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**Higher education between steering and autonomy in Germany and Europe after Bologna –
Can this state-state, state-university and university-individual problem be solved by
standardization?**

Matthias Klumpp¹

1. Introduction

Most major reform processes in higher education in the past and future years as for example the Bologna Process or the European Qualifications Framework are in essence *standardization* processes.² Hopes are high that this should lead to increasing transparency, mobility as well as education aspiration – and therefore rising quantities and also quality in higher education. At the same time problems in higher education arise due to major changes in a globalized world: Politics and especially economic policy increasingly rely on higher education with its main objectives of research, teaching and transfer as main source of economic growth and wealth as stated for example by the European Union in the Lisbon Strategy and succession documents (European Commission, 2003; European Commission, 2005; Griller/Ziller, 2008: 285-296) or several researchers (cf. Teichler, 2007; Clancy/Dill, 2009: 7; Coates, 2009b; Gornitzka, 2009; Kehm/Stensaker, 2009: xi-xii; Teichler, 2009: 21). At the crossroads of these development traits lies the core question of steering and autonomy between higher education institutions and stakeholders distinctively elaborated by Burton Clark (Clark, 1996: 136-181): What has always been an important question is today under increased economic pressure and facing political expectations a Shakespearean question of ‘to be or not to be’ putting students on streets, universities in protest and state authorities in legal battles. For example protests in Germany and France regarding student fees display these *conflicts* regarding higher education finance, in Germany especially about university finance e.g. in the battle against the closure of the University of Lübeck in 2010 (AStA Universität Lübeck, 2011) and in general discussions about rights and liabilities in higher education due to the federal constitution in Germany. In Britain for example Prince Charles was attacked on 9th of December 2010 by students as the Government voted for a three-fold increase in study fee levels (Guardian, 2011). Expectations were often voiced about

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² This has to be clearly separated from the term ‘academic standards’ indicating a quality minimum perspective as for example described by COATES, 2009a.

wars concerning global resources – meaning oil, water and other ‘hardware’ resources. But the notion of increasing risks³, occasions⁴ and frontlines⁵ of conflicts about the essential resource of education has never been described as what it could be in the future: a potential war for education. Therefore *reform and change processes* in higher education will have high stakes and impacts for societies in the future – and research has to answer the question if standardization processes in general (Bologna, EQF, rankings and excellence) can help solving these conflicts in higher education. The research methodology especially for Germany conducted by this research paper is a data-based description of the status quo in higher education combined with an empirical research addressing German universities and asking for their institutional activities and insights about standardization developments in the wake of Bologna and EQF – as well as especially about their problems and hurdles in implementing these concepts. This research was conducted with an online survey for all 230 universities in Germany offering study programs in economics and business administration in order to avoid subject specific distortion. Expected results were detailed answers to the crucial question whether standardization is actually working in higher education practice and if positive effects about higher education conflicts can be recognized by universities in Germany themselves. Further on this research may contribute on the one hand to identifying and managing obstacles in the Bologna and EQF processes and on the other hand towards a first draft for a map of higher education conflicts outlining the future challenges for universities as well as higher education policy.

2. Status Quo in German Higher Education

The total number of students in German higher education rose steadily during the last twenty years and is expected to rise sharply in the coming three to four years as military duty will be suspended in 2011 and several German states shorten high school time, resulting in student entrants leaving school after 12 instead of 13 years in a transformation phasing until 2014.

Winter Semester	Total Student Number		at ...					
			Universities		Art Colleges		Universities of Applied Sciences	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
1990/1991	1 712 608	665 881	1 193 075	504 127	28 360	14 494	331 496	90 198
1995/1996	1 857 906	774 633	1 233 466	560 690	29 150	15 486	398 840	122 619
2000/2001	1 799 338	829 201	1 171 600	582 073	30 159	17 020	425 585	156 729
2001/2002	1 868 666	873 230	1 210 162	609 686	30 444	17 347	453 297	169 503
2002/2003	1 939 233	918 624	1 391 363	701 091	31 325	17 993	479 720	180 750
2003/2004	2 019 831	958 129	1 436 679	728 157	31 211	17 925	513 483	192 534
2004/2005	1 963 598	937 182	1 372 531	704 788	30 960	17 737	523 808	196 347
2005/2006	1 986 106	948 818	1 386 784	715 039	31 593	18 088	535 127	199 499
2006/2007	1 979 445	946 600	1 377 444	712 472	31 100	17 835	541 924	202 075
2007/2008	1 941 763	926 854	1 338 556	691 313	30 519	17 636	546 013	204 531
2008/2009	2 025 742	967 747	1 365 927	705 258	31 565	18 154	600 568	230 612
2009/2010	2 121 190	1 014 731	1 416 379	731 581	32 237	18 521	644 778	250 990

Table 1: Student Number in Germany 1990-2010 (Source: DESTATIS, 2011)

³ For example in the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia the universities of Witten and TFH Bochum (Germany) with the new legal option of an institutional insolvency (since 2007) as well as the specific institutional failure as university bankruptcy cases.

⁴ In the past: Funding of HE institutions and systems; in the future: International competition in Europe and globally (China-EU-US-UK-Australia) – the question of WTO regulations for higher education for example can be expected to surface more often again in the future (cf. Bekelman/Yan/Gross, 2003; Bok, 2003; Clark, 2009).

⁵ For example non-academic versus academic groups in higher education finance respectively student fee discussions in Germany and the United Kingdom (academic income tax).

The number and share of *international* students increased prominently in German higher education in the last thirty years as the following table shows. But as this increase started long before the Bologna Process and was on a fallback position since 2005 it could be doubted if the official position of a success thanks to Bologna is really adequate.

Year	Total Number of Students	International Students (including migrants with German school degree)	International Students (without migrants with German school degree, therefore only "Bildungsausländer")
	Persons	in % of all students	
1976	836,002	5.7	-
1980	972,068	5.5	-
1985	1,311,699	5.5	-
1990	1,504,563	6.1	-
1995	1,872,490	7.6	-
2000	1,773,956	9.9	6.4
2005	1,963,108	12.5	9.5
2009	2,025,307	11.8	8.9

Table 2: International Student Share in Germany 1976-2009 (Source: DAAD, 2011)

These student quantity increases are in general not met by corresponding funding increases. Though in general overall (public) budgets for education have increased especially on the federal level, most additional funds are allocated through new and existing competitive grand schemes e.g. for research. Therefore the 'base load' of teaching in relation to fixed teaching budgets has increased. This development is shown in the following table addressing overall budget in higher education.

Government Budgets for Higher Education in Germany	1995	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Federal Level (FRG)	1,770,202	2,079,577	2,128,165	2,133,565	1,827,131	1,843,472	1,892,899	2,128,127	2,411,664	2,600,389
State Level										
Baden-Württemberg	1,924,370	2,171,359	2,489,641	2,140,332	2,162,278	2,205,640	2,465,997	2,117,663	2,334,781	2,586,486
Bayern	2,079,068	2,237,394	2,152,584	2,351,288	2,307,515	2,233,960	2,277,959	2,316,992	2,293,392	2,455,113
Berlin	1,445,809	1,211,626	1,175,008	1,186,685	1,154,118	1,172,192	1,136,021	1,106,379	1,247,063	1,241,496
Brandenburg	228,894	225,288	243,224	243,166	249,938	237,004	248,942	247,976	268,210	296,520
Bremen	158,246	218,430	270,833	222,806	237,954	213,634	214,937	221,222	197,233	202,614
Hamburg	496,919	526,077	560,501	563,955	572,064	591,021	596,586	621,302	624,846	601,287
Hessen	1,083,954	1,210,881	1,228,124	1,266,279	1,206,132	1,325,304	1,481,599	1,453,557	1,569,854	1,690,249
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	278,716	293,090	316,692	315,123	272,364	258,006	351,773	330,655	337,128	366,006
Niedersachsen	1,159,572	1,681,697	1,645,185	1,555,364	1,597,061	1,537,623	1,472,691	1,533,515	1,640,266	1,667,238
Nordrhein-Westfalen	2,789,821	3,122,278	3,687,214	3,808,127	3,682,307	3,767,307	4,079,974	3,905,621	3,995,951	4,185,059
Rheinland-Pfalz	513,299	590,206	547,765	572,960	533,026	575,809	625,417	773,866	721,539	742,064
Saarland	188,949	190,708	201,082	221,659	215,128	227,327	224,581	214,150	229,021	212,038
Sachsen	812,125	791,956	789,877	827,519	791,633	888,276	947,750	977,938	996,430	1,095,013
Sachsen-Anhalt	430,797	478,295	490,604	519,236	458,113	479,410	483,121	492,813	493,591	459,103
Schleswig-Holstein	421,117	408,558	416,839	424,164	428,702	420,518	427,438	425,483	414,552	435,400
Thüringen	446,080	441,939	435,647	456,740	436,936	440,076	445,827	436,739	542,702	486,422
Total Germany	16,227,940	17,242,563	17,879,361	18,778,985	18,808,968	18,132,400	18,416,579	19,373,512	19,303,998	20,318,222

Table 3: Financial Data Regarding Higher Education in Germany (Source: DESTATIS, 2010)

From this funding difference major conflicts between students (regarding access to study programs), among universities (regarding distribution of scarce resources) as well as states and the federal government (regarding distribution of budgets) is obvious.

Private Universities, especially Universities of Applied Sciences, are on the rise in Germany as the number of students in private higher education has doubled since 2005 and in economics and business administration studies already about 10 percent of all students are enrolled in private institutions (65,265 out of a total of 668,398 students in this subject group in the winter term 2009/2010, cf. DESTATIS, 2011). Usually these private institutions are demanding student fees whereas public universities only have small or no fees depending on the specific state. In the most populated German state of North-Rhine Westphalia student fees will be abolished in the coming winter term 2011/2012 due to a new left-wing state government. This further increases conflict potential as different population groups and areas within Germany are treated not equally (as demanded by the constitution) but differently.

The German Excellence Initiative is regarded as a program that of course focuses on excellence but also stimulates profile building of institutions that are not successful in this respect. It has created dynamics in German higher education, but it has also been argued that such initiatives lead to homogeneity instead of heterogeneity in the system (cf. Wissenschaftsrat 2010a). Furthermore the question arises, if the preparation and selection process is not producing too many losing universities and about the overall efficiency of this new program.

Specific problems in Germany arise due to a strategic misfit in higher education budgeting within the bachelor-master study structure: As government lump sum funding is mainly bound to bachelor student numbers most universities try to reduce sizes and student numbers in their master programs as this does not contribute to the institutional budget and small numbers are seen as positive 'quality signal' especially for master degrees. This corresponds with heavy legal problems and differences regarding study fee regulations for master programs whereas bachelor programs are deemed to stay free of higher fees: Most state laws in German higher education define that 'continuing education' master programs (for professionals) can introduce study fees and are prohibited to profit from state funding by overhead or basic services from the university. This is one reason why the concept of lifelong learning and continuing education is still in a minority position in German universities. Whereas so-called consecutive master programs for bachelor graduates should be offered free of charge – which leads to the unfair and probably also illegal situation that older students pay study fees for master programs received for free by their younger colleagues.

An intensively discussed field of higher education, especially for Germany, is the doctorate (cf. Johnston/Murray, 2004; Sadlak, 2004; Enders, 2005; EUA, 2005; Gurth, 2006; Golde/Walker, 2006; Maki/Borkowski, 2006; Nerad/Heggelund, 2008; Kehm, 2009). In this field Germany is realizing a 'standstill' position like no other country in Europe: Though in special project and funding contexts new concepts of graduate and research schools (e.g. Ruhr Graduate School in Economics, 2011) evolve – but the large chunk of PhD activities is still incorporated only at universities and in the old-fashioned way of a single dissertation thesis supervised by one professor, often being employer and research group leader at the same time.

In the case of the non-university sector this leads to the genesis of new problems even in the assumed mobilizing Bologna structure: Though bachelor and master degrees are formally standardized and no longer have universities of applied sciences ('Fachhochschulen') to earmark their degrees with the addition 'FH' (cf. Teichler, 1998; Klumpp/Teichler, 2008) still graduates from Fachhochschulen do experience differences and difficulties in entering PhD programs at universities e.g. by additional entrance exams or even total rejection. This is an increasingly severe conflict as the share of students at German Fachhochschulen has risen from 20% to 30% and also in an increasing number of professional contexts a PhD level qualification is required. This was also recognized by the German auditing and federal supervision board, the Wissenschaftsrat, in 2010 and a first draft of institutional

requirements for PhD program was published (cf. Wissenschaftsrat, 2010b). This could point to the idea, that in the future not the traditional distinction of universities and Fachhochschulen defines the right to offer PhD programs but an institutional, criteria-based accreditation. But this is still in the future and today the official policy of the German federal government and the university association HRK is to promote so-called 'co-operative' PhD projects with a PhD process at universities but including a professor of a Fachhochschule in the auditing council. One of the roots of this rift is still the different formal entrance requirements even for professors as university professors usually have to complete a Habilitation after their PhD (urging them as 'right by their own sweat' to differentiate themselves as 'Univ.-Professor') whereas professors at Fachhochschulen have to prove practical (industry) experience of at least five years. In this field Germany is also in a traditional 'hold-out' position awaiting and partially neglecting international trends and standards. The proposal to transfer the system to international standards by introducing a "junior professorship" (which would translate to an assistant professor level) as a general career path instead of the Habilitation by the federal government in 2003 (cf. Federkeil/Buch, 2007) was even sacked by the constitutional court as in Germany only the states have political and legislative rights in higher education.

This also leads to the recognition that in Germany the internationally discussed 'professional doctorate' (cf. Bourner/Bowden/Laing, 2000; Bourner/Bowden/Laing, 2001; Scott/Brown/Lunt/Thorne, 2004) – which could also mitigate the conflict between universities and Fachhochschulen and their graduates – is no political topic. This is in contrast to the principles of the Bologna Process as described above as the three standardized study cycles are not applicable to all institutions of higher education and students.

Whereas in the main shift to the Bologna three-cycle study system new problems have been generated, in these days to be changed by most universities in the process of re-accrediting these study programs: In most cases bachelor programs have been heavily split up in smaller modules, leaving professors with nearly unbearable short courses and prohibiting long-term and concept learning. And also leaving students with a multitude of exams and a tendency to highlight 'fast fact learning' until the next exam. Advertized as modern learning context in modules and with many choices for students this development left lecturers and students alike in a hurry for credit points which led to decreasing quality, obvious especially in the written scientific work as 'Seminararbeit' and the final thesis: Corresponding with a severe drop in importance for the overall mark (in business administration the 'importance' of the final thesis lumped from about 30% of graduation mark share to 8-10%) delivered text, reference and especially concept as well as result quality of this important work did decrease significantly.

Though in Germany this may be seen (in media and higher education policy) as 'changeover problem' to be solved in the coming years by curriculum changes in the process of re-accreditation for most study programs, it shows one important lesson for the problem of conflicts in higher education discussed here: In parallel to the shift of trust and public focus labeled 'accountability' from general university existence towards standards, auditing and accreditation (cf. Amaral/Rosa/Tavares, 2009), an individual mistrust towards institutions has spread in higher education leading to the renewed interest towards rankings, study testing and switching. This 'over-formalization' of quality control and shift from academia and institutional to accreditation and student responsibility for teaching quality has driven students to the street in Germany in 2009 and 2010 (cf. Würmseer, 2010). This leads to the notion that there are interconnected 'layers of standards' on system, institutional, study program, course and even individual level.

This also shows that conflicts especially arise of standards and quality responsibility is unfair distributed: In the old Germany diploma system, people rightfully assumed that degrees as e.g. the

German ‘Diplom-Kaufmann’ or ‘Diplom-Ingenieur’ incorporated a certain quality and qualification of graduates, safeguarded by academia as ‘quality-keepers’ in a stable institutional setting. Nowadays this was heavily changed towards a system with accreditation and modularization as well as ‘over-examination’ as quality control system. This represents a certain mistrust against academia, surfacing in interesting questions for example in institutional auditing: Auditors asking about the (constitutionally guaranteed right in Germany due to Nazi history) absolute freedom of academia in teaching in contradiction with the necessary adherence to in-detail descriptions and standards in module descriptions and even study content clearly mark this conflict. This comes down to the question what happens in higher education if professors (who are explicitly named in the constitution regarding this freedom of research and teaching) as well as lecturers teach in disrespect of given module and content descriptions. This could probably lead to institutional-individual conflicts urging even court rulings about the freedom of teaching in Germany (cf. Stichweh, 1994).

3. Survey Results from Germany

An online survey among the 230 German universities offering business administration and management study programs (data source: HRK, 2010) was conducted from September to December 2010. Within the universities the responsible study program dean for business administration (‘Studiendekan’) was selected, though many professors delegated the survey answering to the dean or academic staff managing study programs. Nevertheless the persons were uniquely qualified to answer questions regarding the Bologna Process and the subsequent European Qualifications Framework as well as National Qualifications Framework. Altogether 54 persons responded to the survey invitation communicated by phone (gross response rate of 23,5%); but several of these answers were incomplete and finally only 33 answers could be used for further analysis (net response rate of 14,4%). Additionally three in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in order to complement the quantitative data.

One of the first survey questions was about the general support of university leadership regarding the Bologna Process: This was sustained very positive with nearly four fifths of all answering academics supporting the Bologna Process strongly. In the additional qualitative experts interview reasons for this support such as increasing international exchange, visibility and standardization.

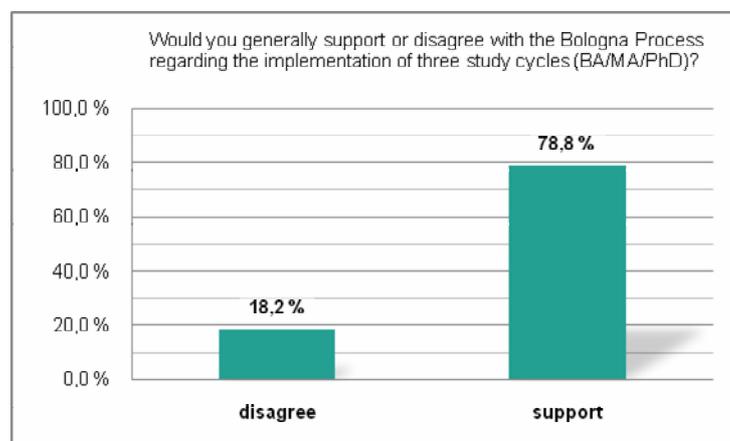


Figure 1: General Support for the Bologna Process in German Universities⁶

⁶ In all figures percentage numbers do not always add up to 100 percent as ‘not answered’ is not displayed.

But nevertheless a majority of answering universities state that there still is crucial need for further redesign in the Bologna Process: For example many universities demand stricter central standardization by e.g. the federal accreditation council (cf. Kehm, 2007; KMK, 2010).

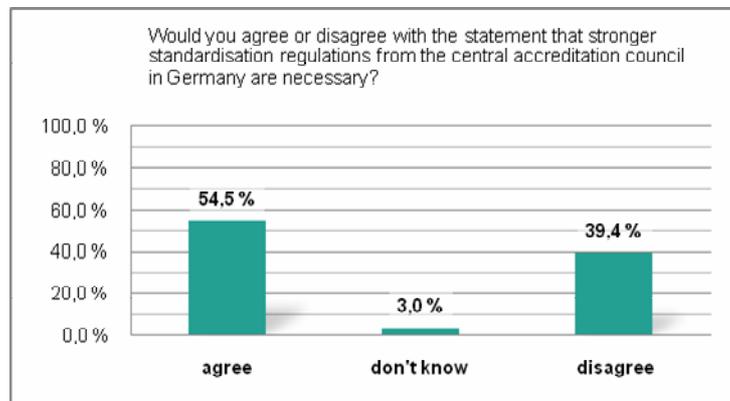


Figure 2: Demand for Stronger Central Standards in German Higher Education Accreditation

One example for a stricter standardization in German higher education was given in the survey as a identical ECTS level for all master degree programs with 300 ECTS accumulated including the bachelor studies programs. This demand was supported by more than four out of five universities in the survey. This is caused by the fact that the varieties for study duration and ECTS credit point volumes differ significantly between 180-240 ECTS in bachelor programs and 60-120 ECTS in master programs. This is also highlighted by the fact that in several contexts entrance levels are defined with a number of students not being able to fulfill these requirement from their first cycle studies (and also from the second cycle aiming for a PhD), even because some universities partially only recognize parts of prior study programs. So for example at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Mercator School of Management, where for business administration studies in a master program only credit points obtained in bachelor programs *management* courses are accounted for (cf. Lischka, 2011).

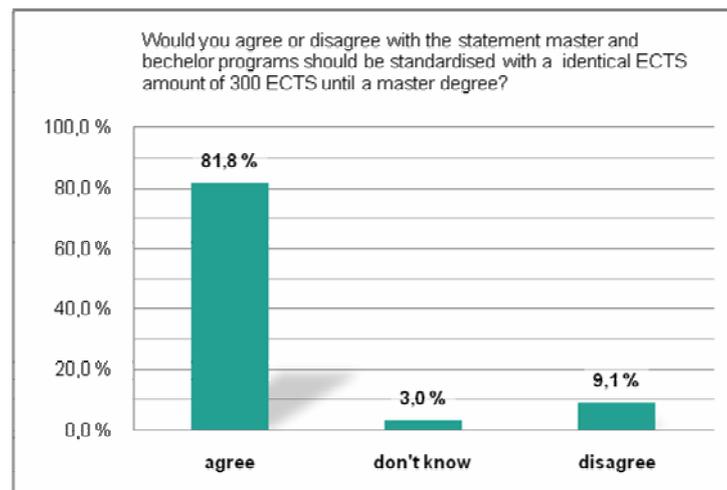


Figure 3: Demand for Standardization in ECTS Study Program

Further in detail the question of formal implementation of the Bologna study cycle denominators (1st cycle bachelor, 2nd cycle master, 3rd cycle PhD) within the *diploma supplements* of the specific

universities have been checked, revealing that only roughly half of all universities acknowledge to have implemented this important recognition and dissemination measure.

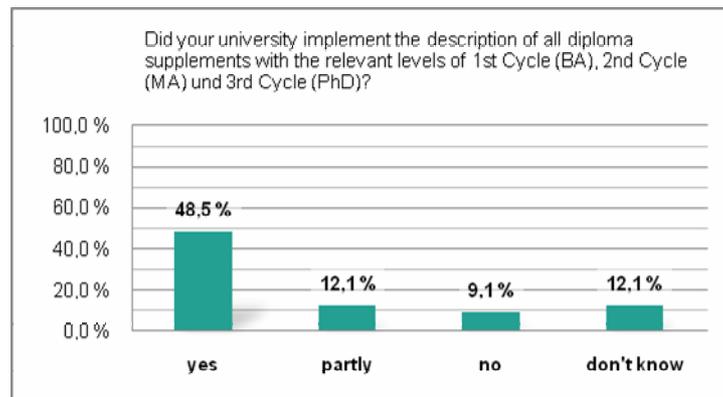


Figure 4: University Implementation of Diploma Supplement Cycle Description (BA/MA/PhD)

But on the other hand still an even smaller share of only 18 percent of all universities in the survey said they already have implemented the necessary classification according to the National and European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This has to be recognized as a major setback for higher education politics as the ‘Dublin Descriptors’ for the three relevant higher education study levels have been implemented in Germany in 2005 by the state council governing higher education, the ‘Kultusministerkonferenz’ (cf. Klumpp, 2010a: 23). This regulation has to be audited by the German accreditation agencies approving study programs at all German universities. Therefore this answer is in average a bad evaluation for standards implementation in German higher education.

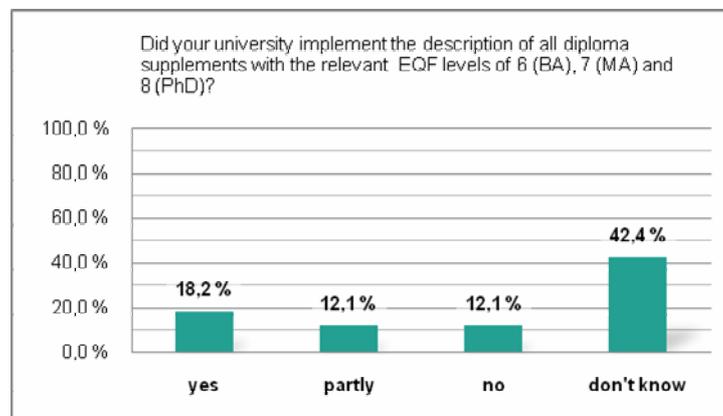


Figure 5: University Implementation of EQF Description in Diploma Supplement

Within the EQF process outcome orientation and therefore descriptors for qualitative indication regarding learning outcomes per module are very important for the basic concept of qualifications frameworks. This is highlighted and evaluated in the following two questions shown in figures 6 and 7. Altogether 21% of all responding universities sustained the notion of implementing the Dublin Descriptors as outcome description of learning results into their module descriptions, whereas 30% say they have done it partly and 18% say it did not happen at all.

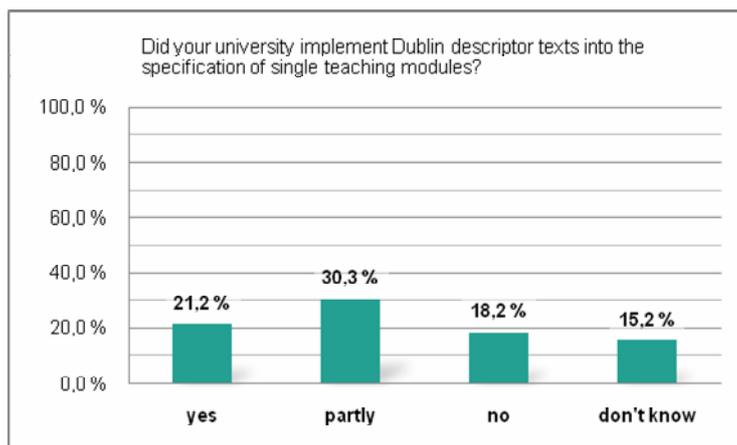


Figure 6: University Implementation of Dublin Descriptors in Module Descriptions

The following figure deals with the question of urging lecturers to actually realize outcome oriented teaching in the study programs according to the EQF principles (cf. Gehmlich, 2009). At least 24% of all universities realized this by counseling their lecturers to support them in order to bring outcome oriented teaching to the real classroom life. Also a quarter said they have undertaken nothing in this direction, the rest of the respondents being not able or willing to respond to this question (also showing that this notion of outcome oriented teaching is not really implemented in higher education practice in Germany).

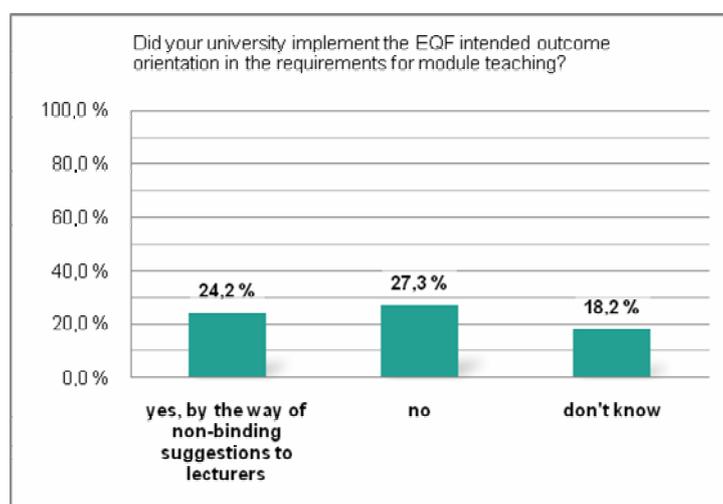


Figure 7: University Implementation of EQF Outcome Orientation in Teaching

A further important field of EQF standardization in Europe is addressed in figure 8 with the concept of implementing processes for the recognition of prior learning outside study programs (e.g. especially important for Germany being the vocational education and degrees amounting for roughly two thirds of an age cohort). As also dual education with sequential or even parallel learning in vocational education and academic education gets more and more commonplace in Germany, this is very important for the individuals engaging in such endeavors (cf. von der Hijden, 2008).

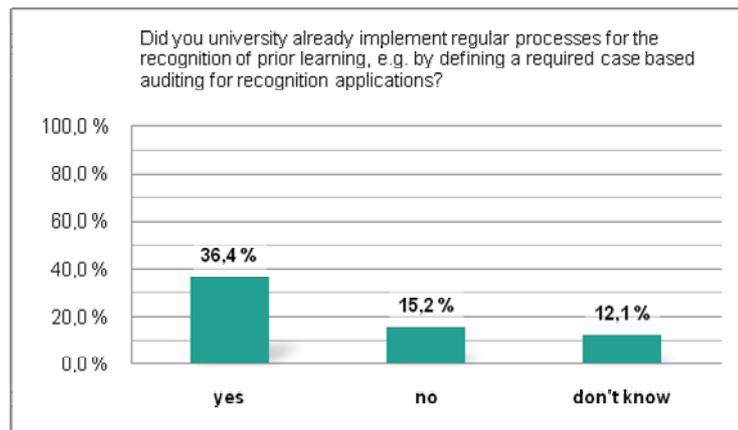


Figure 8: University Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning

The results show in general that universities support standardization processes like Bologna and EQF but still recognize major reengineering potential especially in the details of standardization. This leads to the empirical result that standards may eventually really contribute to solving problems, at least on the institutional level. But it also shows that in many cases details in standardization reforms are neglected and missed in implementation leading to new conflict potential as the intended similar standards in different institutions and areas of higher education are not met.

4. Standardization Processes and their Conflict Solving Potential

4.1. Bologna Process

In general standards provide information about a grouped affiliation of persons, programs and institutions, creating groups of people, programs and institutions with a high homogeneity inside and an also high heterogeneity towards other groups. The most simple standardization system is one required attribute as e.g. university status connected to research activities: This provides 'insiders' (the universities) as well as 'outsiders' (the non-university higher education sector).

One major standardization process in recent higher education in Germany and Europe is the Bologna Process, started 1998 and proposed to be finished since 2010. Though especially in Germany the official message of a completed shift towards standardized higher education studies in three study cycles can be doubted: For example federal universities as the 'Verwaltungsfachhochschulen des Bundes' still provide old-fashioned one-tier diploma studies (cf. FH Bund, 2011). But nevertheless the big bulk of higher education institutions and study programs have switched towards the bachelor, master and PhD structure.

Therefore it is obvious that conflict potentials at higher education systems borders in Europe was reduced as graduates can really travel across borders for further study cycles and also into labor markets. But at the same time new conflict arise within universities or at the system border between higher education institutions and individuals as e.g. students: As standards are not implemented uniquely in the whole system and especially entrance hurdles exist for continuing levels of education in a distorting and unfair way due to budget shortcomings for master and PhD levels, individuals feel increasingly disrespected and voice their concern as well as protest.

4.2. European Qualifications Framework

The development towards an European Qualifications Framework is seen as a further general education reform process, for the field of higher education being intertwined with the Bologna Process (cf. European Commission, 2006; European Commission, 2008). In general in Europe eight levels of education as well as a distinctive outcome orientation shall be implemented, with higher education assuring the levels 6 (bachelor), 7 (master) and 8 (PhD, cf. Hanf/Reuling, 2001).

In a comparable move with the Bologna Process this should lead to a decrease in conflict potential between higher education systems in Europe, but also reaching out to other areas of education such as vocational education and continuing education. But still as the discussion in Germany about the level system of vocational degrees shows, there will be an enormous amount of conflict potential left.

4.3. Higher Education Rankings

Rankings and league tables pose an important trend in higher education. Research provides for the lines of thought that this is mainly caused by information interest from students (and their parents) in the wake of rising study fees as well as an increased information need by public authorities, third party institutions in higher education funding (foundations, companies) and the society as a whole under the pretext of increasing ‘accountability’ (cf. Dill/Soo, 2005; Hazelkorn, 2007; Klumpp, 2009; Kehm/Stensaker, 2009; Longden/Yorke, 2009; Marginson, 2009; CHERPA-Network, 2010).

Though this development strongly connects to the new public management concepts as for example indicator based budgeting or risk return management (cf. Klumpp, 2010b), the details of measuring higher education output, outcome and especially impact are still not nearly solved as discussions about ranking criteria and their interdependencies show (cf. Stahl/Leap/Wei, 1998; Serenko/Bontis, 2004; Lang, 2005; Moed, 2008; Bowman/Bastedo, 2009; Bastedo/Bowman, 2010).

Therefore also new conflicts arise about feasible outcome measurement criteria in higher education fuelling critics pleas that such ranking systems are mainly a ‘diversion from real quality’ (which cannot be measured, cf. Ahn/Dyckhoff/Gilles, 2007; Achibald/Feldmann, 2008; Federkeil, 2009). At least for some stakeholders in higher education rankings are lowering transaction costs as many cooperating institutions such as companies and foundations may evaluate their partners with the help of rankings. But in these cases it also has to be stated that especially companies usually have better, first-hand information resources from past common research projects about specific universities and do not really need such league table information (cf. Usher/Medow, 2009).

4.4. Higher Education Excellence and Profiling

The thrive towards excellence by excellence programs and also profiling in higher education can be seen as a further standardization process as explicitly expressed by the European Union ‘U-Map’ project with the objective to define a similar higher education classification as the ‘Carnegie Classification’ in the US (cf. Veira, 2009; van Vaught et al., 2010). This is in line with many excellence objectives in different countries, often combined with performance based funding and other financial motivation for universities to strengthen their portfolio and especially their (international) research visibility (cf. Jongbloed/Vossensteyn, 2001; Liefner, 2003; Australian Research Council, 2008; Harmann, 2009; DFG, 2010).

These developments lead to increasing state-institutional conflicts as funding is increasingly oriented towards a steep stratification of institutions – leaving some institutions without sufficient budgets to

operate properly in research and teaching. They have the severe choice to make between downsizing and investing in assumed fields of excellence in the hope of acquiring funds in the race for research.

5. Conclusion

It was obvious during this research contribution, that standardization is helping to mitigate conflicts arising in different fields around higher education, namely in student's access, graduate's entrance to work, financing and national as well as international distribution of fair generational and intergenerational chances. Though it has to be said, that standardization processes as e.g. the Bologna Process, the EQF Process as well as ranking and excellence schemes are mainly helping on a political level, whereas the individual-institutional conflicts between students and universities as well as graduates and employers for example are not prone to easy solutions by standardization schemes as in these fields contents and qualifications in the end count more than input, degree or output standards. This was already proclaimed by Geuna in 2001.

Therefore the general view and political ambitions should focus more on supporting such content quality e.g. by supporting individual scholarship in all student and researcher levels in order to rise 'gold quality standards' in German higher education – otherwise a danger would exist in Germany as well as in the whole of Europe of over standardization diluting quality and increasing conflicts instead of mitigating them. Because all concerned individuals will discover very quickly, if they have been sold 'empty boxes' with new labels such as Bologna, EQF or ranking and excellence systems. And this recognition could lead to new conflicts in European countries in remembrance of the sixties in the last centuries when a similar feeling of 'talars and titles' with old-fashioned content provoked wide-spread protest.

Finally it has to be remarked that during this research it evolved that standards are in many cases a 'fair' distribution scheme of chances and also risks and therefore conflicts: By avoiding misconception by individuals their decision behavior can adapt to ever faster changing environments and institutional missions as well as profiles. Second standardization avoids increasingly necessary differentiation in times of mass and universal higher education to get too steep. As a too steep differentiation would drive distinctive groups of individuals and institutions into 'loosing positions', strong conflict potential would arise which is mitigated by standards as a 'floor backup'. This provides potentially 'loser groups' to adhere to existing structures in society and higher education as they still have maneuvering room. This interestingly provides for some loose research ends leading to psychology and group behavior, defining standards as mitigating effects in dynamic group processes of individuals and institutions.

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