

Is “Bologna” the new “Guernica” of education?

Radu Baltasiu¹
University of Bucharest

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¹ Radu.baltasiu@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The `Bologna system` was initially designed as a large scale process intended to modernize and integrate the various national educational systems, thus contributing to the homogeneity of European Union's enlargement mechanisms and socio-cultural outcomes. Nevertheless, behind the glamorous words, the manner in which it is orchestrated and implemented on national or regional coordinates became a subject of criticism by the use of the `efficiency-driven` label in the way that the math accounting technique appears to be the final point of view. Is Bologna part of a European `McDonaldization process`? Thus, the relation between accountant type efficiency and the substantial rationality (the Weberian localized social logic and values) will be reflected in one of our topics. The segmentation of the higher education process under the name of the `Bologna reform` seems to balk both the organic phases regarding the student's personality maturation and the burden of early entering in life's working stage during the BA or MA studies. In these circumstances, education is transformed into an industrial process that leads to a fragmentation of the apprenticeship-professor bond during the educational years.

Keywords: *modernization, higher education, rationalization, economizing education, standardization*



Guernica. Picasso. 1937 [*Guernica* was an artistic *protest* regarding the terrible *events* of the bombing of innocents in Guernica (Spain) during the Civil War].

Prolegomena

The reform in education officially started with the 1999 European meeting of Ministries of education in Bologna (Italy) which launched a chain of events that has not only considerably changed the structure and philosophy of higher education system in Europe (Terry, 2006), but it also encompasses direct implications for the youth generations and, implicitly, the societies that chose to be involved in the process. In this sense, the implications extend to the EU level at large, in matters of educational efficiency. The reform has two main and recognized pillars: 1) the unification of higher education and 2) the economic efficiency or reducing costs through the educational process², both being regarded through the lens of European competitiveness (Bergan, 2003). Is *Bologna*, as we will further refer to it, *that* (socially) efficient? We will discuss the issue under the aspect of *economizing education*. From this point of view, we define the latter by arguing that ***Bologna is not entirely about democratizing education, due to its non-economic effects that appear on the long/medium term.***

***Bologna* appears to be at odds with its claimed source, the “knowledge society/economy” that, even though this type of paradigm has “been known to ‘civilized’ Europeans for more than some 250 years ... [now it is] presented as a new message”³. Moreover, we note that the Bologna process is developed under the paradigmatic umbrella of an already failed twin paradigm of *Neoliberalism-New public management (NPM)*. Neoliberalism (and monetarism) is (are) at the core of the biggest economic crises in the modern history⁴. But, on the other hand, “we have no empirical evidence that NPM reforms have led to any productivity increase or welfare maximization”. And NPM could not deliver since it is based on the very frail assumption of “quasi-markets created within administrative organizations in order to create market behavior. However, as any**

² See Chris Lorenz, op. cit.

³ Idem

⁴ Jon Hilsenrath, Seren NG and Damian Paletta, “Worst Crisis Since ‘30s, With no end yet in Sight”, *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept 18, 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122169431617549947.html> [April 2011].

market theorist knows, such behavior can only develop in genuine and not quasi – (i.e. pseudo-) markets”⁵.

The Bologna process was and still is treated reluctantly in most countries where it is being implemented. For instance, if we take into consideration only the ratification dates⁶ of the Lisbon Convention (signed in 1997), we observe that in states such as Germany (2007), Israel (2007), Netherlands (2008), Belgium (2009), Spain (2009), Italy (2010) the ratification was a very slow process. Moreover, other countries are still, in present times, unwilling to ratify the Convention, crucial for any Bologna system implementation (Greece, Canada or US). On the other hand, in contrast to the reluctance of the first, some states that had *no important issues to address* or others that were underway in *a search of international recognition and legitimacy* chose to immediately ratify the Convention (Switzerland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, France, Latvia, Estonia, Austria, Azerbaijan etc. in 1999).

Another issue that somehow consolidated the reluctance of Bologna implementation was the shift in terms of *content* made from the paradigm of reciprocity regarding the promotion of national language, culture and civilization into partner countries’ territories and educational systems (Article 2 of the Council of Europe's European Cultural Convention of 1954⁷), to a curricula with an European content, orientation or organization⁸ (Berlin communiqué). Moreover, through the increased mobility programs for students and staff, one country’s attractiveness in the eyes of foreign students translates into a lack of interest in the country of origin (in terms of making a career, investments, residence). In this way, an accumulation of the youngest and brightest minds will be made in only a couple of

⁵ Wolfgang Drechsler, „The Rise and Demise of the New Public Management”, *Post-Autistic Economics Review*, issue 33, 14 Sept. 2005, <http://www.paecon.net/PAERreview/issue33/Drechsler33.htm> [April 2011].

⁶ For country figures see <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=165&CM=8&CL=ENG>, [April 2011].

⁷ “Each Contracting Party shall, insofar as may be possible: a) encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to those Parties to promote such studies in its territory; and b) endeavour to promote the study of its language or languages, history and civilisation in the territory of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to the nationals of those Parties to pursue such studies in its territory”. See <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/018.htm> available April 2011.

⁸ “Ministers note that, following their call in Prague, additional modules, courses and curricula with European content, orientation or organisation are being developed”.

http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/Berlin_Communique1.pdf, [April 2011].

universitary places in Europe. *In this regard, the present paper adopts a system of analysis along with a theoretical support by the constant background-referral to the so called critical thought, a Romanian paradigm initiated in the 19th century by the Junimea School, internationally recognized for its “forms without substance” theory regarding the synchronism method and consequences in the modernization process in backward societies. From a methodological standpoint, the majority of arguments presented here are the conclusions and results of more than 6 years of experience in the field of the educational activity of reformation in Romania (both teaching activities, as well as institutional involvement).*

Briefly on the historical dimension of the Bologna process

The idea of abroad studies in the system of higher education appeared as a recognized and essential element of the European integration right from the foundation of the Council of Europe, in 1949⁹. In this context, one of the first steps towards a Bologna system as we know it today was the Lisbon Recognition Convention elaborated by the Council of Europe together with UNESCO, signed by all¹⁰ 47 member states of the Council of Europe in 1997. Through this Convention, the degrees and periods of study were included in an institutional mechanism that, starting with that particular moment in time, could be recognized unless *substantial differences* were to be proven otherwise.

The next step towards an agreement, this time regarding a common set of qualifications in the educational system, was signed between the ministers of France, Germany, Italy and England in 1998. The meeting was finalized by signing the Sorbonne Agreement, a document that provided a common set of qualifications in the four countries mentioned, based on the Bachelors and Masters qualifications already offered in the United Kingdom, and highly recognized at an international level.

⁹ Here we can name a few of the treaties elaborated in this context: Article 2 of the first Protocol of 1952 to the European Convention on Human Rights, the 1953 European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas, the European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study in 1956, the European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications in 1959, the European Agreement on continued Payment of Scholarships to students studying abroad in 1969, and the European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study in 1990.

¹⁰ Except for Greece, Monaco, and San Marino

The Bologna process itself started on the 19th of June 1999 in Bologna (Italy) with 29 Ministers of Education signing a document entitled the “Bologna Declaration”. The main goal that was to be achieved referred to the proclamation and establishment of a unified European space in terms of education and science until 2010. In order to do so, an adoption of a common system of comparable degrees was needed. In this context, the signatory states implemented a two-cycle study of 3 +2 years (BA + MA) that had to be accepted on the European labor market as educational and qualification levels. This was thought to lead to a better European co-operation of universities through a mobility available for students and staff within the partner countries (Cardoso et al., 2007).

The next phase of the Bologna implementation took place in Prague (2001), where representatives of 33 European countries signed the so called Prague Communiqué, a process followed by the meeting held in Berlin (2003), where a document was signed on behalf of 40 European countries. The communiqué was written on a *voluntary basis*, both in terms of goals and responsibilities or time restrictions. The final objective was to transform Europe into “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth and with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (Berlin communiqué, 2003). For instance, in the time restrictions area, the signatory countries¹¹ have to reform their national education systems in accordance to the basic stipulations of the Bologna Declaration up to 2010. Other governmental meetings were held in the same manner in Bergen (2005), London (2007), and Leuven (2009).

General considerations

The system of *Bologna* appears to be a subsidiary of the *neoliberal-monetarist* and the so-called *New Public Management (NPM)* approach of “*GATS - regulation*”¹², that has the objective to transform education in a world-wide market free of interferences from national-policies, in parallel with the circulation of other marketable goods:

¹¹ Nowadays, the members of the Bologna process and the Declaration “European Higher Education Area” are: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Vatican, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

¹² General Agreement on Trade in Services part of the Uruguay free trade negotiations in 2000, *World Trade Organization*, “Services Trade”, http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/serv_e.htm [Apr. 2011]

“Gats is applying the same free trade principle to services, and in our context it is crucial to realise that higher education is defined by Gats as one service among others, along with utilities like energy and water supply, health care, housing and social security, that is: domains that used to be seen as the core of the public sector in Europe”¹³.

While GATS is all about deregulating and free-market international relations, new public management is a new form of *bureaucratization* society in order for it to become “an organizational society in which many important services are provided through multiorganizational programs”¹⁴. The latter is equivalent to the expansion of governance through all society’s levels which, in fact, is not all liberal, but a new Leviathan. Critiques of the NPM range from the “disastrous effects on «industrial» and «developing» countries alike” that reduce drastically the public space to a matter of “quantitative efficiency”¹⁵ in terms of a toolkit that comprises “quasi-totalitarian practices of control”¹⁶.

The first visible paradox of *economizing education* and its emergence on the market in a neoliberal way refers to the transformation of the social roles of the professor, student and university in provider, consumer and commercial enterprise. In other words, education which was based on a specific significance and content of the University now is fading away. The second paradox is that *Bologna* is producing far more regulation by deregulating the “old order” and introducing a new one, being at odds with the “Bolkestein rules”¹⁷ which stated that “regulation must be rolled back if its costs outweigh its benefits”. Today, even simpler economic activities are regulated by special papers; filling out

¹³ Chris Lorenz, „Higher Education Policies in the European Union, the «Knowledge Economy» and Neo-Liberalism”, in *Espaces Temps.net*, Evaluating Academia, 12.07.2010, <http://espacestems.net/document8320.html>

¹⁴ Jo Ann G. Ewalt, Eastern Kentucky University, *Theories of Governance and New Public Management. Links to Understanding Welfare Policy Implementation*, prepared for presentation at the Annual conference of the American Society for Public Administration, Newark, NJ, March 12, 2001, second draft,

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/ASPA/UNPAN000563.pdf> [April 2011]

¹⁵ Wolfgang Drechsler

¹⁶ Lorenz op.cit.

¹⁷ Frederik Bolkestein – Dutch politician, former European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services between 1999-2004. See *Goliath. Business knowledge on demand*, “Single Market: Bolkestein wants to simplify rules in new policy areas”, 14 Sep 2002, http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-2169592/SINGLE-MARKET-BOLKESTEIN-WANTS-TO.html, [April 2011].

applications for a grant requires specialized services and “networking” *outside* the university; all these are, in fact, consumers of important research “energies”.

The discussion will further develop/ offer insights on the Bologna implementation, taking into account a list of apparent effects emerged in more than 6 years of educational activity of reformation in Romania: the **induction of a fracture between *Knowledge and Science*, in the name of *freedom of choice*; immature personalities left *in charge* of their own education. Professors transformed in providers of *pieces of knowledge* in a short timeframe like workers on the assembly line, in the name of *flexibility and compatibility*; transformation of students in a “*mass clientele*”; *education as business*, losing the proper interest in *citizenship* and *knowledge*, and young personalities *brought to pieces* by the sheer fragments of knowledge they cannot link with one another; **increased secondary costs that translate into a mobility’s limitation available for *more* graduate students, i.e. more boundaries to cross over.** All add up to the Guernica image from which we initiated the present paper of the nowadays system of education. Taking into account the flaws of the undergraduate level, the MA programs are inevitably built on shaky foundations. The secondary higher education is becoming more and more of an *opportunistic substance*. Students do not have enough time to dedicate to knowledge, and due to the life’s expensiveness and *losing their patience*, they are (self)directed merely towards *a job search in exchange of a diploma*. Neither at this level knowledge is the motor which leads the relationship between education and society, but *opportunism* for the sake of a *job idea*. Higher education thus becomes a Hobbesian battlefield: only the very few of fittest reach to the *universals* of knowledge, i.e. involved in *science*, and only the fittest are successful in finding a job.**

“Europe” through the voice of Brussels recently drew attention upon a “lost generation”¹⁸. In other words, the problem is not of short-termed and “crisis” related, but a structural one. The “statistical voice” of the European Union, Eurostat says: “high youth unemployment rates do reflect the difficulties faced by young people in finding jobs”¹⁹, a

¹⁸ *Financial Times*, February 16 2011, „Europe grapples with youth unemployment”, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8c907618-39ca-11e0-8dba-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1JbMZnvSn>

¹⁹ *European Commission. Eurostat*. “Unemployment statistics. 1.3 Unemployment trends”, data up to February 2011, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment_trends

figure that reaches 43% unemployment in the young population nowadays in Europe²⁰. In this case, *Bologna appears as unsuccessful* enough regarding the *practical things*. The figures published by Eurostat were sustained by the state of distrust regarding the Bologna system's capabilities to create a solid relationship between the shorter three-year period and the employability figures (in comparison to graduates of the longer cycle²¹), verbalized also in the academia (Pastore, 2007). This situation rises two important questions: a) what is the remaining role of education regarding the `production` of quality citizens if we take into account such a weak self-interest (sic!) as the basis of knowledge and b) what is to become of the *economic efficiency* of the Bologna process if so many young people can hardly find a job (related to their field of study)?

The Bologna Process was initiated as an intention to both increase the higher education efficiency in Europe and to assure the *standardization* of degrees in order to be compatible with one another. *Fiscal efficiency* and *standardization* seem to be the main *actual* driving forces of the Bologna process and its main outcomes. Of course, there are also higher idealistic goals like *integration* (national compatibility), *society of knowledge*, *global competitiveness*, "European educational space", "European dimension in quality assurance", and "eliminating of remaining obstacles to the free mobility of students". All in all, *Bologna* is part of the *European integration* – see *The Bologna Declaration*²².

Chris Lorenz, professor at the Free University of Amsterdam²³, observed the Bologna phenomenon through the ideology of the project:

"The basic idea behind all educational EU-plans is economic: an enlargement in the scale of the European systems of higher education, just as has been

²⁰ *News N Economics. Daily analysis of global economic and financial conditions*, Jan.2, 2010, "Unemployment in Europe: it's most just Spain", <http://www.newsneconomics.com/2010/01/unemployment-in-europe-its-bad-all-over.html>

²¹ "In the EU-27, more than one recent graduate in eight (13 %) is unemployed; this is nearly three times more than those who graduated at least three years ago (5 %)" – Eurostat, 2009, "The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe. Key indicators on the social dimension and mobility".

²² *The Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education: an explanation* – „prepared by the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European universities (CRE)”, February 29, 2000, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf> [April. 2011]

²³ The University of Chicago, CRESCAT, „Bologna Process and European Higher Education”, <http://crescat.uchicago.edu/bologna-process>

realised with the economic systems in Europe before, in order to enhance its competitiveness by cutting down costs.

Therefore a Europe-wide standardisation of the 'values' produced in each of the national higher educational systems is called for. The introduction of the European Credits Transfer System — of ECTS-points — in order to make all European grades compatible and comparable can thus be compared to the introduction of the Euro, because the 'value' of higher education all over Europe will in the future be calculated, compared and exchanged in terms of the same ECTS-points — at least in theory and if we abstract from minor practical issues like the language problem²⁴.

Therefore, *the Bologna Process* is one of the most comprehensive standardization processes ever seen in Europe on various levels: the curriculum and the structure of education. The main outcome reflects into *serious consequences*: the University is converting into a provider of (educational) services, the professor from a master of knowledge is transforming into an ordinary employee, *a worker*, and the student is becoming *a client*. Throughout such a policy and philosophy implementation, the direction of responsibility and authority in the classroom along with the productive dimension that leads to one society's progress are lost. Such an action becomes probable due to the (indirect) qualitative decrease and objectivation of the relationship between the professor (master) and student (apprentice), a reified relationship that cannot produce personalities anymore²⁵, but students whose cognitive reflexes are reduced to those of the market economy. Market is no longer knowledge dependent but education is becoming market dependent, except for technical sciences. Moreover, the standardization of the educational system appears to determine a standardization of both personal aspirations and outcomes. In this logic, the entire scientific and academic community will no longer, in the medium-term future, have an heterogeneous composition built up from different, concurrent or emerging paradigms, but a homogenous

²⁴ Chris Lorenz, „Higher Education Policies in the European Union, the «Knowledge Economy» and Neo-Liberalism”, in *Espaces Temps.net*, Evaluating Academia, 12.07.2010, <http://espacestems.net/document8320.html>

²⁵ See, for instance, the works related to education and apprenticeship written by Dimitrie Gusti, Mircea Vulcanescu, Simion Mehedinti or Nicolae Iorga

one, with an unitary epistemic community that, at history's challenges, will be able to offer the same range of solutions. In other words, the Bologna process is not so much about *Europe's* strength, but more about its weakness. Clearly, the educational process will be unified to some extent, but economizing education is debasing the young European and, moreover, *Europe* itself.

There are three main issues that we identified in relation to the *Bologna reform*. For methodological reasons, we chose to address them separately even though, in fact, they are subordinated to first one, the *economization of education*.

1. **Economizing education.** Accounting efficiency seems to be the first derivative, above knowledge. *The process* can be synthesized to *reducing costs*.
2. **Standardizing education.**
3. **Curricular debacle** by separating *competencies* and *knowledge*.

1. Economizing Education

As Chris Lorenz argued in his paper on "Higher Education Policies in the European Union ...", *Bologna* is all about *cutting down costs*. In this case, *economizing* education refers to a subordination of knowledge to accounting, i.e. economic efficiency.

The first way of achieving this (in terms of visibility) is by **reducing the undergraduate level to only three years** as part of the Bologna process reform. The logic is to reduce costs due to fewer student figures that take part in MA studies. The MA is less subsidized because in different countries, for instance in Romania, there are *highly restrictive limits* regarding the number of students which can be grant-aided. Even if the public spending per master student is about two times higher than the spending per undergraduate student, the *number* of subsidized students in this level is almost 10 times lower than the undergraduate for certain programs²⁶.

The second way of economizing higher education is through the **increase of the workload for students and professors**. In order to provide at least a satisfactory level of education, the course load had to be heavily increased. This reduction of the undergraduate

²⁶ Faculty figures not made public.

cycle with (at least) a year appears to be in contrast to the *time of maturization needed for the scientific thought*.

The third approach refers to a **relativization of the curricula**. The student is the one in charge of establishing his/her own path throughout science and knowledge. In the meantime, the Science is converted into smaller pieces labeled as credits implying that a *corpus of science* is no longer available for the student. The *Corpus of Science* is rearranged by the students' choice who, in his or her turn, acts by somehow addressing to the "forces of market".

Graduate education cycle is the *mass cycle* of higher education, since in many countries is strongly subsidized. On this level, those people that *want to* receive access to the higher knowledge of humanity in an organized framework. **Reducing the undergraduate cycle to three years can be equivalent to a weakening of the chance of getting more than a basic education, by artificially creating a "superior market" of MAs and PhDs.** Three years are not enough to get enough higher education. In other words, the ones that tend to be honest seekers of knowledge are obliged to further choose different *specialization* lines for higher costs in order to achieve it.

The implications are multiple and of a serious nature. The first one refers to **fracturing the most fertile age of psychological readiness towards education**. According to our teaching experience, in the third year, the student is finally finding out what he/she is looking for right about the time when one starts to understand the meaning of the "social mission". Thus, a fourth year is necessary because in that specific amount of time the student is supposed to achieve and demonstrate his intellectual maturity. The fourth year, from this point of view, represents a split between taking the undergraduate degree, finding a job to pay for the MA and passing the exams to enter the MA degree. In reality, once entering in the MA program, the Romanian student places the *job as his life core, no matter if one realizes* what science and knowledge are. **Starting with Bologna, the time ripped from the natural educational development converts into a time lost for society.**

The second implication refers also to a fracture, the one of the *corpus of knowledge*. This is the result of the lost time from the erased fourth undergraduate year. In

the same time, it is the result of the *economy of scale*²⁷ introduced by the so-called transferable credits system, part of the standardization of education. It is about shifting the *responsibility* from the professor to the student in establishing the *curricula by choice* which equals to letting the student *outside* the *main corpus of science*. It is well known that the *basis of science* is much more than two or three introductory lectures in the first year. To choose according to your own vocation is one thing. But to be left alone to do so is another matter. Having a good advice of a *handful* of dedicated professors is no match in comparison to the apparent *abandonment made by the system*. The undergraduate is in this case left without guidance by the system when he/she has to choose what he or she *likes* or *thinks it fits* – a mix between *likes* and *must have* a qualification-job.

Thirdly, in this manner, **a generation of socially unprepared youngsters on a mass scale is encouraged**. Before the Bologna implementation, the younger generation had problems of integration into the social order. The conflict between generations, the internet as a distraction, the expansion of the so-called “no-time for education” families, the lowering quality of the secondary education were already part of a negative context. Bologna itself was made specifically to address those shortcomings *by cutting costs* with a system of mass education seen until then as a waste of money. The so-called free higher education is reduced to three years with a questionable weight on the market. In order to get a position there, the students have to attend an MA program which, for most of them, implies significant costs. Thus, in order to pay for their education, the students have to work. This leads to the situation in which **the MA students have no longer sufficient time to study properly**. The undergraduate students finish their degree *academically unprepared for work* by reasons that are linked to the prescription of the system. This is why some students have been starting a movement of protest against the system:

“Our need for a common network is based on our struggles against the Bologna Process and against the education cuts Europe is using as a response to the crisis. Since the state and private interests collaborate in the corporatization process of the university, our struggles don’t have the aim of defending the status quo. Governments bail out banks and cut education. We

²⁷ Reduction in cost per unit resulting from increased production, realized through operational efficiencies. Economies of scale can be accomplished because as production increases, the cost of producing each additional unit falls.

want to make our own university – a university that lives in our experiences of autonomous education, alternative research and free schools. It is a free university, run by students, precarious workers and migrants; a university without borders.”²⁸

Moreover, the transformation of the PhD institution (with such a valuable legacy in Europe for hundreds of years which was a subject to the rarity law in Economics) into another level of studies (entitled *doctoral school*) can also be included in the economizing education context. The reduction of the research process and thesis completion to only 3 years was a measure that brought major controversies especially in the applied sciences²⁹, research and development domains. In addition to it, another time reduction was made, this time somehow under the umbrella of a doctoral type of school foundation in the 1st year, consisted of general courses one must attend from such diverse domains that most of them hardly have any link to the thesis in progress. In other words, the doctoral student (along with his or her coordinator professor) loses two years from the time needed to individually complete the research and create the thesis. What is left of the social and scientific value of the student’s product in the end if we take into account such time limitations?

2. Standardizing Education

There are different levels where standardizing of education is active. Firstly, there is the *leveling*. The second one is the transformation of knowledge into smaller pieces. The third is about depersonalizing the academic apprenticeship and transforming it into an industrial process. Finally, standardization refers to the conversion of education into a commodity – *commerce en masse*, with the diploma passing on as the main traded good.

Standardizing education is mostly about making education a matter of *transferable credits*. Lectures and courses are becoming part of a more and more unified curricula. As a result, the curricular autonomy of the professor is almost abolished, the course as the result of *personal scientific work* is almost scrapped, and the curricula is leveled to a level accepted by the dominant paradigm in charge within the bureaucratic apparatus of the university, leaving

²⁸ *The Paper*, <http://wearethepaper.org/2011/03/06/report-from-paris-saint-denis-meeting-11-13-february-2011/>

²⁹ See Eurostat, 2009, *The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe*. Key indicators on the social dimension and mobility

the other paradigms (and the teachers belonging to them) outside the epistemic community with decision power.

The personality of the young student is becoming a mirror of *different pieces of different discourses*, a pastiche. It is true that this is the situation of the postmodern man anyway, but education has to reestablish the unity of humanity not by being subdued by the “trends of the market”. These problems prove that the system of education entered in an impasse by starting to abandon its social meaning of socially *producing* self-conscious individuals.

The reshuffle of curricula is accompanied by a general changing of the student-professor relationship, eliminating the chance of the best students to stay close to their professors by being integrated *on the long run* into the lower hierarchy of teaching. Professors are becoming providers of services, knowledge is serviceable and the relationship between the professor and assistants is debased. The idea of apprenticeship is scraped, **passing the knowledge from a senior professor to a younger one in a depersonalized manner. The map of knowledge becomes a bureaucratized one. In other words, anyone who qualifies bureaucratically can reclaim his assistant professor position. Starting with the Bologna system implementation, the professor is no longer in charge of passing on the knowledge, for the system takes his place.**

Even though the globalization process (Bergan, 2003) and the increased competition on an international scale emphasized the importance of increasing the attractiveness of the European higher education institutions (Cardoso et al., 2007), the EU is still regarded as having a limited competence in the coordination, reformation and regulation of the educational system (Terry, 2006). From this perspective, we can state that standardizing education is part of the already mentioned *economics of scale*. In order to cut costs, educational process is to be standardized by commoditizing it. However, since knowledge is much more than money, being a *public good*, the University cannot be ousted from the public interest and subdued to the market forces. Using Ritzer’s concept, the McDonaldization of the University equals the McDonaldization of the future citizens which is a serious danger for democracy.

3. Separation between competencies and knowledge

It is one of the most overstated objectives of the *Bologna process* the one to target *competencies* versus *knowledge*, as if knowledge would be a competence in itself. The nowadays educational bureaucracies are centered to “define” the so-called competencies attached to certain faculties, as if faculties are training schools or vocational seminars. If the faculty is not able to define the “competencies”, then it is regarded too theoretical and not properly adapted to the forces of the market. It matches another highly utilized slogan: “theory vs. practice”, as if humanity has lost its historic knowledge, being forced to reinvent from scratch the old solutions (theories). The process is surprisingly part of another “big theory” of the European Union: the *knowledge society* and the subsequent *knowledge economy*. Competence is attitude and skill. More, it is *ability*. In order to be able to perform properly, competence has to include knowledge. But knowledge is wisdom and a process of separating them is bound to produce a *homo faber* without *sapientia* (wisdom). Moreover, knowledge is *social conscience* and in the English language it is translated by *learning*. Here is once again the very serious confusion between the *public good* – which is the *social conscience* acquired within university – and the *marketable goods* of the market. Knowledge has *naturally a string of competencies* attached to it, derived from the science itself. One cannot predict all the occupations ready to be embraced by a lawyer or a sociologist, just as one cannot fully predict the life route of any human being. Subordinating the development of curricula to a bunch of competencies established at a certain moment in time is to artificially freeze the free movement of the graduated labor and to turn the university upside-down, by putting the *actual utility* of *certain* applications of knowledge in front of the *infinite set of utilities offered by any corpus of knowledge on the long run*.

Another form of separation with serious consequences is the one between the quality assurance and the Universities, as if the University is by definition unable to follow up to its task of knowledge distribution: “promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view of developing comparable criteria and methodologies”³⁰. **The political finality** of this principle is assuming that there should be other bodies outside the University and Academia which are better equipped to find out what are knowledge, science and education. The immediate consequence is the serious diminishing of the professional

³⁰ *The Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education: an explanation* – „prepared by the Confederation of EU Rectors’ Conferences and the Association of European universities (CRE)” , February 29, 2000, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf> [April. 2011], p.8

autonomy of the faculty and academic freedom. **Diminishing the academic freedom to enhancing administrative centralization is, in its turn, a serious debasement of the quality of democracy in European Union.**

Conclusion: The fast-food university

The three problems with the Bologna process we have previously taken into account are bound to permanently develop further and further since *The Declaration* “is not just meant to be a policy statement or a policy event, but a continuous process that will be with the Europeans indefinitely. In Bologna the EU took a conscious decision to keep the systems of higher education in Europe in a state of permanent supervision and reform” (Chris Lorenz, *ibidem*).

The *Bologna process* is the result of a specific paradigm. It is the neoliberal paradigm mixed with the so-called “new public management” approach. Neoliberalism professes the *efficiency of private interest* and the *fall of the public interest*; the new public management is centered on reorganizing by bureaucratizing everything from top to down, shattering the professional organized autonomy. The result is paradoxical: the bureaucratic apparatus *external* to the University is becoming overwhelming, a sort of quasi-totalitarian agency above any kind of professional control from the part of the *corpus of organized knowledge* which is The Academia (the University). Knowledge is reduced to some set of *useful reflexes* “required by the market”, good for anyone in search of a *fast way* of getting a diploma, a good to subdue him further on in the new bureaucratic entity which engulfs the society.

“Why the professional autonomy of academics must be distrusted (and on what grounds) and why bureaucratic formalism is to be preferred over professionalism has never been justified: it is a crucial presupposition built into New Public Management [embedded in the Bologna process] - and thus beyond any discussion and critique. ...

There is not a shred of evidence—neither factual nor logical—that this move represents an improvement in any sense, while there is quite some evidence to the contrary. Thus N[ew] P[ublic] M[anagement] is transforming the universities into ‘a fast-food outlet that sells only those ideas that its managers

believe it will sell, that treats its employees as if they were too devious or stupid to be trusted, and that values the formal rationality of the process over the substantive rationality of the end’.

The net-result of the non-inspired reform of the universities is nothing less than an organisational structure which shows some remarkable similarities to the former Leninist parties. ...

Like ‘dissidents’ in Leninist parties, ‘dissidents’ in npm-organisations are usually seen and treated by management as objects to be disciplined and punished—and preferably to be removed from the organisation. ... So for all who prefer the Enlightenment idea of knowledge and the Humboldtian idea of the university to the neo-liberal ‘McUniversity,’ it is high time for a ‘wake up’ call.³¹

Of course, if Europe is to develop its competitiveness in comparison to the US and Asia, it has to somehow handle its educational system. Europe is not a unitary national entity and not a federal one either. There are different traditions and *national issues* to be tackled in each particular space. The solution is not *standardization* which means to level up the challenges and the forthcoming responses, but a *specific* answer to *specific* issues, that is *convergence of different national energies to promote a unified and not a mediocrized European Educational space*. However, according to the present developments, the only reason for an increase of educational mobility will be the intercultural dialogue, and not the knowledge and learning dimension.

³¹ Chris Lorenz, op.cit.

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