

The Bologna Process

- The aim of the Bologna Process is to create a European Higher Education Area through initiatives and ambitions such as educational harmonization, comparability, mobility, flexibility, employability and qualification frameworks.
- 1998: the Sorbonne Declaration was ratified
- 1999: the Bologna Declaration was ratified
- 2010: the launching of the European Higher Education Area.
- 2014: the Bologna Declaration had been ratified by 47 nations.

The dissertation explores the Bologna Process through a multisited policy ethnography. The research project employs a combination of qualitative methods and materials, including interviews, observations, logbooks and document analysis.

About Katja Brøgger

Katja Brøgger holds an MA in the History of Ideas. She produced her PhD dissertation at the Department of Education, Aarhus University, Campus Copenhagen, where she has been part of the research programme on Organization and Learning and the research programme on Education, Policy, and Organization in the Knowledge Economy. Her research focus is on education reform.

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Time and place for the defence

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1pm – 4pm

Aarhus University, Department of Education, Tuborgvej 164, 2400 Copenhagen NV, room D169

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THE FACELESS MASTERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

GOVERNING THROUGH
STANDARDS: THE BOLOGNA PROCESS
AND THE NEW REALITIES OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

Ph.d.-afhandling af Katja Brøgger



AARHUS UNIVERSITET

THE FACELESS MASTERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

GOVERNING THROUGH STANDARDS: THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND THE NEW REALITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The dissertation *The Faceless Masters of Higher Education* by Katja Brøgger, Department of Education, Aarhus University, campus Copenhagen focuses on the new mode of governance introduced to higher education through the Bologna Process. This new mode of governance consists of standardizations and comparisons and the dissertation investigates how this materializes and translates in everyday working life in higher education.

International higher education reform

This dissertation contributes to research on international higher education reform by offering an empirical and theoretical account of the mode of governance that characterizes the Bologna Process and by demonstrating how the reform materializes and is translated in everyday working life, including an empirical and theoretical account of the agency among professors and managers as integral to the understanding of the reform.

The Bologna Process and the EU

The dissertation reveals the close connections between the Bologna Process and the EU regarding regulative and monitoring techniques such as standardizations and comparisons, which are carried out through the so-called 'Open Method of Coordination'. The dissertation suggests that the Bologna principles were part of an early EU agenda on European growth that pre-dates the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and thus that the Bologna Process works as a subtle means to circumvent the EU's subsidiarity principle, making it possible to accomplish a European governance of higher education despite the fact that education falls outside EU's legislative reach.

A material-affective infrastructure of the Bologna Process

The dissertation argues that the spread and continuous development and production of higher education standards in Europe depends on the infrastructure of the Bologna Process, which consists of an explosion of standardizing devices and monitoring practices. The materiality of the infrastructure, such as multicolored scorecards that compare national performance data, is affectively wired through naming-shaming-faming mechanisms that calibrate and incentivize member states to mimic each other and desire 'better performance' and, as such

co-opt themselves into peer-pressure. Through these material-affective processes, governance without government is produced.

The alteration of everyday working life in higher education

Following the spread of two education standards – the modularization and the outcome-orientation of the curriculum – the dissertation argues that standardization used as a regulative technology designed to govern at a distance reaches deep into the ontological matter of everyday working life in higher education organizations. The dissertation reveals how these standards are involved with the creation, shaping and (re)configuring of the realities of higher education. The dissertation argues that these standards alter that which they seek to govern because they change professors and managers' social and professional worlds and because they themselves bend and transform when they are bundled up with work practices. Therefore, the dissertation further concludes, that even though a standardizing process has taken place, this does not necessarily entail that such a process has contributed uniformity.

The faceless masters of higher education

The ontology of the Bologna Process, including its infrastructure, stabilizes itself by glossing over the messy and colliding reals related to the translations within higher education organizations. The demarcations that once framed the social geography of national education are currently being dissolved. The new education standards that transgress nation states and institutions are changing the quality of the social interactions. This makes the Bologna Process emerge as a dimension of the social and professional world of higher education rather than an educational space in its own right. Since the Bologna Process relies on voluntary co-option, once established, the challenge – or perhaps the potential – is that no one person or organization has the power to change it. The standards through which the Bologna Process is governed no longer serve as tools for what were once human organizational, national or international, regulators. The standards become regulators themselves – the faceless masters of higher education.

Between agility and standards

How is it possible to maintain the ambition of (for example) increased exchange and mobility within higher education without introducing a host of standards that seem to lock, constrain and thus foreclose this ambition of agility and movement? Today, the new curricular standards are locked together with numerous other standards, including quality assurance and accreditation. How is it possible to overcome the obvious discrepancy between an ambition of exchange, movement, agility and connectivity and the means by which this is to be achieved – between standards and standardizing processes? Is there a way to craft realities of higher education into existence beyond the 'peer-pressure ontology' of the Bologna Process that, until today, has proved powerful enough to mobilize 47 nations without passing any laws?