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## Beyond Bologna: The Bologna process as a global template for higher education reform efforts

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# TranState Working Papers

BEYOND BOLOGNA  
THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AS A  
GLOBAL TEMPLATE FOR HIGHER  
EDUCATION REFORM EFFORTS

EVA MARIA VÖGTLE

No. 129

Universität Bremen • University of Bremen  
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Staatlichkeit im Wandel • Transformations of the State  
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*Eva Maria Vögtle*

***Beyond Bologna***

***The Bologna Process as a Global Template  
for Higher Education Reform Efforts***

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## ***Beyond Bologna***

### ***The Bologna Process as a Global Template for Higher Education Reform Efforts***

#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates recent regional higher education reform initiatives in non-European regions. It studies which non-European regions have launched Bologna style reform initiatives and analyses these initiatives by means of case studies. The regions where such initiatives were launched are the Asia-Pacific region, parts of Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. In a nutshell, cultural and institutional similarities among countries participating in these regional initiatives as well as between these countries and Bologna participants can account for the adoption of Bologna style policies. Additionally, dependence on and competition for resources, such as students and academic reputation, determine the non-European universities' responses to the Bologna Process. In more general terms, the Bologna Process has a major impact even on non-European regions. All the initiatives have in common that they have similar goals as the Bologna Process. Moreover, they have emulated the governance mode of the Bologna Process to a large extent.

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## **Beyond Bologna**

### **The Bologna Process as a Global Template for Higher Education Reform Efforts<sup>1</sup>**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The last decades have seen great changes in the attitude of governments towards policy harmonization. Recently, international harmonization efforts have reached beyond the traditional areas, such as economic policy, and have begun to harmonize fields that were previously strictly national, such as higher education (HE). The prime example of a harmonization attempt in the field of HE is the so-called ‘Bologna Process’ (BP). One of its objectives is to increase the employability of European citizens and labor mobility in Europe. This is to be achieved by enhancing the comparability and compatibility of HE structures and degrees in Europe. Additionally, the reforms aim at enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of European HE systems against other HE systems. The reforms’ emphasis on comparability and competitiveness can be set in relation to political developments at the European and global level. One example of such a development is the Lisbon Strategy<sup>2</sup>, which focuses on issues of employment, growth, and social cohesion. In this policy, education is perceived to be a key element in social policy, labor market policy, and overall economic policy. Especially tertiary education is presumed to play a central role in the transformation into a knowledge-based economy. Generally it is believed that competitive higher education institutions bear the potential to increase the competitiveness of the overall economy and further economic growth through research and innovation.

Thus, concerns about the adequacy of HE opportunities are not merely European phenomena. If a large and economically wealthy region such as the European Union (EU) launches political initiatives related to HE, it can be expected that they will attract international attention. In 2003, at the Berlin Summit, European education ministers

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared in the realm of the project C4 *Internationalisation of Education Policy* of the SFB597 *Transformations of the State* and was initiated by Kerstin Martens. I would like to thank Kerstin Martens for inspiring this paper, two anonymous reviewers and James Hudson for helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> The Lisbon Strategy, also known as the Lisbon Agenda or Lisbon Process, is an action and development plan for the European Union. In the year 2000 it was adopted by the European Council for a ten-year period. Its aim is to make the EU "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010" (European Commission, 2003).



stressed the need for European HE Area (EHEA) countries to engage with the rest of the world (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). Although the so called external dimension of the BP is primarily concerned with promoting the competitiveness and attractiveness of European HE institutions to non-Europeans, it also emphasizes the need to look beyond Europe and to engage in cooperation with other regions. In turn, many other regions perceive benefits from cooperation and adaptation of their own HE systems to become more compatible with the EHEA (Zgaga 2006). Although in depth studies about the impact of the BP on European HE have been conducted (see for example Witte 2006; Westerheijden et al. 2010; Voegtler et al. 2010), little systematic knowledge has been gathered about which countries outside of Europe have responded to the BP and why they do so. This paper aims to investigate which regions and countries outside Europe have responded to the BP and how these reactions are coordinated. It tries to identify reasons why these regions or countries have reacted to the BP the way they did.

This study on regional HE reform initiatives outside of Europe is structured into five main sections. Following this introduction, section 2 provides a brief overview of the main goals, developments and actors of the BP. In section 3, Bologna style HE reform initiatives of non-European countries are identified, summarized and compared to be BP. So far, regional HE reform initiatives have been launched in Asia-Pacific, parts of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. The responses to the BP in these regions are analyzed by means of case studies, comparing similarities and differences between the European, and other regional attempts at harmonizing HE policies. Subsequently, in section 4, the empirical results of the case studies are compared to assumptions of organizational theories— namely sociological institutionalism and resource dependence theory – on adaptation processes due to external pressure. Then, hypotheses about reasons for policy adoption in the field of HE are derived from the theories discussed. These hypotheses are intended to guide further in depth studies of HE reform efforts on country or cross-national level. Concluding, section 5 summarizes the main findings of the study and provides prospects for future research endeavors on regional HE reform initiatives.

## **2 THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: MAIN GOALS AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS**

In 1998, the education ministers of France, Italy, Great Britain, and Germany gathered in Paris to sign the Sorbonne Declaration, which aimed at harmonizing the architecture of the European HE systems (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998). This first step towards adjusting national HE systems was substantiated one year later with the Bologna Declaration, which was signed by 29 European education ministers and led to the BP. The BP's central aim is the creation of a European HE Area by 2010 (Bologna

Declaration, 1999). To achieve this, a system of easily comparable degrees is to be established. The objectives of the BP included: the introduction of first a two-tier and later (in 2003) a three-tier study structure, a credit transfer systems, the promotion of academic mobility, and European cooperation in quality assurance. To enable these degree cycles to work in a transparent and harmonious manner across Europe, a number of tools have been developed or adapted for use at institutional and country levels.

Countries partaking in the BP have been required to ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention since the Berlin summit in 2003 (Berlin Communiqué 2003). This Council of Europe (CoE) – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations' (UNESCO) *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications* was adopted at a diplomatic conference in Lisbon in April 1997. The convention is a multilateral legal framework for the improved international recognition of HE degrees and periods of study. Accordingly, degrees obtained and periods of study served at HE institutions of one member country must be recognized by the institutions of all other countries members to the convention, unless it can be proved that substantial differences in qualifications exist. By incorporating the Lisbon Recognition Convention into the BP, the members of the process adopt the definition of Europe developed by the CoE (as defined in the European Cultural Convention of 1954).

The BP did not develop completely new policies aiming at harmonizing HE provision in the EHEA. Rather it incorporated harmonization elements established before the process was launched. Foremost among these institutional level elements are the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement. Originally introduced as part of the Erasmus framework in 1989, ECTS was solely a credit transfer system; more recently, it has developed into a credit accumulation system. Established by the Lisbon Convention (1997), the Diploma Supplement is a transcript of credits from courses undertaken and grades achieved. It has a standard format designed to allow for comparison of qualifications throughout countries and should promote the employability of European citizens and improve the international competitiveness of European HE systems (Bologna Declaration 1999:3).

Quality assurance, as a major cornerstone of the BP, was incorporated into the process with the Berlin Communiqué (2003) and tangible measures for its application at institutional level have been developed since 2005. According to these measures, programs and study courses are to be evaluated internally and externally, students and international experts have to be involved in evaluation, the results of which must be published (Bergen Communiqué 2005). Additionally, the Communiqué presents guidelines for the implementation of a system of accreditation, certification, or similar procedures. At the Ministerial Summit in 2005 the ministers agreed to adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance proposed by the European Association

for Quality Assurance in HE (ENQA). Moreover, the Ministers agreed to establish a European register of quality assurance agencies and four bodies that are collectively known as the E4<sup>3</sup> were requested to develop guidelines for acceptance into the register and report back to the ministerial summits on the progress made (Bergen Communiqué 2005:3). At the London Summit of 2007, E4 proposed a voluntary, self-financing, independent and transparent register (London Communiqué 2007:4). The purpose of the register is to allow all stakeholders and the general public open access to information about quality assurance agencies working in line with the European Standards and Guidelines.

After the Bergen and the London Communiqués laid emphasis on quality assurance and access to information about quality assurance agencies, the last declaration, the 2009 Benelux Communiqué, did not introduce any new policies regarding the comparability of study structures and quality assurance schemes. It mostly repeats the already agreed upon goals and includes the widening of participation of underrepresented groups as another objective (Benelux Communiqué 2009). Even though progress in implementing the Bologna policies was observed (see Stocktaking Reports 2005, 2007 and 2009), the Benelux Communiqué stated that not all the objectives have completely been achieved, and thus ministers will need to commit to the BP beyond 2010.

The goals agreed upon during the course of the BP are summarized by Figure 1. They are depicted by the year and Communiqué, which delineates the measures to be taken. Some of these goals represent tangible measures, while others are mere statements of intentions. As can be seen in the above described arrangements, the education ministers agreed on measures aimed at a structural convergence of HE programs (Olsen and Maassen 2007:9), not at harmonizing the content of academic programs.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the number of the BP's objectives increased between almost every biannual conference of the European Education Ministers. Beyond just the number of objectives, there was an increase in the number of countries participating and the size of the coordination structure. While only four large European countries launched the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, the Bologna Declaration (1999) was signed by 29 European education ministers. At the Prague conference in 2001 the number of signatory states increased to 32 and the European Union Commission (referred to here as Commission) was included as a full member of the process. Further formalization took place as several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and interest groups

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<sup>3</sup> The organizations are the European Universities Association (EUA), European Association for Quality Assurance in HE (ENQA), the European Association of Institutions in HE (EURASHE) and the European Students Union (ESU).

joined the process as advising bodies. These organizations are the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in HE (EURASHE), the CoE, and the European Student Information Bureau (ESIB), which is now known as the European Students Union (ESU). Additionally, an organization, assigned to prepare and follow-up the ministerial summits, was established. This organization itself consists of two sub-organizations, the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and the Bologna Preparatory Group. The BFUG in turn consists of Bologna representatives from the signatory states, representatives of the Commission and the advising bodies EURASHE, CoE, and ESU.

At the Berlin conference in 2003, the follow-up procedure became more formalized when members agreed that the host country of the next conference should establish a secretariat. Additionally, the BFUG was assigned to monitor the participating states' progress in implementing agreed upon measures until the next conference. The BFUG collected this information in the so called Stocktaking Reports, which state the progress made by participating states towards reaching the agreed upon goals. The preparation of the Stocktaking reports was from then on defined as a set task of the BFUG, thus, the Bergen conference in 2005 was the first to assess progress made by the signatory states. At the Bergen summit, new interest groups were included in the BFUG as consultative members<sup>4</sup>. In 2007, at the London summit, no other actors joined the process. The most recent conference was held in April 2009 and no other actors have joined the process as the “present organizational structure [...] is endorsed as being fit for purpose” (Benelux Communiqué 2009:5). Even though the organizational structure was perceived as fitting its purpose, in the future the governance mode will alter as the BP shall be co-chaired by the country holding the EU presidency and a non-EU country (Benelux Communiqué 2009:5).

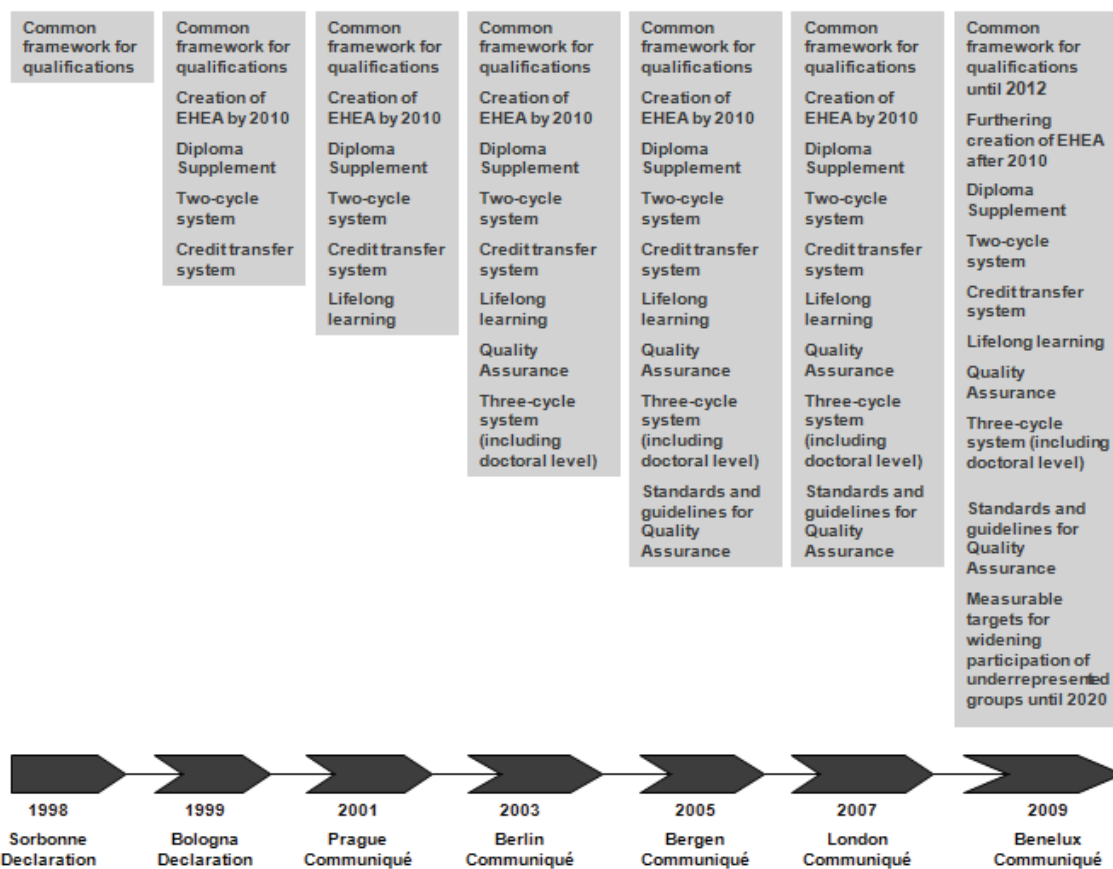
Overall, both the number of participating states and the number of non-governmental as well as supranational actors increased with each successive Bologna Conference until the Bergen Conference in 2005. Since then, there has been a visible trend towards consolidation. These two trends, first the expansion of actors and then their consolidation, are also detectable for the policy issues discussed in the Bologna documents (see Figure 1). However, these policies were around before the process was launched, “there is a general HE modernisation agenda which is common to all world regions and to all countries of today – broadening access, diversifying study programs, quality enhancement, employability, links to the economy, mobility, international students, recognition of study periods and degrees” (Zgaga 2006:49). The BP combined

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<sup>4</sup> These consultative members are the Education International (EI) Pan-European Structure, the European Association for Quality Assurance in HE (ENQA), and the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederation of Europe (UNICE; now BusinessEurope).

and concentrated HE policies and issues rather than developing new policies, it combined policies of different origin, as some were originally invented in a European context, such as ECTS and Diploma Supplements, and some policies were adapted from countries perceived as leading in the field. Policies already operating successfully mainly in the Anglophone world, such as three-tier degree structures and quality assurance, have been the main focus of attention throughout the BP and processes following the BP route in other parts of the world. Thus, what is genuine about the BP is that it bundles HE policies perceived as best practices and that it structured the discussion about them as well as the implementation efforts.

Figure 1 Goals of the Bologna Process



Source: Voegtle et al. 2010 (information from Bologna Communiqués)

In sum, the process can be characterized as expanding in terms of objectives, participants and consultative members. As a result of the increase in participant and consultative members, coordination structures such as the secretariat, the preparatory, and the follow-up group were established. The jointly agreed upon objectives are monitored and promoted by means of institutionalized communication, benchmarking measures (such as the Stocktaking Reports), and information exchange in transnational policy networks. These networks materialize through the bi-annual ministerial meetings

and through the follow-up groups, national committees, and national Bologna groups supporting the responsible ministries. However, there are no legally-binding requirements that oblige the signatory states to implement reforms and there is no central steering authority.

### **3 BOLOGNA STYLE REFORMS BEYOND BOLOGNAS BORDERS**

The development, goals and actors of the BP were presented in the previous section in order to guide our investigation on HE reform initiatives in non-European areas. Although the BP primarily focuses on the creation of a European HE area, it has aroused attention from countries and representatives of HE institutions beyond Europe's borders. This interest is reflected in the fact that Bologna conferences and seminars were opened to non-European countries. In the Berlin Communiqué, Ministers welcomed “the interest shown by other regions of the world in the development of the European higher education area” (Berlin Communiqué 2003:5). They encouraged “the cooperation with regions in other parts of the world by opening Bologna seminars and conferences to representatives of these regions” (Berlin Communiqué 2003:5). Cooperation arrangements between Bologna-countries and other regions have been established, promoting the “Bologna idea” and regional cooperation, based on a “partnership and cooperation agenda” (Zgaga 2006: 15) between the EHEA and the respective country or region.

Even though the BP has brought about cooperation agreements between European countries and countries in other parts of the world, knowledge about the development and the characteristics of these cooperations are absent so far. Given the lack of knowledge about the impact of the BP on other parts of the world, this paper investigates if and which countries in other regions of the world have initiated a HE harmonization process similar to the BP. To ensure that these regional processes are comparable to the BP, the selection criteria for the initiatives to be studied are the following:

- (1) The HE policy initiatives must have a regional approach similar to the BP and thus include at least two or more neighboring countries. Accordingly, they must reach beyond bilateral cooperation agreements.
- (2) The cooperation structures of the initiatives must resemble features of the BP's governance mode; consequently relying on declarations, voluntary commitments, communiqués, benchmark reports and regular meetings.
- (3) The agreed upon policies must resemble policies of the BP, such as the three-tier degree structure, credit transfer and accumulation systems similar to ECTS, Diploma Supplements and standards and guidelines for quality assurance.

Subsequently, regional HE reform initiatives in non-European parts of the world are identified and analyzed. However, this paper does not analyze if the policies agreed upon in these cooperation agreements have been implemented in the respective countries. The focus lies on identifying the harmonization approaches chosen and the goals agreed upon.

### **3.1 Data sources and primary results**

This section describes the research strategy and the process of data gathering. In a first step, the official documents of the BP were analyzed in order to find out which non-European countries and organizations participated in the Bologna summits and seminars as observers. After the relevant organizations were identified, their homepages and policy documents concerning the BP were consulted. Main sources of information were the report on the external dimension of the BP (Zgaga 2006), the homepages of UNESCO and UNESCO-OREALC (for Latin America and the Caribbean), of the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the respective regional organizations working with and for HE institutions and personnel.

Information about the different regional initiatives was mainly gathered by a web-based search. Generally, policy documents were available online or could be requested by email. However, not all documents were available in English. Depending on the region in which the initiative was launched, the documents were available in Spanish, Portuguese and French only; the same applies to the academic literature about the regional HE harmonization processes. After the relevant initiatives and the respective policy documents were identified, the initiatives were categorized by the region in which it was launched, by the reason for alignment as given in the accompanying documents, and by type of entities that launched the initiatives (governmental actors, international organizations [IOs] or networks of HE institutions). Then, goals, policies, and governance modes of the initiatives were compared to those of the BP (see section 2). The results of this categorization of the different regional initiatives are depicted in Table 1.

The first column of the table states the name of the declaration or communiqué and the year in which the respective regional cooperation process was initiated. The second column states the participating countries' regional origin. All members to the initiatives depicted in Table 1 descend either from the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa or Europe. Mostly European countries were involved in the initiatives if their reason for alignment was based on language commonalities (see third column). The fourth column states the actors who launched the harmonization processes. In contrast to the BP, not all regional initiatives were initiated by governmental actors; mostly governmental actors and networks of HE institutions launched the processes

together. The penultimate column summarizes the goals agreed upon in the declarations and communiqués and benchmarks them against the policies promoted by the BP. In this vein, the last column depicts and compares the governance structures of the initiatives to the one of the BP. As an intermediate result, the documents of the initiatives depicted in Table 1 not only state goals that are in accordance with those of the BP, but also resemble its network-like governance structure.

### **3.2 Regional Higher Education harmonization initiatives outside of Europe**

Table 1 categorizes the declarations and communiqués and provides a broad overview by summarizing the main information. However, detailed knowledge about the harmonization processes and their main driving forces cannot be deduced from this very broad summary. To provide insights about the development of the initiatives and the reasons for alignment, the declarations and communiqués are analyzed in more detail consecutively. They are analyzed by means of brief case studies about the individual initiatives and are structured according to the regions in which they were launched (see second column of Table 1).

#### **3.2.1 Asia Pacific Region**

The Asia-Pacific region is a very diverse region in terms of languages spoken and economic wealth of countries in that region. Geographically located in Asia, it is also home to countries perceived less as Asian and more as ‘Western’ type countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Additionally, the countries of this region can be distinguished by their role in the provision of HE in an international environment. Most of the countries in this region are ‘education importers’, meaning that a lot of their national students seek HE in other countries and that their systems do not attract foreign students to a significant extent. However, two countries of this region, Australia and New Zealand, can be called ‘education exporters’, meaning that they educate a large share of foreign students in their national HE systems while relatively few national students seek education in other countries (DEST 2006). In view of these differences between the countries of the region, it can be expected that the reaction to the BP will vary between the ‘education exporters’ and ‘education importers’.

In continental Asia, especially in China and India, expansion in the demand for HE is expected. Australian, North American and European HE institutions compete to attract Asian fee-paying students and for cooperation schemes with countries in this dynamic region. Traditionally, the only European country receiving an important share of students from Asia was the United Kingdom. The BP now makes continental Europe more compatible with the Anglo-Saxon model, which is also in place in much of Asia,



Table 1: Initiatives for the Creation of Higher Education Areas

Documents about the creation of a HE area	Countries from which regions participate	Reason for alignment	Launched by	Goals compatible with Bologna goals	Governance of the Process
Brisbane Communiqué (2006)	Asia Pacific	geographical	governments	Quality assurance frameworks; recognition of educational and professional qualifications; greater student and academic mobility; transferability of qualifications	Bi-annual meetings, Working Group, Secretariat; Interim reports
EULAC (since 1999), Vienna Declaration (2006)	Latin America and Caribbean; Europe	geographical	governments	EULAC Common Area of HE; Compatible credit systems; Comparability of degrees	Quadrennial meetings; EULAC Common Space Follow-up Committee; Action Plan (2002-2008)
Fortaleza Declaration (2004)	Africa; Europe; Asia	language	University networks; governments	Creation of Lusophone HE Area ELES/CPLP HE area; Establishment of quality assurance systems; Student and teaching, research and technical staff mobility; mutual and international recognition of qualifications and double degrees	Follow-up Group; Establishment of information centres about HE systems and the recognition and mobility of students and teaching staff
Lima Declaration (2009)	Latin America and Caribbean	geographical	University networks	Latin American and Caribbean Area of HE (ENLACES); Compatibility between programs, institutions, modalities and systems; Convergence of national and sub regional assessment and accreditation systems; Compatibility of degrees; Academic mobility	Follow-up committee; UNESCO-IESALC develops working agenda
MERCOSUR (SEM) (1992)	Latin America	geographical	governments	Mobility and institutional cooperation; agreements about recognition of studies; definition of postgraduate degrees; Accreditation system (ARCU-SUR)	No agreement on governance structure
Salamanca Declaration (2001, 2005)	Latin America and Caribbean; Europe	language	University networks; governments	Ibero-American Area of Knowledge	Ibero-American network of HE accreditation agencies (RIACES)
Tarragona Declaration (2005); Catania Declaration (2006)	Africa; Europe	geographical	University networks; governments	Euro-Mediterranean HE Area; comparability and readability of HE systems; transferable credits and easily readable qualifications; common evaluation methods and quality assurance schemes; mobility of students, researchers and professors	Bi-annual meetings; Follow-up Group

Source: Own illustration on basis of documents depicted by table

including India and Pakistan (Zgaga 2006:23). However, Australia and in particular the USA are still favoured by Asian students over Europe as study destinations. To change this trend, the European Commission has been trying to intensify regional cooperation in the field of HE with Asian countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

One such initiative was the ASEAN<sup>5</sup>-EU University Network Programme (AUNP), which was officially launched with the signing of the Financing Agreement between the European Commission and the ASEAN University Network (AUN) in 2000 and terminated in 2006. It aimed to enhance cooperation between HE institutions in the two regions and to promote regional integration within ASEAN countries (Zgaga 2006:32). Joint ASEAN-EU rectors' conferences have been organized (in Kuala Lumpur in 2004 and in Leuven in 2005) as well as focused round table meetings on quality assurance (in 2003), on autonomy in HE (in 2005) and on regional cooperation in a globalising world (in 2005) (Zgaga 2006:33). Additionally, technical assistance on quality assurance and on credit transfer systems was provided by the EU. The attempts at closer cooperation attracted the interest of Asian representatives of HE institutions in the BP.

“Students of Hong Kong and China Mainland would most likely welcome the change of the European tertiary system to ‘3+2’, i.e. 3-year Bachelor Degree plus 2-year Masters Degree, since it would cost them less to study a first degree in Europe. Furthermore Chinese parents like to have their children go home as soon as possible. Students of Hong Kong and China Mainland interested to study first degrees in European countries would benefit from a common European system.” (Leung 2005:15).

In 2002 the Commission launched the so called ‘Asia link’ to promote regional and multilateral networking between HE institutions in all EU member states and eligible countries in Asia. Its program activities include partnership projects that support human resource development, curriculum development activities, and program support activities (Zgaga 2006:23). Inspired by the BP, ASEAN member countries decided in 2005 to enhance cooperation among its members by agreeing to establish a ministerial meeting on education as a new ASEAN mechanism to serve as a policy body on education.

Some countries in the Asia Pacific Region perceive this closer cooperation between Asian countries and Europe as threat to their own HE sector. For instance, the Australian HE sector is highly internationalized, since Australia is a successful provider of HE programs which attract international students. Australia has the highest percentage of foreign tertiary students of any OECD country and in absolute terms, it is the fourth largest provider of tertiary education to foreign students in the world, behind

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<sup>5</sup> Association of Southeast Asian Nations, members are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

only the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Germany (Williams and Van Dyke 2004). Trade in education services is critical to Australia's overall economic performance and also represents an important source of private income for universities (DEST 2006). Any developments which could threaten this standing, e.g. another region attracting students away from Australia, are inevitably the subject of discussion and debate. Thus, the Australian education ministry and HE institutions have been keen to monitor the BP and lead discussions on the creation of parallel regional processes (see DEST 2006). A highly influential development is the degree to which China and other large Asian countries have become interested in aligning themselves with HE developments in Europe. China is the number one market for Australian, European, and North American transnational education initiatives, and if China chooses the Bologna roadmap, then the primary nations offering HE to foreign students, like Australia, will want to align themselves with these developments (DEST 2006).

The most frequently discussed Bologna measures in Australia are the introduction of a Diploma Supplement, the compatibility of the Australian credit transfer system with ECTS, and quality assurance. Australia already has a credit transfer system based on student workload. Additionally, the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS) – modeled on ECTS – is used by Australian universities for exchange programs in the Asia-Pacific region (DEST 2006). Further, an advanced credit accumulation and transfer system, and student mobility and transfer mechanisms already operate effectively. Moreover, Australia already has the three-cycle degree structure and an Australian quality assurance system. Taken together, many of the policies promoted by the BP have already been implemented to varying degrees within Australia. Therefore, the Australian Quality Assurance Agency has applied to join the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies in order to facilitate communication and to demonstrate compatibility with Bologna policies (DEST 2006). To demonstrate Bologna compatibility, Australia ratified the Lisbon Convention in 2002, which went into force in 2003<sup>6</sup>.

The second HE sector relying heavily on the influx of fee-paying foreign students in the Asia Pacific region is New Zealand. The BP is expected to have implications for New Zealand tertiary education providers since it is likely to affect the international acceptance of New Zealand's tertiary education degrees and the options for student mobility. The development of mechanisms for comparability with the BP is believed to make institutional exchanges and collaboration easier and provide institutions with a useful marketing tool in third countries. New Zealand and the Commission are funding an academic mobility project which allows tertiary students to complete part of their qualifications at a participating European institution. This project is based on a pilot

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=165&CM=8&DF=19/03/04&CL=ENG>

established in 2004, one of objectives of which was to certify the compatibility of credit transfer systems between New Zealand and the EU (Ministry of Education N.Z. 2009). Due to its three-level degree structure, Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, and quality assurance standards, New Zealand's tertiary education system is already compatible with the Bologna standards and New Zealand has signed but not yet ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2007<sup>7</sup>. Since the convention requires governments to promote the use of a Diploma Supplement or equivalent by its HE institutions, the Ministry of Education and New Zealand Qualifications Authority have initiated a project to investigate the desirability and feasibility of introducing a Diploma Supplement. Furthermore, New Zealand Quality Assurance and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee are currently examining their approval practices against the European Standards and Guidelines. New Zealand's quality assurance standards are compatible with the EHEA Framework and New Zealand is currently applying to be included in the European Register for Quality.

Australia and New Zealand have not only been eager to demonstrate their HE systems' compatibility with the Bologna standards, they have also been active in launching an own process of HE harmonization. This initiative is based on regional cooperation in the Asia Pacific region and mirrors many of the Bologna goals and governance modes. In spring 2006, 27 Ministers from across the Asia Pacific region met in Brisbane to discuss how to respond to the Bologna challenge and create stronger regional links. The result of the meeting is the so called 'Brisbane Communiqué', which set up an international working group to assess the conditions and suitability for BP style reforms in the Asia Pacific region. The overarching objective of what is becoming known as the 'Brisbane Process' is to better align the education systems and approaches of the broader Asia Pacific region with international developments. The Education Ministers agreed to collaborate on quality assurance frameworks, the recognition of qualifications, common competency-based standards for teachers, and the development of common recognition of technical skills (Brisbane Communiqué 2006). In organizational terms, the meeting spawned a follow-up group to examine issues of quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications throughout the region. Much like the BP follow-up group, the Ministers will continue to meet on a bi-annual basis to discuss progress regarding these reforms (Clark 2007). The Brisbane Process incorporates many elements from the Bologna Process with regard to goals and governance structures (see Table 1). However, not all participants of the Brisbane Process have to undergo major HE reforms. For instance, universities in Australia and New Zealand already operate with policies introduced by the BP and merely wish to demonstrate the quality of their HE institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5.

In synthesis, in the Asia-Pacific region, the countries' reactions to the BP differ to a large extent. On the one hand, ASEAN countries intensified their cooperation with the EU and launched common programs co-financed by the Commission. These programs opened European HE institutions to Asian students and promoted Europe as study destination. On the other hand, this cooperation aroused the interest of Asian governments in establishing a process similar to BP, the Brisbane Process. This process is meant to ensure the compatibility of study structures and degrees in the region and enhance the attractiveness of the region as a study destination. Accordingly, there are two coexistent phenomena at work. One follows a cooperative logic of closer cooperation with Europe, providing opportunities for Asian students to study in Europe. The other, competitive logic of the Brisbane Process, aims at enhancing or stabilizing the attractiveness of the regions HE institutions in order to keep students from choosing other regions of the world as study destination. Nevertheless, these logics do not exclude each other as most students of large Asian countries such as China and India have an interest in combining degrees obtained in foreign HE institutions with the ones obtained at home (Leung 2005). Due to the 3+2 study structure of most BP participants, it becomes cheaper and faster for Asian students to obtain a Bachelors degree in most European countries in contrast to countries adhering to a 4+1 system. Thus, countries following the 4+1 system, such as Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the USA might lose their attractiveness as study destinations for Asian students in the future. Therefore, in the long term, these countries might feel inclined to adopt Bologna style policies in order to respond to competitive pressure.

### ***3.2.2 Latin America and the Caribbean***

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean share several cultural and institutional similarities such as common languages, religions, and for large parts relatively comparable economic systems. Thus, in contrast to the Asia-Pacific region, they should have a larger common base for cooperation in the field of HE.

In Latin America, the BP is considered to be a key conceptual background for reforms designed to improve student and labor market mobility, in addition to the flexibility of programs. However, it is acknowledged that the BP is not a perfect fit for Latin America (Riveros 2005). In contrast to Europe, where most governments have the ability to decisively intervene in the coordination of their tertiary education systems, Latin American governments limit themselves to financing their systems while leaving coordination to the free play of institutional and corporate interests. Governments are relatively powerless in regulating HE institutions. It is a region where, in comparison to Europe, a much smaller percentage of people attend university (Riveros 2005). Moreover, a strong and growing presence of private tertiary institutions operating

independently from state funds accounts for an average of about 47% of Latin America's total enrollment (Brunner 2009). Latin America's educational systems are subject to intense organizational diversification and competitive pressure. There is no unified national, regional or functional HE market (Teixeira et al. 2004; Avery et al. 2005). Even though Latin American countries share a common history and, for the most part, a common language, regional cooperation in the HE community is fragmented and collaboration occurs more frequently between institutions in other parts of the world, rather than between different HE institutions in the region (de Wit 2005). Latin America's national HE systems face structural, organizational, and functional obstacles to Bologna style harmonization of their HE systems. Nonetheless, the BP has had an impact in Latin America in raising new issues and encouraging discussions among academics and governments. The major and most directly relevant topics for discussion in Latin America include the length of studies, architecture of degrees and diplomas, standards of quality assurance, the establishment of regional HE areas and the international competitiveness of Latin American HE institutions (Brunner 2009).

The EU has been showing great interest in close cooperation with Latin American HE institutions. Additionally, it has furthered the creation of an own Latin American and Caribbean HE area. In 1999, the first summit for the creation of a common HE area between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean – called EULAC (European Union Latin America and the Caribbean) – was held in Rio de Janeiro. One year later an action framework emanated from the Ministerial Conference held in November in Paris. This framework called for the promotion of degree comparability and the establishment of compatible credit systems. Furthermore, it aimed at promoting distance education, its validation and recognition in a transnational context, the pooling of documentary resources and databases, the promotion of vocational postsecondary education and training, and the recognition of work experience (Brunner 2009). The ministers or the authorities responsible for HE, supported by the HE institutions, agreed to meet regularly and at least every four years to assess progress made in implementing the objectives. The 2002 Madrid Summit accepted a political declaration and an action plan was subsequently established for the period 2002-2004 and later extended until 2008. The proposed projects for the period 2002-2004 focused mainly on activities to encourage mobility and assessment of quality. Here, the document set the task

“to promote a study on the current accreditation systems recently drawn up in the regions within the common ground. To achieve this, the Bologna Process that is taking place in Europe will be taken into account. To help communication between both processes (Bologna and the EULAC common ground) the EULAC Common Space Follow-up Committee should participate in the preparatory meetings for Berlin 2003” (Zgaga 2006:27-28).

At the second summit the education ministers of Latin American, Caribbean and EU countries affirmed that they would continue constructing a common HE area, which is

to be completed by 2010 (Pena-Vega 2009). In the final declaration of the Vienna Summit in May 2006, Heads of State and Government formulated the objective of creating a EULAC Common Area of HE, based on mobility and cooperation (Brunner 2009).

To support the creation of the EULAC HE area, Latin American and European universities have been developing various collaborative initiatives. Two have been carried out in collaboration with the EUA, the BRIDGES-LAC project and the PROMHEDEU-LAC project. The members of the BRIDGES-LAC (2007-2009) project are individual universities and it is co-financed by the Commission under the Erasmus Mundus framework. The project aims to enhance the accessibility of European HE institutions for Latin American students, to contribute to the advancement of mutual recognition of qualifications and degrees and to strengthen the international dimension of quality assurance. The PROMHEDEU-LAC (2008 to 2010) project is also co-financed by the Commission and its main objective is the consolidation of the EULAC HE space through enhancing dialogue, providing information about the BP and conducting a comparative study about the different exchange programs in the United States, Australia, Canada, the European Union and Latin America.

One of the most tangible implementation activities (running jointly at more than 135 European universities and in nine different study areas) in the course of the BP is the so called ‘Tuning project’. After its success in Europe, it has also been implemented in the academic environment of Latin America and the Caribbean. Similarly to the European Tuning project, the ALFA Tuning Latin America Project seeks to ‘fine tune’ existing educational structures in Latin America by initiating a debate with the aim to “identify and improve cooperation between HE institutions, so as to develop excellence, effectiveness, and transparency” (Zgaga 2006:30). Tuning Latin America is carried out by universities in many different countries, both Latin American and European. It aims at developing comparable degrees in the Latin American region by encouraging regional convergence in twelve disciplines<sup>8</sup> and making educational structures more transparent. About 186 Latin American universities in 19 Latin American countries<sup>9</sup> participate and each country has established a ‘Tuning Center’ to coordinate the efforts (Benetoin 2008). The participating universities have been selected by the ministries of education and/or by rectors’ conferences of each country according to the following criteria: national excellence in the area they are representing and sufficient importance in their own national system (due to institutional size, historical trajectories and

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<sup>8</sup> The disciplines are Architecture, Business, Chemistry, Civil Engineering, Education, Geology, History, Law, Mathematics, Medicine, Nursing and Physics.

<sup>9</sup> Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

academic credibility) so that national specifics are mirrored by the participation of these institutions (González et al. 2004). The project is administered by a steering committee composed of representatives of eight Latin American universities, seven European universities and representatives of different regional HE associations<sup>10</sup>.

Third, a Latin American version of the European Reflex Project (The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society<sup>11</sup>), called Proflex, has been launched. It aims at gathering results about HE and university graduate employment in different Latin American countries by supplying indicators that facilitate the comparison of university graduates in the Latin American labor markets with European and other developed countries (Brunner 2009:15). These three EU funded projects and collaboration projects aim to foster compatibility between Latin America and the Caribbean and European HE systems and in turn enhance the possibilities for the emergence of a Latin American and Caribbean Area (LAC) of knowledge.

Apart from cooperating with the EU, initiatives based on common linguistic and historical background have been launched. One of them is the creation of an Ibero-American<sup>12</sup> Area of Knowledge, based on traditional ties between Latin American universities and those of Spain and Portugal. Since their first meeting in Salamanca (2001), rectors of Ibero-American universities and participating governments have built on and continue to emphasize academic cooperation towards a common area for HE. Thus, in 2005, the Declaration of Salamanca of Ibero-American Heads of States and Governments “expressed the agreement to advance the creation of an Ibero-American knowledge area, oriented toward the transformation of HE and stressing research,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibero-American University Council (CUIB), Superior University Council of Central America (CENTROAMÉRICA), National Association of Universities and HE Institutions (ANUIES, Mexico), MERCOSUR, Community of Andian Nations (CAN) and four coordinators for the thematic areas.

<sup>11</sup> The REFLEX project is funded by the EU 6th Framework Program and several national funds. The project involves partners from twelve countries (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK) and is coordinated by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market from Maastricht University.

<sup>12</sup> Ibero-America is a term used since the second half of the 19th century to refer collectively to the countries in the Americas which were formerly colonies of Spain or Portugal. Spain and Portugal are themselves included in some definitions. The prefix Ibero- refers to the Iberian peninsula in Europe. Ibero-America is formed by all Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas, in addition to Brazil, which is Portuguese-speaking, but excludes the French-speaking countries Haiti, French Guiana, Martinique and Guadeloupe. The exclusion of the French-speaking regions differentiates Ibero-America from Latin America, as well as the inclusion of the European states of the Iberian peninsula if they are included in the definition. The English-speaking countries Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Saint Kitts & Nevis and Grenada, and Dutch-speaking Suriname are also excluded from Ibero-America.



development and innovation as necessary conditions to increase the region's international competitiveness" (Brunner 2009:13). Therefore, the General Secretariat of the Organizations of Ibero-American States (OEI) together with the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science, and Culture and the Ibero-American University Council were commissioned to elaborate a political-technical agreement to start this process.

At the same time, a group of academic organizations, associations, and networks has been constituted to sustain and support the development of the Ibero-American HE area (Brunner 2009). The establishment of the Ibero-American network of HE accreditation agencies (RIACES) can be regarded as a result of the intensified cooperation of Ibero-American states in the area of HE. This network was founded in 2003 by evaluation and accreditation agencies of various Latin American countries together with the Spanish National Agency of Quality Evaluation and Accreditation (ANECA) and education ministers of the region. It promotes the Ibero-American cooperation and exchange of good practices in quality assurance and accreditation and aims to contribute to the convergence of HE in the Ibero-American area through projects, exchanges, and mutual recognition measures (Lamarra 2004).

Latin American countries not only enhanced their cooperation in the field of HE with the EU and with Ibero-American countries. They also have enhanced regional cooperation by promoting a Latin American and Caribbean Area (LAC) for HE. This cooperation culminated in a declaration, signed in June 2009 by representatives of University Networks and Councils of Chancellors (of publicly funded as well as private institutions) of LAC. This meeting took place on request of UNESCO-IESALC (International Institute of UNESCO for HE in LAC) and the 'Lima Declaration' on the creation of a LAC HE area (called ENLACES) was drawn up. With this declaration, the universities committed themselves to foster support for this initiative by their governments and through bi-lateral and multi-lateral organizations in the region, as well as by different sectors of society.

The goals delineated in the Lima Declaration resemble the ones of the BP to a great extent. The most tangible objectives outlined are the achievement of greater compatibility between programs, institutions, modalities and systems; convergence of national and sub-regional assessment and accreditation systems; mutual recognition of studies, titles and diplomas; intra-regional mobility of students, researchers, professors, and administrative personnel; creation of multi-university and multidisciplinary research networks; and the encouragement of shared distance education programs, as well as support for the creation of institutions of a regional character that combine internet-based and regular education. The Lima Declaration outlined an organizational structure for the process foreseen to follow the declaration, it created a "follow-up

committee with consultative, technical support, and supervision functions, with UNESCO-IESALC being responsible for the development of a concrete working agenda” (Lima Declaration 2009:3), hence, including a governance structure similar to the BP. The signees appeal to their national governments to take measures to avoid further brain drain<sup>13</sup> and enhance the condition of academics. Thus, the goal of this harmonization process is less to attract foreign students, but to reform national HE systems so as to keep domestic students from acquiring their education elsewhere.

However, not all regional approaches of HE reforms and initiatives have been inspired by the BP. The first attempts at cooperation were already undertaken in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. In 1992, the educational sector of MERCOSUR – called Sector de Educación de MERCOSUR (SEM) – was launched. All signatory countries to the MERCOSUR agreed that education should play a prime role in the integration process of the region. Three main thematic blocks have since received most attention: accreditation, mobility, and institutional cooperation. Through this SEM project, a series of agreements about recognition of studies –although differing in scope– have been established. With regard to the mutual recognition of studies, two protocols have been signed: one concerning postgraduate studies, signed in 1995 in Montevideo, and the other concerning the recognition of degrees for conducting academic activities in SEM member states, signed in Asunción in 1997. A protocol on postgraduate training was also adopted in 1995 with the aim of assuring comparable training in MERCOSUR member states. This protocol established criteria to define postgraduate degrees and for the accreditation of postgraduate programs. With regard to accreditation, SEM has designed an experimental mechanism for accrediting degrees and for the recognition of university degrees called MEXA. This mechanism has been established through a memorandum signed by MERCOSUR member states and affiliates in 1998 (Pena-Vega 2009). Thus, regional cooperation in the field of accreditation and quality assurance began before the onset of the BP and cannot be described as inspired by Bologna. However, in 2008 a memorandum about the creation and implementation of a system of accreditation of university careers for the SEM area was signed. This recognition of academic degrees in the MERCOSUR and associated states constitutes a framework for the implementation of a permanent system of accreditation, named ARCU-SUR (Pena-Vega 2009). Due to timing and content it can be assumed that this regional approach was inspired by the Bologna reform agenda. Although the Bologna reforms did not inspire all regional cooperation in the field of HE, they certainly gave existing initiatives a new impetus.

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<sup>13</sup> Brain drain is the loss of highly skilled professionals from a source country to a recipient country (Sako 2002: 25).

The BP is stimulating closer collaboration between Latin American and European HE institutions. This cooperation goes beyond the projects launched in the Asia-Pacific region (see 3.2.1) since they aim at the creation of a common HE area between LAC and the EU. The cooperation is particularly intense with Spanish and Portuguese universities, in an effort to create an Ibero-American area of knowledge. Most recently, the regional approach of the BP has been emulated by Latin American universities with the Lima Declaration. Thus, contrary to the way the BP occurred in Europe, the universities themselves have started the process of regional harmonization and HE policy convergence, not the governments through their education ministers. As has been pointed out before, due to the great autonomy which LAC universities have in most parts of the region, the governments could not have started a process of reforming HE policies without the support of the HE institutions and without the cooperation of the private institutions. Two regional university networks have been providing the building blocks for the creation of a Latin American and Caribbean Area for HE, the Inter-American Organization for HE (IOHE, founded 1979) and the Union of Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean (UDUAL). These two organizations have been seeking to establish an academic synergy in collaboration with other national and regional organizations and university networks (OUI 2010). Thus, the process of creating an Latin American and Caribbean HE area is a bottom-up process, from the institutions to the governments while the BP is a top-down process, initiated by governments and passed on to the HE institutions for implementation.

Even though the Lima Declaration bears no direct reference to the BP, the BP certainly had an ideational impact on the creation of an LAC HE area, providing best practices for reforming HE institutions and templates for governing a process of policy adaptation in the absence of legal obligation. Bologna has radiated to Latin America and the Caribbean and triggered discussions that – had Bologna not existed – might not have taken place or would have developed only locally (Brunner 2009). However, this regional approach was the last step after several initiatives based on common language and historical roots. The regional coordination followed other transnational initiatives not based on geographical propinquity but on shared historical ties and financial support from the Commission. Hence, in the case of Latin America, the focus was first on cooperation with Europe and with culturally close countries before a regional approach was considered. Only recently have the Latin American and Caribbean countries begun to develop a regional approach excluding European countries and without financing from the Commission.

Generally, the BP has encouraged collaboration among Latin American and Caribbean HE institutions and between them and European HE institutions, especially with Portuguese and Spanish ones. Practices and mechanisms which originated in North

America – such as the accreditation of institutions and programs, or the three-cycle degree structure – are viewed with overt ideological distrust when they are imported directly from the ‘hegemonic center’, the USA. However, if the transferred policies come from Europe, the barriers to their acceptance and adoption weaken (Brunner 2009). It seems as if European globalization is seen as something less fearful than that from the United States and more in agreement with Latin American idiosyncrasies and customs (Malo 2005).

In summary, cooperation in the field of HE seems a difficult venture for Latin America and the Caribbean. Due to the great autonomy of their universities, the large private HE sector and the lack of regional cooperation, governments are restrained in attempts to reform their HE systems. The first initiatives to harmonize the provision of HE were based on projects co-financed by the Commission. As a result, the costs of adapting to the Bologna policies were lowered for LAC universities. The EU actively seeks to increase its influence in this region by cooperating with Latin American HE providers and governments. Other initiatives in this region are based on a common language and cooperation with former colonial powers. In 2009, a first purely regional approach was launched by university networks. Thus, in contrast to the top-down character of the BP, the first substantial initiative for regional cooperation came from the universities and not the governments of the regions.

### ***3.2.3 The African Continent***

Africa is a region characterized by huge language and religious diversity not only in-between the countries of the regions but even in the countries themselves. The economic systems and performance vary to a great extent, and the capabilities of governmental institutions to uphold the rule of law differ enormously. Against this background, regional cooperation in the field of HE should be a difficult venture for African HE institutions and countries.

Africa faces more acute and serious challenges in virtually all aspects of HE development than any other region of the world; these challenges include: funding, enrollment, infrastructure, governance and management, brain drain, capacity building, equity and access, quality, and graduate employability. For many countries, their sheer size, fragile socio-economic state and poor educational infrastructure make it impossible to act on their own. Serious underinvestment in HE owes to education policies enforced by external forces (such as the World Bank) which formally insisted that resources should be directed to other forms of the education sub-sectors, especially to elementary education (Teferra 2005). Hence, the problems of the African HE sector are immense.

The educational systems in Africa are heavily shaped by European former colonial rulers, whose influence still persists through a variety of social, political, economic,

educational, and cultural bonds (Teferra 2005), such as a common language and religion. The creation of African universities often dates back to the colonial period; almost all universities and HE institutions have been designed on the models of their colonizing counterparts. The differences between African HE institutions are due to the original differences between the models they reproduced (Sall and Ndjaye 2007). Due to the BP, most European higher education systems are undergoing reforms, thus African universities which currently have links with European universities become isolated. In the future, they will have difficulties to find universities with which they can cooperate and exchange students. Thus, African universities might feel pressure to align themselves with the BP reforms in order not to isolate them from their cooperation partners. This may not be too difficult in Anglophone countries where the three-cycle degree structure is already in use and most universities are about to adopt a credit transfer system. In contrast to them and like their European counterparts, francophone, lusophone and hispanophone countries' institutions will have to undertake major reforms in order to comply with Bologna standards (Mohamedbhai 2005).

The first transnational cooperative initiative that included African HE institutions was launched at the annual meeting of the Association of the Portuguese Speaking Universities (AULP) in Luanda, Angola, in 2002. There it was proposed to use the experience of the BP to create a lusophone HE Area (called ELES). The project involves the establishment of mutually recognized quality assurance systems and improvement of the mutual recognition of qualifications, the facilitation of the exchange of students, the recognition of qualifications and double degrees, and the moves to strengthen the mobility of students and graduates. As the actions proposed implied the involvement of the Community of the Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP)<sup>14</sup>, the CPLP was approached to obtain their engagement (Zgaga 2006:25). At the 2004 meeting of the CPLP in Fortaleza, Brazil, a text for a convention on the recognition of qualifications – prepared by the AULP and based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention (see section 2) – was presented and proposed. This 'Fortaleza Declaration' aimed at establishing the CPLP HE Area and set the following priorities: mutual and international recognition of the degrees offered in the CPLP, promotion of student and academic staff mobility, and structural compatibility of HE systems. The declaration established a follow-up group, composed of a representative of each of the ministries responsible for HE and a representative of the AULP (Fortaleza Declaration 2004). The following meeting of ministers (December 2005) approved a two-year plan dealing with the establishment of a network of information centres about HE systems and the

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<sup>14</sup> The CPLP was established in 1996 and constitutes a formal forum with regular meetings of ministers of education and also with HE issues on the agenda. Its members are Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor.

recognition and mobility of students and teaching staff. This network's function was to promote elements of convergence with the BP. Cooperation among national systems of evaluation was encouraged, as was the promotion of inter-institutional cooperation through the development of networks involving activities of teaching and research, including the mobility of students and teaching staff (Lourtie 2006).

Another initiative to regional integration in the field of HE incorporating African countries is the 'Tarragona Declaration'. The rectors and representatives of the universities at the meeting of the Mediterranean University Forum in Tarragona (June 2005) formulated the Tarragona Declaration, which aimed at the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean area of HE and Research, the fostering of collaboration and dialogue among educational institutions, and an increase in the efficiency of the institutions and the quality of teaching and research. However, in contrast to the BP, it was not the governments, but rather the universities themselves which took the first steps in the direction of harmonizing HE provision in the Mediterranean area. As a tangible objective, the Tarragona Declaration aimed at establishing a HE network, consisting of universities and research centers in the Mediterranean region and supported by national and regional political institutions of the countries involved. This network strived at fostering the development of competencies, by means of joint research programs, teaching and training programs for academic, technical and administrative staff, and to increase youth employment in sectors of high levels of cultural knowledge.

Just one year later (2006) the education ministers of the Mediterranean area followed the initiative taken by the rectors and representatives of the universities with the 'Catania Declaration' which proposed the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean HE Area. This structured cooperation was intended to promote the comparability and compatibility of HE systems in the Euro-Mediterranean Area. The declaration intended the establishment of a common system of transferable credits and easily comparable qualifications by sharing criteria, evaluation methods, and quality assurance schemes in order to facilitate the mobility of students, researchers, and professors. The education ministers aimed at promoting PhD research programs with a view to encourage scientific and technical collaboration and to promote competitiveness in the region. Networks for interlinking universities were foreseen to be established, while distance and lifelong learning efforts should be strengthened. Additionally, and going beyond the Bologna goals, a set of initiatives in the field of vocational education and training with the aim of developing vocational expertise and diplomas in HE was launched (Catania Declaration 2006). The ministers have agreed on a governance mode to structure the process similar to the BP. They agreed on bi-annual meetings to assess progress and to promote further collaboration through the establishment of a follow-up group.

Thus, the BP certainly has had an impact on HE in Mediterranean Africa. But even beyond that region it impacted some countries and regions directly, others slowly and circuitously and on some countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, it has had little to no impact. Reforms are under way in almost all countries on the African continent, especially the conversion to two-semester academic years, two- and three-cycle degree structures as well as the division of curricula into credits (Sall et al. 2007:25). For instance, the Maghreb countries in northern Africa are now re-aligning their HE systems (based on the French model) with the three-tier system following the 3+2+3 (three years of study for a Bachelors degree, two years for a Masters and three years for a PhD) structure (WENR 2006). Some African countries directly transferred the reforms bundled by the BP without modification to context and connection to regional initiatives. For example, in 2005, member countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (CEMAC) adopted the three-tier system following the 3+2+3 format (Tchombe et al.2009). An international conference on adaptation to BP policies by African universities was held in the Democratic Republic of Congo in July 2007. The conference sought to examine why African universities may seek to adapt to (or adopt aspects of) the BP, including: issues of quality assurance and accreditation, and the role of international financial organizations in the promotion of the Bologna policies in Africa (Obasi, 2007). Africa was a major focus at the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on HE, where many political and HE leaders from all over the world spoke at the Round Table Africa in favor of promoting an African HE and Research Area (MacGregor 2009). Thus, while there is little progress to speak of, especially in sub-Saharan African Countries, at least the discussion about the creation of an African HE and research area has begun.

Overall, cooperation in the field of HE in Africa includes European countries and does not follow a regional approach like the BP or the Brisbane Process (see section 3.2.1). The participation in HE networks is based on language and colonial legacies. Even though there are efforts for regional integration, such as the creation of a Mediterranean HE area, these regional initiatives include European countries participating in the BP as well. Rather than cooperating regionally, some African countries emulate the Bologna policies without intention to intensify cooperation with neighboring countries. These adaptation processes are furthered through north-south inter-academic cooperation agreements or as parts of bilateral or multilateral cooperation. This is due to the fact that most African countries are under great reform pressure since the former colonial powers are changing their HE systems and formerly compatible degrees will not be compatible anymore in the future. Historical, cultural and political roots account for the fact that more and more African countries are adhering to the academic reform principles initiated by the BP (Sall et. al. 2007). Thus,

it is not surprising that reform efforts are more focused on collaboration with European countries than with neighboring countries. Only recently have attempts to create an African area of HE been undertaken.

Pressure for HE reforms is not only exerted by former colonial powers, but also by major regional or sub-regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), the African Union (AU), and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Sall et al. 2007). However, it is a difficult task for African universities to follow the reform path of the BP, since they lack resources for reforms and are largely dependent on support from their former colonizers. They want to prevent further brain drain since in a globalizing world with the increasing mobility of skills, the opportunities for using skills as a ticket to a better life elsewhere are growing (Crush et al. 2005:1). So there is a high risk that due to the lack of reform capacity of African universities, the brain drain of African scholars to Europe will exacerbate the challenges to Africa's development initiatives and that developing countries will remain mere consumers of knowledge produced in developed countries.

### **3.3 Comparison of regional harmonization initiatives**

This section compares and summarizes the findings of the case studies on HE reform initiatives in Asia-Pacific, Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) and Africa. First, the results for the different regions are contrasted against each other, followed by an overall comparison of the findings for all three regions.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the governments and education ministers were the driving forces behind the Brisbane Process, while in the LAC area, IOs and university networks were the main drivers of harmonization attempts. These attempts encouraged governmental actors to support and further the processes later on; nevertheless, they did not initiate them. The regions differ in that most HE policies of Asia-Pacific countries are already compatible with Bologna style policies, while HE institutions of LAC countries will have to undertake major efforts to assure policy compatibility among each other and with HE institutions of BP countries. Moreover, the reasons for adopting Bologna style reforms differ between the two regions. While LAC countries fear brain drain of talented students and academics, the main concerns of Asia-Pacific countries are either a loss in influx of fee-paying foreign students (in the case of Australia and New Zealand), or the loss of the possibility to combine degrees earned abroad with national ones in case of incompatibility with Bologna policies. The degree of influence the European Commission exerts also varies between the two regions; in Asia-Pacific the Commission focuses on cooperation agreements, while in LAC it aims at the creation of a common HE area with the EU (called EULAC) (see 3.2.2).



The differences in conditions and reasons for complying with Bologna style policies between Asia-Pacific and Africa are quite similar to the differences between Asia-Pacific and LAC. Again, in Africa first IOs and university networks proposed greater regional cooperation in the field of HE before the governments followed. However, these regional approaches in Africa just include parts of the region (like the Mediterranean area) instead of regional approaches like the Brisbane Process (see 3.2.1). In large parts the HE policies of the Asia-Pacific universities are already similar to the Bologna policies and compatibility of degrees is the major concern for cooperation. In contrast, African universities adopting Bologna style policies have to undergo extensive reforms. Additionally, the pressure to adopt Bologna policies is higher for African universities, since they become isolated in their institutional context as their European counterparts change their HE systems.

In Africa, the reasons for alignment with Bologna policies are similar to those of Latin America and the Caribbean. Like in the LAC region, initiatives for the creation of a common HE area were first started in cooperation with European countries or with countries sharing the same language, including former European colonizers (for instance, the CPLP HE area is based on common language and colonial legacies see part 3.2.3). In both regions, integration into a common HE area is more likely between institutions of countries with common languages and similar HE systems, while the systems' similarities are due to common colonial legacies. Thus, harmonization processes in LAC and Africa have mostly been based on language commonalities and colonial legacies, rather than on geographical proximity. Another commonality is that both regions, LAC and Africa, want to prevent further brain drain by adapting to Bologna reforms. Generally, cultural and political roots account for the fact that more and more African (Sall et. al. 2007) and LAC universities adopt BP policies. However, while with the Lima Declaration (see 3.2.2) a truly regional harmonization process was launched in the LAC region, the only regional approach on the African continent, the Mediterranean HE area, also includes European countries.

In summary, all HE harmonization initiatives resemble Bologna goals and its governance mode to a great extent. They differ from the BP, especially in LAC and Africa, in that the university networks initiated the processes instead of governmental actors. The reason for aligning with Bologna reforms also differ, while the main concern of Asia-Pacific countries is loss of compatibility and competitive disadvantage in case of non-compliance, LAC and African countries fear isolation from European countries and further brain drain of their HE systems. Mostly language communalities and former institutional similarities triggered cooperation in LAC and Africa, while in Asia-Pacific, a regional approach was only taken after bi- and multilateral cooperation with the EU. Hence, the reactions to the BP were triggered by cultural and institutional

similarities among countries, between them and European countries, as well as by competitive pressure exerted by the BP. The dependence on resources provided by the BP – such as student and academic mobility, compatibility of HE systems – or the fear of losing access to resources, were the further driving forces to align themselves with Bologna style reforms.

Following, the factors identified by case studies determining the interest in Bologna style reforms by non-European countries are supplemented with theoretical assumptions of organizational theories. These theories are used to derive hypotheses about why and which non-European countries should be especially responsive to Bologna style reforms.

#### **4. ORGANIZATIONAL THEORIES EXPLAINING ADAPTATION PROCESSES TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

The entities eventually implementing the Bologna style policies agreed upon in the various communiqués and declarations (see section 3.2.1 to 3.2.4) are autonomous HE institutions. These institutions are both publicly and privately funded organizations and operate largely independently of governments. The communiqués and declarations are non-binding and non-sanctionable; hence the universities cannot legally be forced to adopt policies. Consequently, theories explaining why organizations adapt to their environment in the absence of legal obligation build the focus of the next sections.

There are two theories dealing with processes of policy adaptation as a strategy for organizational survival. These theories also explicitly address the emergence of organizational cooperation and use the concept of the organizational field: sociological institutionalism (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983) and resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). In the following, these two approaches shall be presented shortly and their similarities and differences are highlighted. Then, hypotheses are derived about why and which non-European countries should adopt Bologna style policies and why they are expected to emulate the BP.

##### **4.1 Sociological Institutionalism**

Sociological institutionalism (SI) deals with processes of reproduction or imitation of organizational structures, activities, and routines in response to external pressure. External pressures such as professional or collective norms from the institutional environment are assumed to induce institutional change (Zucker 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Generally, SI theorists assume that organizations are dependent on legitimacy, which refers to “the degree of cultural support for an organization” (Meyer and Scott

1983:201), and is defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchmann 1995:574). Legitimacy can be conferred through certification and accreditation by bodies defining standards and best practices (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Ruef and Scott 1998). Thus, legitimacy is a status conferred from outside of the organization, from its environment.

SI scholars have identified the organizational environment or organizational field as a level of analysis especially fruitful for analyzing institutional processes of policy change and policy adaptation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Scott 1983; Scott 2008). Following DiMaggio and Powell, an organizational field refers to “organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services and products” (1983:143). Institutional interlinkages between actors create mutual awareness among participants that they are involved in a common enterprise (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), forcing them to find a common solution to face the environmental demands and to organize more efficiently.

Common perceptions and the organizational surrounding are believed to influence organizations’ actions; they are linked to cultural orientations which, in turn, are linked to specific patterns of interpretation of policy-specific information (Simmons and Elkins 2004). Information about culturally similar entities is easily accessible and processed (e.g., due to a common language or value system) and thus more carefully received. While searching for relevant policy models, decision-makers are expected to take the experiences of those countries with which they share an especially close set of cultural ties into account (Strang and Meyer 1993; Lenschow, Liefferink and Veenman 2005).

As in the case studies above, a common research question of SI theorists is why similar forms of institutions or policies emerge in very different social and political settings (Peters 2005). In an attempt to collectively deal with the adaptation pressure exerted by the BP, the universities in non-European countries have chosen to create institutional interlinkages by starting their own regional HE initiatives, thereby imitating the organizational structures and policies of the BP. These harmonization attempts were guided by common perceptions due to common cultural orientations. Most non-European countries investigated in the case studies on HE harmonization initiatives share common languages and institutional structures due to colonial legacies, additionally they cooperate in the realm of regionally organized supranational organizations (such as ASEAN, MERCOSUR, CPLP ). Many institutions in these countries are spitting images of those of the former colonial powers; prime examples of such institutions are traditional universities (Mohamedbhai 2005; Tschombe et al. 2009). Thus, due to cultural and institutional similarity and increased institutional

interlinkages, universities and countries outside of Europe can be expected to start Bologna style reform initiatives and thereby imitate Bologna policies and the governance mode of the BP.

#### **4.2 Resource Dependence Theory**

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) is an organizational theory stressing the importance of the organizational environment for predicting organizations' actions (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Organizations are dependent on constant exchange with other groups or organizations. This exchange may compromise physical resources, information or social legitimacy. Dependence measures to what degree these groups or organizations have to be taken into account by an organization in the decision-making processes (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978).

In RDT, the organizational environment is pictured as decisively influencing and limiting the actions, behavior and options of actors in organizations. However, rather than being purely reactive to the outside world, an organization can also try to influence the environment; it “can and does manipulate, influence, and create acceptability for itself and its activities” (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978:11). Thus, the concept of dependence implies that organizations are partly but not completely steered by elements in their environment and that organizations in turn try to influence their environment to create more favorable conditions for itself. Generally, RDT differs from SI regarding the assumptions about the degree of power an environment has over organizations' actions.

As in SI, RDT theorists assume that once an organizational environment has become highly interconnected, organizations are more likely to commit to the values or demands of that organizational environment (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Highly interconnected environments provide channels for the diffusion of institutional norms, creating more implicit coordination and consensus on diffused norms. Broadly diffused norms or practices enhance the probability that organizations will adopt these norms because their social validity, and thus their legitimacy, becomes largely unquestioned (Oliver 1991).

In the case studies above, the universities and countries actively created interconnected environments by launching a regional HE policy harmonization process modeled after the BP. By doing so, they structured the exchange relationship between them in order to control mutual dependencies. Hence, they did not merely react to external pressure, but actively tried to create more favorable conditions for themselves in order to control resource dependencies. The universities' resources include domestic and foreign students, international cooperation arrangements and networks, exchange programs and programs of academic mobility, academic reputation, excellent academic staff and reputation as a good teaching university.

HE has become highly internationalized in recent decades. Students have become more mobile, and no longer solely consider attending universities of their home country, but universities all over the world. Hence, even non-European countries might feel pressured to adopt BP style policies, in order to keep students from choosing Europe as a study destination over their own system, and to assure compatibility between the systems. For some countries' HE systems, students – in particular fee-paying international students – are a major financial resource (see DEST 2006). Thus, attracting fee-paying foreign students can be a rewarding strategy, as universities can access additional monetary resources to finance themselves. On the one hand, universities compete for student's tuition fees and, on the other hand, have to coordinate their actions and the programs they offer in order to assure compatibility. Accordingly, universities have to master a balancing act between cooperation to assure compatibility between the different HE systems and competition to demonstrate the quality of services they offer. Additionally, in cases of non-compatibility with Bologna policies, resource exchanges stemming from cooperation with countries following the Bologna models are endangered. Thus, universities are expected to adapt to external pressures resulting from changes in the organizational environment due to the BP. The adoption of Bologna style policies is expected if non-adaptation renders a loss of legitimacy, and thus threatens continued resource flows.

### **4.3 Hypotheses on adaptation processes due to external pressure**

As presented above, SI and RDT both assume that, for assuring their survival, organizations are dependent on resource exchanges with other organizations in their organizational environment. Following the assumptions of SI, decision-makers are expected to take the experiences of those countries with which they share an especially close set of cultural ties into account (Simmons and Elkins 2004). Thus, universities of countries sharing cultural (e.g. linguistic) and institutional similarities with BP participants (e.g., due to colonial legacies) can be expected to adapt their HE policies to the standards of the BP. In terms of RDT, similarity between organizations and countries can be defined as a measure of dependency on the same resources provided by the environment. Thus, it can be expected that

*H<sub>1a</sub>: The greater the cultural and institutional similarity between non-European universities and universities in the Bologna area, the higher the chances that the non-European universities will adopt Bologna style policies.*

*H<sub>1b</sub>: The greater the cultural and institutional similarity between countries, the higher the chances that they will launch a Bologna style harmonization process.*

Both, SI and RDT, regard competitive pressure as an important determinant for an organizations' adaptation to its environment. In cases of high competitive pressure, it becomes increasingly important to adopt policies regarded as best options in order to avoid losing legitimacy. According to SI, the best way to attain legitimacy from the organizational environment is to adopt policies and norms broadly diffused in this environment (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In the same vein, RDT theorists believe that broadly diffused norms or practices enhance the probability that organizations will adopt these norms because their social validity, and thus their legitimacy, becomes largely unquestioned (Oliver 1991). A good measure of the degree to which policies, norms, and practices have diffused is the number of similar organization having adopted them; hence it can be assumed that

*H<sub>2</sub>: The higher the number of universities having implemented Bologna style policies in and outside of Europe, the greater the chances for adoption of these policies by further universities.*

RDT focuses on the dependency between organizations and their environments (Oliver 1991). The organizational field and resource flows between organizations are regarded as decisively influencing organizations' actions and behavior, both in SI and in RDT. With increasing internationalization of HE, universities around the globe inhabit the same organizational environment. Universities cooperate and compete in this field for resources such as academic reputation, excellent academic staff and fee-paying domestic and foreign students. Due to the institutional similarity of ex-colonies to their former colonizer, ex-colonies are still dependent on cooperation with their colonizers to assure their own students' mobility, to educate national elites and not to be isolated in their organizational context. It can be assumed that reactions to the BP are a function of dependence on the resources provided by Bologna participants. Therefore it can be assumed that

*H<sub>3</sub>: The greater a universities' dependency on the interexchange and cooperation with universities of Bologna participants, the higher the chances that it will adopt Bologna style policies.*

These hypotheses, derived from SI and RDT, could guide further studies on regional HE initiatives. For example, they could support in depth country studies about de facto implementation of Bologna style policies in non-European countries. Even though these policies were agreed upon in the communiqués and declaration of the regional harmonization processes depicted in table 1, nevertheless knowledge about their actual

implementation is absent so far. The hypotheses might as well be used to investigate implementation efforts of countries participating in a certain process outlined in table 1. Further, they could provide a starting point for a large scale cross-country comparison. Moreover, they could guide studies on legally non-enforceable adaptation processes in other policy fields, such as environmental or human rights policies. The combination of theoretical assumptions and empirical findings of these and further studies could yield a theoretical framework, explaining cross-national policy adaptation in the absence of legal obligation.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

This paper has presented a study on Bologna style policy harmonization processes outside the Bologna area. To structure the presentation of the study, firstly the development of the BP, its policies and governance structure were presented (section 2). This way, benchmarks for comparing the non-European initiatives to the BP were established. Secondly, HE policy harmonization initiatives outside of Europe were identified, compared and summarized (see Table 1). Accordingly, case studies on the initiatives presented in that table were conducted (sections 3.2.1 to 3.3). The case studies were structured by the region in which the harmonization processes were launched. They focused on goals of the processes as well as on main actors furthering and funding the processes.

Main findings of these case studies are, that regional initiatives were launched by university networks and IOs (like the UNESCO). Governmental actors of the countries involved supported these processes later on; however, the initial initiative was – in contrast to the BP – not taken by governmental actors. This is due to the fact that HE institutions outside of Europe are far more autonomous and thus cannot legally be forced to adopt policies; they have to adopt them voluntarily. With the exception of the Brisbane Process in the Asia-Pacific region (see 3.2.1), cooperation attempts were first based on cultural (e.g. language) and institutional (e.g. due to colonial legacies) commonalities and included former European colonizers. Especially Latin American and African countries first cooperated with the HE institutions of their former colonial powers. Just recently, initiatives based on geographical proximity without involvement of EU countries have been launched (for instance with the Lima Declaration, see section 3.2.2).

The development of own regional Bologna style processes can also be regarded as an answer to competitive pressure exerted by the BP. Since European countries increasingly attract foreign students, countries like Australia and New Zealand fear competition for fee-paying foreign students. They compete to attract students from economically emerging Asian countries such as China and India. Chinese students and

their parents in turn welcome the BP since it makes it easier and cheaper for them to obtain a degree at a European HE institution (see section 3.2.1). Thus, the adaptation to Bologna standards by countries in the Asia-Pacific region is rather a strategic response to the BP than a commitment to an encompassing reform agenda, especially since most countries' HE policies are already in accordance with the Bologna standards.

Overall, whatever the reasons for launching a Bologna style process were, all processes have in common that they resemble the policies of the BP (especially the introduction of a three-cycle degree structure and cross-national compatibility of degrees) as well as its governance mode. All processes rely on regular meetings, prepared by a follow-up group also monitoring implementation progresses. Hence, the governance mode of the BP seems apt for harmonization efforts based on communication and best-practice exchange in the absence of legal obligations. This is due to the fact that it can integrate actors from different levels of authority such as governmental actors, supranational organizations, non-governmental organizations, and interest groups such as university associations (Walter 2007).

Thirdly, after conducting the case studies, their empirical results were evaluated in the face of organizational theories. Two theories, dealing with processes of adaptation to external pressures as strategy for organizational survival, were shortly presented and contrasted against each other. These theories, sociological institutionalism and resource dependence theory, guided the development of hypotheses on adoption of Bologna style policies (see section 4). It was hypothesized, that cultural similarity between non-European universities and universities in the Bologna area would increase the chances of non-European universities adopting Bologna style policies. Additionally, cultural similarity among countries was assumed to increase the chances for these countries to launch a Bologna style harmonization process. Due to assumptions of SI and RDT about the adoption of norms broadly diffused in the organizational environment, it was hypothesized, that the chances for adoption of Bologna style policies by universities is dependent on the number of universities already having implemented Bologna style policies. Lastly, the dependence on interexchange and cooperation with Bologna participants was introduced as a measure to which extent universities adopt Bologna style policies. These hypotheses (see 4.3) could be used to guide in-depth country studies on implementation efforts of Bologna style policies in non-European countries, for countries participating in a certain process outlined in Table 1 or for a large scale cross-country comparison. The combination of theoretical assumptions and empirical findings of these and further studies could support the development of a theoretical framework explaining cross-national policy adaptation in the absence of legal obligation; even beyond the research field of higher education.



This paper has provided initial insights on regional initiatives of HE policy harmonization in accordance with the BP. In sum, the BP reform agenda has ceased to be a uniquely European agenda. It has developed into a template for worldwide HE reforms coordinated via regional initiatives. The Bologna policies and governance mode served as reference points for HE reform efforts around the globe. In Asia-Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, there have been clear and direct echoes to the BP but also tacit and indirect ones. While some countries and universities considered the adoption of selected policies, others seek to implement large-scale changes. However, knowledge about implementation efforts in the non-European regions are still absent. Therefore, further research on HE reforms beyond Europe's borders should focus on the emergence of the regional initiatives summarized in Table 1 and the implementation efforts of the countries and organizations partaking in these regional harmonization processes.

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