policies at the EU level, it appears to mark a significant step forward in the direction of a deeper engagement of the EU in promoting educational technologies for teaching and learning in higher education. The EU has already started or provided support for new major initiatives in this area. The first European MOOC platform, OpenupEd (OpenupEd, n.d.), was launched this year with financial and political support from the EU. This initiative is coordinated by the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), possibly the most important player in Europe in promoting the use of new technologies in higher education in Europe, including specific initiatives at the master's and doctoral levels. OpenupEd currently offers about 70 courses, also by non-EU universities. What is particularly "European" about this initiative is the fact that, reflecting the diversity of languages in Europe, courses are also offered in languages other than English.

There are a few other examples of policy "concerns," if not provisions, and also actual initiatives, aiming to take advantage of the "promises of the new technologies" for higher education, including graduate education, in the EU. The renewed attention to teaching and technology might reflect in part new developments and trends in the world but also the new objectives for higher education of the Europe 2020 strategy. They put forward quantifiable targets, such as about access and completion (40% of 30-34 years-old to complete a tertiary education degree), participation in lifelong learning (15% of all adults), "learning mobility" (20% of all students to have a period of study abroad), etc. (Europe 2020 Targets, n.d.). It is in a way not difficult to make the link between these objectives (mobility and access in particular) and the promises of the new technology. A serious policy discussion regarding the potential use of technologies in higher education, graduate education included, in the EU is very much at the beginning. Unlike earlier times, now this matter is clearly on the agenda. This discussion may result in important contributions at the level of the policy framework. As with other good policy initiatives in Europe, it is not clear how far and how fast it will go. This speaks for the need for higher education institutions themselves to reflect, plan, and act.

References

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