

Catherine Owen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Durham University, UK, <sup>2</sup>University of Glasgow, UK

Strategy, identity and Europeanisation: reformulating the past and imagining the future in CEE and SEE universities. (0012)

Programme number: B11

Research Domain: Management, Leadership, Governance and Quality

In 1999, 29 member states signed the Bologna Declaration and initiated a process that has revolutionised European higher education (Keeling, 2006; Westerheijden et al, 2010). The Bologna Process is best known for promoting the introduction of the three-cycle degree structure to European higher education systems but it has also introduced a European credit framework and far-reaching developments in quality assurance (Keeling, 2006). In some European countries adaptive pressures emerging from Bologna implementation are minimised because pan-national policies emerged as a result of “uploading” of existing national preferences (Elken et al, 2011; Vukasovic, 2012). In other countries efforts to integrate European higher education can be seen as part of a more general process of integrating sovereign states in a new political and institutional order (Olsen, 2007). Whilst changes in policy can appear relatively rapid, changes in working practices, relationships and identities are often harder to detect and there is currently almost no literature in this area (Elken et al, 2011; Vukasovic, 2012).

Kwiek (2012) suggests that CEE universities are prone to mythologising their exceptionalism from other European universities and from all other public sector institutions, leading to a belief that they are immune from the impact of global and European public sector reforms. In some CEE countries (Latvia, Poland) that have experienced loss of students choosing study destinations in other member states and economic effects due to under-investment in research, the outcomes of integration appear to be crises in university confidence (Dombrovsky, 2009; Kwiek, 2012) and significant anxiety about the implications of Europeanisation effects. Implementation activities in Croatia to date have been described as “a failure” (Rodin, 2009).

Keeling (2006 p208) argues that the European Commission has developed and circulated a “richly-elaborated language” which influences in turn the European discourse of higher education. It is not clear, however, whether actors implementing Bologna Process activities have filled the ambiguous, interpretive spaces in Bologna policy with congruent local translations of this same discourse or whether other discourses or rhetoric have emerged.

This paper will report on the early stages of research exploring the relationship between academic identity and European educational strategy in Central Eastern European (CEE) and South Eastern European (SEE) universities. The research draws on Sillince and Simpson’s (2010) observations about two theoretical challenges in relating identity and strategy. The first challenge is in reconciling flexibility and stability. Kohler-Koch (2005) argues that European integration implies a specific kind of system integration that *does not* leave the national systemic integration intact, i.e. integration at the European level *transforms* its constitutive elements. European policy change dynamics represent a shift from internal to external control including the introduction of externally initiated evaluation mechanisms, the professionalisation of institutional management functions and the growing pressure to be accountable to society (Maassen and Musselin, 2009). The transformational ambition of European policy makers can therefore create considerable adaptive pressures at both institutional and individual levels.

The second challenge is that of agency. European educational policy assumes two inter-related principles about agency. Firstly: institutions are the bodies operationally and legally responsible for the quality of education and therefore national systems must include evaluation at institutional level. Secondly: academics are the principal point of delivery of educational experiences and therefore play a key role in the interpretation of institutional policy. The ambiguous framing of pan-national European educational policy is a deliberate attempt both to satisfy heterogeneous national expectations and to stimulate value-added local responses based on institutional distinctiveness (Rodin, 2009; Westerheijden et al, 2010). This ambiguity can offer opportunities for national or institutional actors to present local policy preferences (Gornitzka, 2006; Maassen and Musselin, 2009; Rodin, 2009); it also places great pressure on universities and on academic staff to translate policy into actionable tasks or processes.

This paper will explore the theoretical challenges associated with exploration of the relationship between 'strategy work' and 'identity work' as actors "strive" (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) to reconcile national or organisational demands with personal values or beliefs in a context of heightened ambiguity. It draws on Sillince and Simpson's (2010) observations of identity and strategy as interlinked and dynamic processes that are concerned with the past (as the locus of identity formulation) and the future (as the imaginative space filled by possible strategic outcomes).

## References:

Alvesson, M and Willmott, H (2002) Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of management studies*, 39(5), 619-644

Dombrovsky, V (2009) Is anything wrong with higher education in Latvia? *Baltic Journal of Economics* 9 (2) (2009) 5-24

Elken, M; Gornitzka, Å; Maassen, P and Vukasovic, M (2011). European integration and the transformation of higher education..

[https://www.uv.uio.no/pfi/forskning/prosjekter/eie-utd2020forprosjekt/HEIK-Utd2020-Part1-EI\\_and\\_transformation\\_of\\_HE.pdf](https://www.uv.uio.no/pfi/forskning/prosjekter/eie-utd2020forprosjekt/HEIK-Utd2020-Part1-EI_and_transformation_of_HE.pdf)

Gornitzka, A (2006). What is the use of Bologna in national reform? The case of Norwegian quality reform in higher education. In V. Tomusk (Ed.), *Creating the European Higher Education Area: Voices from the periphery*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Keeling, R (2006) The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: the European Commission's expanding role in higher education discourse. *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2

Kwiek, M (2012) Universities and Knowledge Production in Central Europe. *European Educational Research Journal*. Volume 11 Number 1 2012

Maassen, P and Musselin, C (2009) European integration and the Europeanisation of higher education. In *European integration and the governance of higher education and research* (pp. 3-14). Springer Netherlands.

Sillince, J A and Simpson, B (2010) The strategy and identity relationship: Towards a processual understanding. *Advances in Strategic Management*, 27, 111-143.

Vukasovic, M (2012) European integration in higher education in the Western Balkan countries. [http://wbc-inco.net/attach/0\\_NORGLOBAL\\_-EI\\_and\\_HER\\_in\\_WBC\\_-LR\\_FINAL.pdf](http://wbc-inco.net/attach/0_NORGLOBAL_-EI_and_HER_in_WBC_-LR_FINAL.pdf)

Westerheijden, D., et al (2010). The first decade of working on the European higher education area: Executive summary, overview and conclusions. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna\\_process/independent\\_assessment\\_1\\_detailed\\_rept.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna_process/independent_assessment_1_detailed_rept.pdf)