



Can the Bologna Process Make the Move Faster towards the Development of an International Space for Higher Education where Africa would find its place?

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Abstract

The Bologna Process is presented to the political and academic officials of Southern countries as the bearer of form constraints – the division of higher education studies into three main cycles (a bachelor's, master's and doctorate degree in respectively three, five, and eight years after the completion of upper secondary education) – and the calculation of the relative importance of subjects according to a credit mechanism. As unmenacing as it may look to decision-makers, reality is more complex. Form constraints soon turn into structural constraints that are only gradually revealed – mobility implies the transnational harmonization of academic timetables, the division of teachings and assessments into semesters, etc. The implementation of the 'Bologna spirit' also calls for interdependent universities whereas previously each only had to comply with their national constraints. In Africa, this interdependence is a strong asset for academic officials when they have to negotiate with their authorities. As it was the case in Europe, the solution to national problems will probably entail striking international agreements whose binding force will derive precisely from their international character.

Functional interdependence may enhance dialogue between academic officials. African universities should seize the opportunity of the call for dialogue as expressed during the London summit in 2007 to have their qualifications certified according to international standards and thus weigh on the definition of quality that will bind the international space for higher education in the near future.

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Résumé

Le processus de Bologne est présenté aux responsables politiques et académiques des pays du Sud comme étant porteur de contraintes de forme- la division des études de l'enseignement supérieur en trois cycles principaux (les diplômes de licence, de maîtrise et de doctorat en respectivement trois, cinq et huit années après la fin des études secondaires)- et le calcul de l'importance relative des matières selon un mécanisme de crédit. Aussi non-menaçant que cela puisse paraître aux yeux des décideurs, la réalité est plus complexe. Les contraintes de forme se transforment vite en contraintes structurelles qui ne sont révélées que progressivement - la mobilité implique l'harmonisation transnationale des horaires universitaires, la répartition des enseignements et des évaluations en semestres, etc. La mise en œuvre de l'« esprit de Bologne » appelle également à l'interdépendance des universités alors que précédemment chacun ne se conformait qu'à ses contraintes nationales. En Afrique, cette interdépendance est un atout majeur pour les responsables académiques quand ils doivent négocier avec leurs autorités. Comme ce fut le cas en Europe, la solution aux problèmes nationaux va probablement entraîner la conclusion d'accords internationaux dont la force exécutoire résultera précisément de leur caractère international.

L'interdépendance fonctionnelle peut renforcer le dialogue entre les responsables académiques. Les universités africaines devraient saisir l'occasion de l'appel au dialogue exprimé lors du sommet de Londres en 2007 pour faire certifier leurs qualifications selon les normes internationales et donc peser sur la définition de la qualité qui unira l'espace international de l'enseignement supérieur dans un proche avenir.

Introduction

For various reasons African universities have difficulty in facing world competition. In the Cybermetrics Lab (2008) ranking of July 2008, the University of Cape Town ranks first in Africa and 385th in the world. Eleven out of the fourteen best-ranked universities in Africa are South African. The first twelve are either South African or Egyptian English-speaking universities. The first French-speaking African university is Cheikh Anta Diop University, the second Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech. The last two respectively rank 2, 962nd and 3,961st in the world. Africa only has one university in the top 500, five in the top 1,000. This poor performance¹ pushes the best African students to leave for European and North American universities.

This paper suggests that one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process was to raise the flow of (good) non-European students into European universities. Africa was not the prime target of this policy to exploit the flow of grey matter from the South. Indeed, the relationships between its universities and those of ex-colonizing countries guaranteed the transfer of the best African students to European universities in any case.

We will also try to show that the inevitable alignment of African universities with the 'Bologna spirit' will change the power struggle within African universities and make them more interdependent. At best, this interdependence will contribute to common thinking and decision-making on curricula and qualifications, and will in turn bring African universities to implement quality criteria that other regions of the world will have to take into consideration. The alternative is simple: either the quality criteria are modelled on research universities and the resulting rank will be most unfavourable to African universities; or the criteria reflect the various dimensions that quality takes and plural forms of excellence will be valued as a result. Ultimately African universities will be assessed in a fairer and more fine-tuned manner.

African Students on the International Higher Education Market

The Mobility of African Students

The *Global Education Digest, Comparing Education Statistics Across the World* published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2006a) presents a set of global data on student mobility that are worth exploring. The internationalisation of higher education (HE below) is put in a historical perspective. The number of mobile students worldwide, that is, those who study abroad, was 800,000 in 1975 and 2,500,000 in 2004 (UNESCO 2006a: 34). The figures in Table 1 indicate that the Bologna Process and the national strategies for the recruitment of foreign students have been instrumental in this trend.

Table 1 indicates that the four countries first to sign the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 – the starting point for the Bologna Process – saw a much sharper increase in the number of foreign students than the USA. Two additional reasons may account for this gap. First, European countries have relentlessly promoted their universities in Southern countries without restricting access to their territories any further. Second, in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the USA tightened border security measures and accordingly many applicants from the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa were not granted visas.

The development of the intake of foreign students varies considerably among the four countries that signed the Sorbonne joint declaration. The lower performance of the United Kingdom (+ 29 per cent compared to a 26.7 per cent rise for the USA) is related to high tuition fees. Therefore the poorer students turned away from British universities, which caused a clear but temporary decrease in the number of foreign students there. While the countries that initiated the Bologna Process performed better than the USA, they did not manage to keep up with the rate of international growth; the total number of foreign students was 565,163

Table 1: Growth in the intake and proportion of foreign students (higher education) in selected countries from 1998–99 to 2003–04

| | France | Germany | United Kingdom | Italy | USA | World |
|------------|---------|---------|----------------|--------|---------|-----------|
| 1998–99 | 130,952 | 178,195 | 232,540 | 23,496 | 451,935 | 1,642,171 |
| 1999–2000 | 137,085 | 187,033 | 222,936 | 24,929 | — | — |
| 2000–01 | 147,402 | 199,132 | 225,722 | 29,228 | 475,168 | 1,750,128 |
| 2001–02 | 165,437 | 219,039 | 227,273 | 28,447 | 582,996 | 2,192,846 |
| 2002–03 | 221,567 | 240,619 | 255,233 | 36,137 | 586,316 | 2,280,553 |
| 2003–04 | 237,587 | 260,314 | 300,056 | 40,641 | 572,509 | 2,455,250 |
| Difference | +81,4% | +46,1% | +29,0% | +73,0% | +26,7% | +49,5% |

Source: UNESCO statistics (2006)

in 1998–99 and reached 838,598 in 2003–04. Between these two dates, the rise stood at ‘only’ 48.4 per cent for the four signatory countries and at 49.5 per cent for the rest of the world. Asia and Oceania grow so fast that the rest of the world cannot keep up with these two regions.

Overall, the intake of mobile students does not grow faster than that of students enrolled in HE institutions. During the latest wave between 1999 and 2004, the number of HE students increased by 40 per cent worldwide whereas the number of mobile students grew by 41 per cent. The proportion of mobile students remains quite stable but the fast increase in the number of enrolments enlarges their absolute numbers.

The organisers of the press conference for the publication of the report *Global Education Digest, Comparing Education Statistics Across the World* assert that its most significant piece of information is Africa’s contribution to rising student mobility in the world. The press release was issued under the unequivocal heading ‘African students the most mobile in the world’.

(UNESCO 2006b) includes a few dramatic statistics that speak for themselves: Africa is the region in the world that sends the highest proportion of its HE students abroad: 5.9 per cent of Sub-Saharan HE students study abroad, and this proportion is three times higher than the international average; 2.9 per cent of HE students in Arabic countries also choose to study abroad compared with 0.4 per cent of North American students and only 0.2 per cent of US students (UNESCO 2006a: 37). Although it remains high, the proportion of African students who study abroad declined slightly from 6.1 per cent in 1998–99 to 5.9 per cent five years later.

The massive proportion of mobile African students emphasizes the dependence of African countries for the training of their scientific elites compared to other regions in the world. However, this dependence differs across countries as evidenced by the *Global Education Digest* when it compares data on access to higher education for national students with data concerning international mobility. The national rates of access to higher education change accordingly, and the main changes concern African countries: four out of the eight countries whose HE students study mainly abroad are African (Cape Verde, the Comoros, Djibouti, and Guinea-Bissau) (UNESCO 2006a: 37). Moreover, ten out of the fifteen countries whose number of mobile HE students represents at least a third of the intake of students in national universities are African (Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Lesotho, Namibia, Angola, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius, Gabon) (UNESCO 2006a: 39). African countries, more than other nations, are led to adjust the structures of their HE systems to international standards to make it easier for their national students to carry on their studies abroad.

European Strategies to Attract International Students

Table 2 highlights the geographical distribution of mobile African students. Their prime destination remains Europe, where they go in ever greater numbers. In 2004, almost two-thirds (64.9 per cent) of African students attended a course in a European university compared to 59.6 per cent in 1999, that is, a five-point rise.

Table 2: Comparison of the distribution of HE African students abroad in 1999 and 2004

| | 1999 | Percentage | 2004 | Percentage |
|---------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|
| Africa | 45,726 | 21.7 | 49,903 | 17.0 |
| Europe | 125,431 | 59.6 | 190,109 | 64.9 |
| North America | 32,554 | 15.5 | 39,894 | 13.6 |
| South America | 9 | 0.0 | 176 | 0.1 |
| Asia | 4,089 | 1.9 | 7,022 | 2.4 |
| Oceania | 2,503 | 1.2 | 5,774 | 2.0 |
| Total | 210,312 | | 292,876 | |

Source: UNESCO statistics (2006)

The attraction of European universities for African students is neither a question of chance nor the natural effect of geographical proximity, nor indeed the cultural and intellectual bonds developed over the course of time between European and African countries. This attraction is sought and sustained by European countries. One has to bear in mind that the prime objective of the Bologna Process initiators was to strengthen the attractiveness of European universities worldwide and organize resistance against the growing influence of American universities (Charlier & Croché 2007). Their prime target was emerging countries, that is, those whose economic growth is strong and which open up a wealth of commercial, financial, and industrial opportunities – China, India and some countries in Latin America are cases in point. The Bologna initiators did not mean to renounce their influence in the regions of the world where they had a strong hold as their recruitment strategies extended over all continents.

It is patent that competition is fierce between the USA, Europe and South-East Asia to draw in the best students and researchers (Marginson 2006). Three reasons justify this competition:

- First universities must make sure that they have the competences necessary to maintain their rank and provide industries with the services the latter expect: 'the race is on between countries to attract the best brains from around the world in order to generate the ideas that will in turn lead to innovations, patents and profits' (Robertson 2006: 1). Attracting foreign students to its universities is the right strategy for any country eager to further the immigration of a highly qualified workforce insofar as 'they provide a potential reserve of highly qualified labour that is familiar with prevailing rules and conditions in the host country' (OECD 2002: 5).
- Increasing the attractiveness of the host country and in turn its 'soft power' (Nye 1990) – the positive feelings it raises in the rest of the world – is another objective.
- Finally, many countries, including the USA, the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands (van der Wende 2003: 195), compete to participate in high-potential economic activity.

The most strategic objective is to encourage a brain drain favourable to immigration countries.² 'Almost a third of the scientific and technical staff in the USA with a BA, an MA or a PhD is of foreign extraction' (NSF 2006, cited by Harfi & Mathieu 2006: 2). This phenomenon is not new: Stalker (1994, cited by Robertson 2006: 2) 'estimates that between 1960 and 1987, Africa had lost 30 per cent of its skilled professions'. Other figures given by Wickramasekara (2002) testify to the massive emigration of African intellectuals to OECD countries. However, it is impossible to provide accurate figures as data are incomplete and unreliable.

Lourtie, a close observer of the Bologna Process since it was launched, considers that:

International competitiveness may be analysed from, at least, two different perspectives, although intertwined: the competitiveness of European diplomas in the international scene and the capacity to attract students from outside the European Higher Education Area. (Lourtie 2001: 8)

The European Commission and EC countries themselves spend considerable amounts of money to convey a positive image of European HE for students across the world (Croché 2006b). The official objective of improving Europe's position in international competition and of drawing in the best scientists was preceded by efforts to improve the mobility of European students within the European space for higher education. The goal of attracting the best researchers moved up the policy ladder and inspired the Erasmus Mundus programme, which seeks to draw in non-European students, including those from rich countries, by offering them comfortable grants:

The Erasmus Mundus programme is a co-operation and mobility programme in the field of higher education which promotes the European Union as a centre of excellence in learning around the world. It supports top-quality European Masters courses and enhances the visibility and attractiveness of European higher education in third countries. It also provides EU-funded scholarships for third-country nationals participating in these Masters courses, [...]. (European Commission 2008)

The project to attract the most brilliant brains is also clear in the directive of the European Council that aims to ease access to European HE institutions for foreign students:

One of the objectives of Community action in the field of education is to promote Europe as a whole as a world centre of excellence for studies and vocational training. Promoting the mobility of third-country nationals to the Community for the purpose of studies is a key factor in that strategy. (European Council 2004: 12)

If European authorities bet on the quality of member states' education systems to attract foreign students, it is because they need the contributions of third-country nationals. The policy to open doors to promising students fits perfectly with the directive of the European Council that seeks to ease access to European laboratories for foreign researchers:

The number of researchers which the Community will need by 2010 to meet the target set by the Barcelona European Council in March 2002 of 3 per cent of GDP invested in research is estimated at 700,000. This target is to be met through a series of interlocking measures, such as [...] opening up the Community to third-country nationals who might be admitted for the purposes of research. (European Council 2005: 15)

Clearly, the opening of European borders to foreign researchers is in no way governed by the desire to offer them a work environment favourable to their self-fulfilment or to the provision of their competences in the service of their respective countries. The sole purpose is to boost the intake of researchers and reach the requested number to ultimately attain the development targets Europe has set itself.

The press conference organised on 23 October 2007 for the presentation of the Blue Card, which, like the Green Card in the USA, would allow holders to live, work and travel within the Union, was also the opportunity for Commission President José Manuel Barroso to announce that 'labour migration into Europe boosts our competitiveness and therefore our economic growth. It also helps tackle demographic shortages resulting from our ageing population. This is par-

ticularly the case for highly skilled labour' (European Commission 2007). Vice-President Franco Frattini, the Commissioner responsible for Freedom, Security and Justice, stated that:

Europe's ability to attract highly skilled migrants is a measure of its international strength. We want Europe to become at least as attractive as favourite migration destinations such as Australia, Canada and the USA. We have to make highly skilled workers change their perception of Europe's labour market governed as they are by inconsistent admission procedures. Failing this, Europe will continue to receive low-skilled and medium-skilled migrants only. (European Commission 2007)

The interests or the comfort of migrants are only of secondary importance in Frattini's arguments. He mostly focuses on the competition between the regions of the world. The cautious and selective opening of Europe's doors is aimed to give added value to the old continent and maximize the advantage it can draw from immigration policy:

We should take more account of what statistics tell us: 85 per cent of unskilled labour goes to the EU and only 5 per cent to the USA, whereas 55 per cent of skilled labour goes to the USA and only 5 per cent to the EU. We have to reverse these figures. [...] Europe has to compete against Australia, Canada, the USA and the rising powers in Asia. (Frattini 2007)

These quotations should leave no doubt that Southern countries are prey to the exploitation of their grey matter and that Europe should be as competitive as its main international rivals in this field. EU members are now fully behind this objective. During a follow-up meeting to the Bologna Process in London in May 2007, the ministers of the 46 signatory countries adopted a strategy called 'The European space for higher education in a world context' (Zgaga 2007). It was the first time that a follow-up summit had been so clearly oriented towards increasing the impact of the European space for higher education on the rest of the world.

African Mobilisation to Adjust to New Standards

Form Constraints

In the years following the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) and the Bologna Declaration (1999), few official procedures were undertaken to inform African universities or their political authorities of the large institutional process that had just been started. Regrettably, the representatives of African universities were not invited to participate in the early discussions in Europe on the goals of the Bologna Process and on how to achieve them. The relationships between African and European

universities could not but lead African universities to reform and adjust to the new organization of studies that was being implemented in Europe on the North American model. African representatives were not given the opportunity to voice their opinions and were unable to have their concerns taken into consideration in the construction of the Bologna Process. Had this happened the process's claimed universalization would have been better justified than it is today. Discussions with African colleagues would have dispelled their legitimate fears that the Bologna Process and the new bachelor, master and doctorate degree scheme might be only a tool for spotting talent in the South and drawing its best brains into European laboratories and research centres.³

African universities were left outside the discussions and the Bologna model developed far away from African universities where it is now expected to be introduced. Its development faced both difficulties and conflicts. For instance, a major initial objective – the standardization of the degree structure on the 3–5–8 model – was dropped because European countries showed resistance by opening courses of varying length (from two to four years for undergraduates degrees; from one to two and a half years for graduate degrees; and for doctoral degrees, an even wider timespan (Croché 2006a)). Other central objectives like the application of criteria and mechanisms for quality certification have yet to be achieved because they imply that European countries must renounce their sovereignty in this field, a move they are not ready to make. Therefore the Bologna Process is still marked by push and pull, steps backwards, trial and error. A refined knowledge of its tormented history greatly eases the understanding of the organizational adjustments it implies. Otherwise they may be interpreted as mere form constraints that are being imposed arbitrarily.

Compliance with the academic schedule is probably a case in point. This demand was recalled on many occasions during meetings between officials or experts of African universities such as at the international seminar on the HE degree architecture for bachelor, master and doctoral degrees (*LMD* below) held in Cotonou in September 2006. One of its recommendations was to 'guarantee the strict compliance with the academic schedule (October 1st– July 31st)' (Ametonou & Yandjou 2006: 23).

The introduction of a single academic year unanimously respected by African universities is in no way a whim of European academic officials. It is crucial to the inclusion of African universities within international exchange systems. At the moment they may not feel concerned because intercontinental moves are limited during the same academic year.⁴ The synchronization of academic semesters and years is also one of the prerequisites for the implementation of an inter-African mobility system, which, in turn, is one of the opportunities through which the continent's scientific potential can be developed and promoted. In

Africa, as elsewhere, it will not be possible to multiply excellence poles indefinitely. Therefore it will be necessary to have the most promising students access these poles and be taught by the most brilliant professors on the continent. Now students or professors can be mobile only if they have reliable information that allows them to plan their trips long in advance, which implies that academic years are both synchronous and identical across the years.

The importance of similar academic years has been clearly perceived by many academic officials. For instance, the President of the Gaston Berger University argued for 'similar academic schedules (opening and closing dates) worldwide to foster student and researcher mobility free of any obstacle' (Niang 2007: 2). It implies semester-based courses, that is, all classes must be given during the semester and an exam session following these classes must be organized before the next semester starts. Only the division into semesters can offer students and teachers the opportunity to 'plan and arrange their mobility. It requires a rigorous management of teaching or learning time' (Niang 2007: 2). Mobile students are expected to submit their marks in the host university to their home university. During a speech given at the opening of the academic year 2006–07 at the Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC), 'meeting the deadline for the publication of results and the delivery of degrees' was mentioned (UCAC 2006).

It is argued that the synchronization of academic years is only a form constraint that calls for a simple adjustment of timetables. This move seems technical, almost meaningless. However, it has far-reaching consequences. It would be ridiculous and useless to hide the truth. A Western African university could not start the academic year 2007–08 before mid-January 2008. Another has difficulty ending the year 2003–04 in some subjects. In many African universities, a firmly established tradition holds that the official start of the academic year opens a period of negotiations during which teachers, students and administrative staff members attempt to improve their lot and obtain better conditions from public authorities. The period commonly regarded as acceptable to put an honourable end to negotiations varies across countries and institutions, but each partner knows it.

When the synchronization of academic years is effective, it will mark the end of a mode of regulation of collective relationships suitable to all partners. As universities are now interdependent on a world scale, they will have to break away from collective agreements struck on a national basis. This renunciation is not easy. The form constraint embodied by the synchronization of academic years implies that each social partner (the state, teacher unions, administrative staff unions, student associations, etc.) must renounce the ritual confrontations that mark their collective identities. As the starting date of the academic year becomes a major political challenge, each collective actor can mobilize its supporters and may use its strength to improve its own situation.

The regular crises that HE African systems face have been the object of multiple analyses over the past few years. Its causes are well identified and will probably not disappear in the short term as resources remain inadequate in the face of fast-growing student populations. During the 2006 seminar in Cotonou, it was stated that 'the growth of Africa's universities is hindered by many social, economical, and political constraints in their environment' (Benin's HE and professional training ministry 2006: 1–2). These structural elements 'cause a stir among union, student, and socio-political circles as well as poor governance' (ibid.). The question that is raised is to know how reforms can be introduced in universities given that '*LMD* is identified as a management mode and the bearer of a new academic culture' (ibid.).

Indisputably, the organization of universities as initially conceived at the Sorbonne and Bologna summits is borne by a new vision of their role and function in the polis that calls for a profound evolution of academic culture. Yet this change cannot be taken for granted and is not automatically effective even when form constraints are respected. The expectations that *LMD* has raised could well be far too high. During the 2007 symposium organized in Lubumbashi on the adjustment of African universities to *LMD*, André Nyamba warned:

Building on semi-structured interviews,⁵ the opinions of HE officials and actors in the state and private sectors were collected in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso.⁶ Basically, the *LMD* system is regarded as the solution to universities' internal and recurring problems, especially those concerning the massive intake of students and inadequate facilities. Too much is expected of the *LMD* system, hopes are too high, which may alter the quality of debate about it. (Nyamba 2008)

Nyamba's analysis based on a field survey suggests that form constraints relative to *LMD* may become traps. Academic officials may hope that if they follow them strictly, this will remove the obstacles to a smooth running of their institutions. Such is not the case. The shift to *LMD* contributes neither to reduce student enrolment nor to raise the material resources of universities. In the best-case scenario, this shift is the opportunity for university presidents to review their strengths and weaknesses, to set priorities and allot most of their resources to them. Then it takes the form of 'a negotiated revamp of classes and the resulting drop of some classes or the introduction of others as well as decisions made on fund allotment' (Niang 2007: 2–3).

The Bologna Process: A Think-tank for Africa's Universities

Generalizing the *LMD* degree structure in African universities and complying with form constraints will not automatically lead to their improved effectiveness. Furthermore the measures taken along these lines will encourage the drain of African brains to European universities because the latter have the resources necessary to sustain the quality of the courses they provide to their students.

African universities lack resources and properly delineated quality parameters to ensure quality university education. These factors will exacerbate the brain drain of African scholars to Europe and eventually frustrate Africa's development initiatives as outlined in the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Shawa 2007).

Shawa argues that the exacerbation of the brain drain may deprive Africa of the resources this continent imperatively needs to improve its lot. All the latest European initiatives, including the Attali Report (2008), towards drawing in African researchers, support Shawa's fears. In a move to curb the brain drain, African academic officials strive to come up with technical solutions to force mobile students to return to their home countries once their period of study abroad is completed. For example,

We recommend the representatives of the European Union and African governments what follows: passing a European/African/Congolese law that forbids the naturalization of grant-aided African/Congolese students or those who have not complied with the terms of the grant contract as part of international cooperation; encouraging cooperation and information exchange between African/Congolese governments and those of the Congolese students' host EU countries towards their return to their home country as soon as they have completed their academic course (Kazadi Lubatshi 2008).

It might be impossible to work out measures that would force African researchers to go back to their homelands once they have graduated in Europe. Coercive steps are all the more elusive as Northern countries have no interest in seeing African researchers and their competences return home. An international labour market for scientists is being implemented in which researchers with the most sought-after competences can choose the place where they want to work. Laboratories compete to offer them the incentives that can influence their choice. Nowadays African countries are not in the best position to take part in this expensive competition and it is probably not in their interest to tap into this market immediately. Some countries have instead opted for putting their universities in the service of their national development plans. Take the case of Rwanda:

In Rwanda we now have in place the structures of an excellent system – certainly one of the best in Africa – for maintaining and enhancing the quality of education and the contribution it can make to the country's future plans. Our task over the next years is to implement and embed it, which means changing not just systems, but habits and attitudes. [...] The challenge is to work effectively without much resource [...] and currently with some deficit in qualified and experienced staff, many of whom were lost in 1994. African solutions making best use of skilled human resource are more important in the long term even than the generous help of donors. Beyond this, the requirement is for a change of culture and a willingness to accept change, often without fully understanding where the change is going (Abbott & Sapsford 2008).

This particular vision of where universities should go is aimed at making them as autonomous as possible and driving them less towards abstract international ideals than towards local issues of prime importance for populations. The change mentioned above also implies a shift from French to Anglo-Saxon tradition, and it should come as no surprise that it is Rwanda's national university that strives to change the framework of references. The ultimate objective is obviously to achieve this cultural change, although it may not be easy to do so.

The Anglo-Saxon model, in its Scottish version for Rwanda's national university, is often mentioned in the mouths of the academic officials in French-speaking Africa. The close links it establishes between universities and the territories they occupy are particularly valued. The Rector of Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University builds on a particular interpretation of some elements of this model to call for a reform of his university organization and the provision of additional resources:

[...] the most advanced HE model is the Anglo-Saxon fee-paying system. In the USA students can borrow money from their banks to pay for their study period and access to higher education is a right as set down in their Constitution. In Senegal it is also a right that has to be fair. [...] It is the reason why we are going to set up a foundation and funds will be prioritised for students who will pay them back later on in their lives (Sall 2005).

The remedy found is designed to rescue African universities from their chronic lack of resources. The regulation of access to university via the payment of fees is not the sole option. While its possible merit is to solve the gap between the inadequate resources at their disposal and the intake of students, further reflection is needed on the functions that universities are expected to fulfil.

Sall & Ndiaye have opened this question to debate and have suggested quality criteria specific to African realities. They believe that African universities must first come to grips with the problems that their own populations face and find solutions adapted to the context in which they will be applied:

African universities could decide to create their own system of evaluation. [...] African universities and their clientele place internal and external returns at the centre of their concerns. It is absolutely necessary that the courses provided be aligned with international standards and that employment, the integration of graduates on the labour market, be secured (Sall & Ndiaye 2007).

The development by African universities of quality assurance criteria and mechanisms would be the first step towards the recognition of Africa's specificities by international organizations. African criteria should then be confronted with those worked out by non-African universities. There is little doubt that many universities in Northern countries would better understand and recognize the criteria established by their Southern colleagues than the supposedly universal criteria that ultra elitist Northern universities seek to promote and impose on the whole world but to no avail (Charlier 2006).

Conclusion

Africa's Critical Appropriation of LMD

International symposia were held in Africa during three recent summers, respectively in Dakar (2005), El Jadida (2006) and Lulumbashi (2007), with the support of CUD,⁷ the academic commission for development, to foster dialogue between experts and decision-makers on the adjustment of African universities to LMD (or the Bologna Process). The main conclusions of these symposia can be summed up as follows:

- The *LMD* reform was designed by and for Europe to provide its universities with the resources necessary to be sufficiently competitive against Asia and the USA in drawing in the best researchers and building the most competitive knowledge economy in the world.
- Although the *LMD* reform was not worked out for Africa, its universities have no alternative but to accept it. Indeed, student mobility and exchanges between Europe and Africa are so developed that African universities cannot but build a system in line with the prevailing academic scheme in Europe.
- The adaptation of African universities must deal with multiple obstacles. The overall objective is to ease student and researcher mobility, avoid the brain drain of African academics to the North and to focus on the needs of local populations. These constraints seem partly incompatible.

Nowadays many African universities attempt to become familiar with the Bologna model in a critical, creative and cautious manner. Presidents of universities understood that Bologna basically offered them the opportunity to take measures long postponed because of fierce resistance that was difficult to overcome. This sweeping reform is only an excuse, a temporarily indisputable argument to pass the most urgent local reforms.

In practice material obstacles act as a brake on further and quicker initiatives. In any case, the adoption of the *LMD* reform goes hand in hand with a growing interdependence of universities. Collective actors in universities are now endowed with considerable negotiating power. Universities are forced to compromise with those least open to change, whatever their motives for resistance. In Europe the international dimension of decision-making over Bologna has helped neutralize a number of opponents. Relating a decision on HE to the European construction process is quite easy because it was initiated decades ago and is approved almost unanimously. It may not be the case in Africa, and that must explain why *LMD* is being quite slowly applied in the continent.

The Strategic Challenge of Quality

We have seen that African students are the most mobile in the world and are therefore a target of choice for higher education systems willing to broaden their recruitment efforts. However, in the first years after the Bologna Process was launched, its promoters paid little attention to Africa. It was implicitly regarded as a 'captive user' of European higher education systems and looked bound to align with the standards designed in Europe. At that time European countries and the European Commission targeted their promotion efforts on other regions of the world, especially Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America because their higher education systems were apparently more competitive and their economies were expected to grow at a fast pace. It was not until the London summit in 2007 that the need to open recruitment to all regions worldwide was clearly stated:

We call on HEIs [higher education institutions], ENIC/NARIC centres and other competent recognition authorities within the EHEA [European Higher Education Area] to assess qualifications from other parts of the world with the same open mind with which they would expect European qualifications to be assessed elsewhere, and to base this recognition on the principles of the LRC [Lisbon Recognition Convention] (London Communiqué 2007).

This declaration seems to mark a new attitude from the promoters of the Bologna Process. Indeed, the Berlin Communiqué (2003) was more cautious a few years previously:

Ministers welcome the interest shown by other regions of the world in the development of the European Higher Education Area, and welcome in particular the presence of representatives from [...] the Follow-up Committee of the European Union, Latin America and Caribbean (EULAC) Common Space for Higher Education as guests at this conference. [...] They encourage the co-operation with regions in other parts of the world by opening Bologna seminars and conferences to representatives of these regions.

This declaration had no effect on Africa, of which there was no representative in the Bergen and London summits in 2005 and 2007 respectively. Signatory countries clarified their position in Bergen:

We see the European Higher Education Area as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating balanced student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions. [...] We see the need to identify partner regions and intensify the exchange of ideas and experiences with those regions (Bergen Communiqué 2005).

In the spirit of the Bergen Communiqué, partnership with other regions of the world was limited to the regions where balanced student and staff exchange was possible, which excluded Sub-Saharan Africa (except South Africa).

The London Communiqué is crucial because it calls for openness to all the regions of the world. It seems to pave the way for a different perspective – from internationalization to globalization. As Scott argued (2000), we can consider that the concept of internationalization refers to a world order ruled by nations whereas globalization entails challenging taken-for-granted situations and reassessing alliances. The globalization agenda covers issues such as ‘global climate change, worldwide pollution, sustainable technologies and, most important of all, the inequalities between North and South’ (Scott 2000: 7).

In the London Communiqué, the Bologna Process is no longer presented as the sole model to imitate but as one initiative among others. Therefore it implies that all regions now have their say in the definition of quality and in the implementation of certification mechanisms. It is important that African universities should exert their indisputable right to voice their own concerns. As Africa faces urgent problems, universities worldwide should mobilize to help solve them. One obvious quality criterion would be how successful universities are in find-

ing technical solutions that contribute to improving the living conditions of the poorest populations in the world. As globalization connects all universities, the promoters of the Bologna Process declared they were open to strategies different from those they had complied with until then. Accordingly there is a historical opportunity to include the care for the weakest citizens of the planet in the criteria for the measurement of academic quality. Hopefully African universities will not be overwhelmed by their internal problems and will manage to come together and make a case for this orientation.

This compromise suggestion neither marks a lack of ambition for universities nor a submission to the rules of market exchange. It is in keeping with the statement that ‘universities are socially responsible and seek to improve the common good’. It is even in accordance with the perspective of the League of European Research Universities, an association that encompasses universities that are among the oldest and most prestigious in Europe:

Universities reconcile a transcendent mission of establishing understanding of the true nature of things with a social mission of relevance to their ambient population (Boulton & Lucas 2008: 7).

Notes

- 1 The method used in this ranking can certainly be criticized. Quality criteria that are less prone to criticism are suggested in this paper.
- 2 The debate ‘brain drain vs brain gain’ is not addressed here. See, for example, Vinokur (2006) or Wickramasekara (2002).
- 3 The process of constructing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which was launched just over a decade ago, is not known by the same name by different EU member states. Depending on countries and periods, it is called the Bologna or Sorbonne–Bologna process, *LMD*, for *Licence* (bachelor), *Maîtrise* (master), *Doctorat* (doctorate), or 3–5–8 in reference to the theoretical length of the three cycles. The names of these three cycles also vary across countries (Charlier 2008).
- 4 If exchanges are so limited, it is because many African universities have unpredictable academic cycles and third-country nationals may lose the credits for the semester they spend in Africa.
- 5 On Bourdieu’s model, see Bourdieu 1993.
- 6 The largest two cities in Burkina Faso.
- 7 *CUD*: the Academic Commission for Development is in charge of the implementation of the cooperation policy for the development of French-speaking Belgian universities.

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