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“EUROPEANIZATION”
OF EDUCATION:
CHALLENGES FOR
ACCESSION COUNTRIES

“Knowledge has been at the heart of economic growth and the gradual rise in levels of social well-being since time immemorial”
(David & Foray, 2003)

INTRODUCTION

Considering the current calls for educational reform surrounding the ties between education and international recognition, a large portion of the current reform initiatives is oriented toward the needs of the economy. A central feature of the sociological approach is recognizing the most important basic goals of reforming the higher education system. Education as a public and a private good is both a subtle and a complex process of *production*. At the *international level*, the perception of the (higher) education *functionality* can result in improving their social role for a specific country on the global platform, indirectly giving the same benefits as at the national level (van Tilburg, 2001).

The higher education institutions have a critical role in supporting knowledge-driven economic growth and in constructing knowledge societies. The very recent World Bank study *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*, published in 2002, analyses “how tertiary education contributes to building up a country’s capacity for **participation** (emphases added by D. K.) in an increasingly knowledge-based economy” (World Bank, 2002: XVIII). Policy options investigated and presented in this study should also be elaborated during discussions of intensive policy implementation to avoid the risk of being further marginalized in a highly competitive world economy.

Starting with the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) and continued by the Bologna Process (1999) the central objectives of higher education became:

- Employability;
- Mobility; and
- International competitiveness.

These objectives are replacing the traditional ideals of the university as: searching for true recognition, studying to become a well developed personality and to cooperate as a community for the sake of scientific progress. The current official propositions, papers and policies regarding learning society, life-long learning and higher education must be seen in the European Union’s current goal to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy of the world (Kellermann, 2002).

The implication of the knowledge economy is that there is no alternative way to prosperity than to make learning and knowledge-creation of prime importance. According to New growth economics (based on work by Stanford economist Paul Romer and others who have attempted to deal with the causes of long-term growth), a country’s capacity to take advantage of the knowledge economy depends on how quickly it can become a “learning economy” and after that an overall knowledge-based society. Romer has proposed a change to the neo-classical model by seeing technology – and the knowledge on which it is based – as an *intrinsic part of the economic system* (Romer, 1986, 1990). Sidelining capital and labour, knowledge is now becoming the *one* factor of production (Drucker, 1992), especially in developed economies¹.

It was recently discussed that *production of educational services* is often under pressure of society’s expectations (Krbec, 2002a, 2002b, 2003). Educational institutions use resources and technology to produce services that benefit individuals and society. Traditionally, all educational institutions have been, and continue to be, learning centers with the objectives of accumulating and transmitting knowledge. Societies (transitional as well as “established” ones) are undergoing continuous review and change. As regards education and training in general, these circumstances imply a permanent adaptation by the education system to technological and social change.

Presently, higher education institutions (university and autonomous faculties belonging to them) are undergoing radical transformation from conservative (or traditional) to modern, innovative, which means socially more effective. According to Etzkowitz (2002) “the second academic revolution” is also a marketable commodity; it’s a part of any further economic development.

Regulating the system of higher education, transitional countries have used a combination of bureaucratic regulation and market forces as the most recent key tools of governance. Following other reforms, higher education in Croatia also began a process of transformation, mod-

ernization and diversification. When completed, it would fundamentally alter the profile of a traditional university. In these circumstances many discussions about the future of Croatian higher education revolve around issues of finance and management. On the other hand, different pressures force the universities and other higher education institutions to build partnerships with both industry and government agencies. From transitional perspectives, these activities must be analyzed as a part of the privatization processes in the field of education in general.

“EUROPEAN EDUCATION SPACE”

Among the policies and/or initiatives that have been launched, *the new strategic goal* for Europe set at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 should ensure a transformation to a society *capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and increased social cohesion*. Such “an ambitious goal” (Zgaga, 2003:13) demands very concrete action. Therefore, the Council of Education has been asked “to undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while **respecting national diversity**” (Lisbon European Council, Presidency Conclusions No. 5 and No. 27).

Prior to this communication, the framework of a number of policies was meant to serve only as a basis for helping to define projects for implementation by EU as follows:

- The Commission Communication *Strategies for Jobs in Information Society* - COM (2000)48 - analyzed the impact of the information society and presented a set of proposals and recommendations in different areas (education/learning, working/organizing, public services, enterprise etc.).
- Based on the previous communication, *eEurope Initiative* was also launched in 2000. The initiative’s goal was to encompass different objectives accompanied by several measures needed to ensure that future EU generations benefits fully from changes in the information society. Two “Action Plans”: “eEurope 2002” and, from year 2003, “eEurope 2005” - COM (2002)263 final - identify the specific initiatives and modes of monitoring their results.
- According to the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, the most important strategic goal for Europe for the decade is to become “*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world*”.

- Following this, *the European Employment Strategy* (EES) enhances the development of human capital in terms of education, improvement of professional qualifications, shaping new roles within a changing work organization, equal gender participation in all economic activities, etc.

The European Commission will carry on these programs at all levels, in cooperation with networks either currently existing or specifically established for this purpose. Besides policy-makers, each network should actively include representatives of academic communities, researchers and experts from different (scientific) fields. Also, institutions specialized in curriculum related matters (such as national councils for higher education or scientific research or institutes/centers specialized in the analyses of curriculum evaluation) should also be associated with implementation of the EU standards.

After the *Copenhagen Declaration* (Nov 29-30, 2002), the Bologna Process enhanced new European co-operation in the area of higher education and enlarged its activities in the area on vocational education and training (VET). The Copenhagen Declaration stresses the following main priorities:

- Strengthening the European dimension in VET, accordingly helping to introduce the lifelong learning strategy as a new dimension of (inter)national cooperation;
- Increasing transparency through implementation and rationalization of IT tools and networks, supporting real time monitoring of connection between research and educational institutions in the least developed countries;
- Optimization and awareness of resources, and review of available technologies;
- Encouraging recognition of competences and/or qualifications by developing two different stages of higher education, principles for certification, a credit system (ECTS) for HE and VET;
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning (certified programs);
- Promoting cooperation in quality assurance.

These priorities/measures should be “voluntary and principally developed through **bottom-up co-operation** (emphasized by D. K.)” and also “based on the target of 2010, set by the European Council in accordance with the detailed work programme and the follow-up of the Objective Reports”. *Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of educational and training systems in Europe* has

been accepted by the Council of European Union on February 20, 2002. Consequently, the Berlin Communiqué (September 2003) explicitly set up the Follow-up Group obligations their summit in 2005:

- Quality assurance,
- Two-cycle system, and
- Recognition of degrees and periods of studies.

The Follow-up process is expanding to 37 European countries now. All participating countries should be prepared to allow access to the information necessary for research on higher education relating to the objectives of the Bologna Process. To this effect, access to data banks on ongoing research and research results shall be facilitated (Berlin Communiqué: Sept 19, 2003; Part: Stocktaking).

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

According to the European Commission's attitude (2001), education in general and higher education in particular are not subjects of a "common European policy": **the content and the organization of studies remain at the national level.** The state has a responsibility to shape a framework that encourages and/or supports HE institutions to be more flexible, attractive, and innovative in a "borderless" environment. Salmi and his research team (World Bank, 2002) go on to say that the rising competition for resources and customers in the context of a global education market is producing a much more complex interplay of forces that need proper consideration in order to understand how the transformation of (each) current education system(s) and institution(s) takes place and the range of levels that the state and society can rely on to promote change.

At the Prague Summit 2001 it was clearly confirmed that the importance of the Bologna Process and the need for a common *European Higher Education Area* (EHEA) increased in all member-states not only at the governmental level but also at the level of institutions. Some accession countries expressed their readiness to join the Process. The most recent report prepared for the Ministers of Education of the signatory countries, named "Bologna Process between Prague and Berlin" (Sept 18, 2003), highlights the importance of *the Bologna Club* in the intergovernmental process of exploring the most important issues and searching for consensus.

"There are *national* educational systems and curricula but there is also a firm understanding that *European cultural diversity* gives us great advantages

and richness. Our advantages and richness can be mutually and fully enjoyed only if we create solid ‘common roads’ among us” (Zgaga, 2003:7).

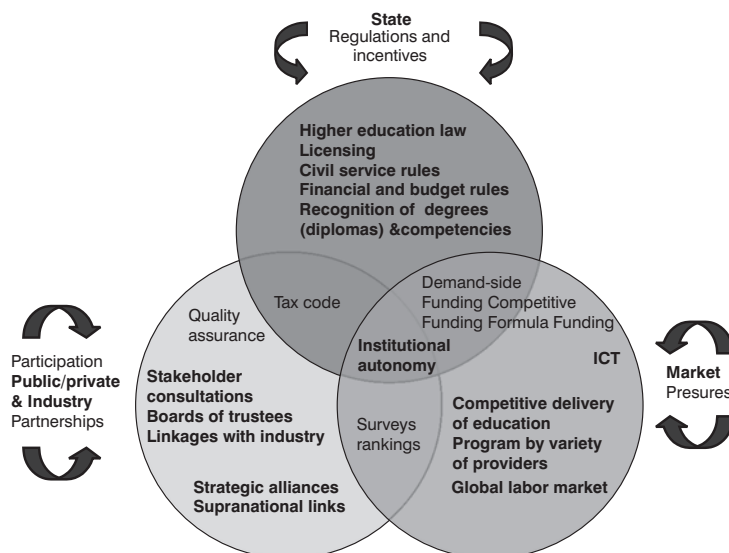
Under the light of EU enlargement, there is a growing convergence between the Bologna Process and educational policy making on the EU level. Forthcoming EU enlargement in 2004 will give additional dynamism to the Process.

The 1997 World Development Report observed that changing government rules and constraints was not sufficient to bring about reforms in an effective manner. A more recent World Bank study (2002) stresses the significance of three mechanisms bearing together on the behavior and results of (tertiary) education institutions:

- State regulations and financial incentives;
- Participation and partnerships, with industry, civil society and professional associations; and
- Competition among the various research and higher education providers (international/national, public/private, university/vocational, presentable/virtual provision, etc.).

Figure 1. illustrates how the overall social context and the diverse types of incentives used by the state interact with market forces and civil society at large to get better performance and responsiveness among HE institutions. This analysis could be used as a framework for considering the relationship between educational (nonprofit) trustees and their management. (In the balance of this paper, we do not distinguish between trustees and management.)

Figure 1.
 Social Context of Change
 in the Education Systems



In this sense, education becomes a branch of economic policy rather than a mix of social policy's solutions. Under the pressure of neo-liberal regimes and societies' ability to solve their problems by themselves (e.g. self-help strategies of employment or life-long learning activities), traditional forms of government and policy-making strategies' began to be reformed.

The degrees of transformation or *transfiguration* (Rikowski, 2001/02) in the education system vary from one country to another (also see Krbec, 2003). In educational settings, discussions about decentralization of public services and/or privatization mean different modes of funding service. In the transitional countries, the process of decentralization is not only a strategy but also a political restructuring plan. Decentralization is often defined as an *intended effect of the site-based or school-based management, which redistributes decision-making authority* (Bauman, 1996).

Following Chubb and Moe's (1993) opinion that the educational "market system is built around decentralization, competition and choice", some approaches to organizational change in transitional circumstances might not be identified only as a political reform. **If decentralization is designed to make educational systems more responsive and accessible, we may talk about radical educational reform that introduces a new system of public education.**

EFFECTS OF "EUROPEANIZATION" OR HOW THE ACCESSION COUNTRIES SHOULD ACT

According to Lawn (2001), the idea of a "European education space", connected to a similar proposal for a "European research area", is fundamental to the contemporary structuring of the European Union. Recent studies by Eurydice on reforms in higher education in Europe during 1980 and 1990 show more diversity in interaction processes between educational decision-makers and the economic environments belonging to them (Eurydice, 2000). On the one hand, this resulted from the intensive participation of business members in the decision-making process. On the other hand, growing marketization in the field of higher education was forced, and it's going to force higher education institutions (and their management teams) to find ways of attracting more consumers in accordance with demands of the economy.

Furthermore, current relationship between *superordinate communities* and national communities (as a cultural entity) is becoming more heterogeneous. Every higher educa-

tion institution may decide on the relative balance between the type and level of community with which it identifies (Neave, 2003:160). The choice is among international (which means: European), national, and even regional means of collaboration.

Generally speaking, the EU Member States adopted the basic (educational) political direction under the title “The European Dimension in Education” (1988) and “Toward Educated Europe” (1997) on which they reached consent of the Committee for education and science (now Department of Education and Employment). The documents include several groups of the basic goals in the field of education, such as (ISCED, 1997):

- Stimulating professions according to the diversity of historic, geographic and cultural development of European countries;
- Preparing youth to assume their share of responsibility in the economic and social development of Europe by offering a variety of opportunities to acquire education and skills sought and demanded by society;
- Stimulating professions and enhancing communication in several European languages, realization of political, economic and social tenets of development (past, current and future), including knowledge about the origin and appearance of the European Union, creation of a European (cultural) identity by building on the experiences from other (neighboring) countries;
- Stimulating innovations through pilot projects at the level of transnational cooperation with special emphasis on education, training and programs for youth (Erasmus, Lingua, Comett, Socrates, Leonardo Da Vinci), as well as;
- Promoting the sense of European unity and accepting the European Union as a distinguished economic and political association apart from the rest of Europe and the rest of the world.

The importance of creating the European system of higher education has further been emphasized in the Sorbonne Declaration or *Joint Declaration on Harmonization of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System* (signed in Paris – Sorbonne May 25, 1998). This document is a key for achieving the mobility and employment of citizens. It is also important in the overall development of the continent. The Sorbonne Declaration emphasized the roles of governments in “achieving these goals (op. goals of Declaration), by stimulating methods according to which the adopted knowledge is valorized and the appropriate levels are identified and recognized”. The main

goal of this declaration is the commencement of the *harmonization process* of European structure of higher education. This only directs the previous principles to the field of higher education by emphasizing that: "Europe must be the Europe of knowledge". It provided a *reference framework* aimed at promoting the external recognition and facilitating student mobility as well as enabling easier employment.

APPLYING STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

According to the Sorbonne Declaration, the Bologna Declaration and other documents, there is a need to implement a *subsidiary principle of the responsibility*. Primarily, the responsibility rests on administrative bodies, such as the ministries of education and their subsidiary administrative bodies on regional, i.e. local levels. At the same time, the administrative bodies of educational institutions (school boards and various councils depending on the level of education) have the authority over implementation.

This requires a *holistic analytical approach* that links different dimensions of the EU accession process instead of merely describing the particular obligations, competences, and organizational behaviors conducive to improving the efficiency of education decision-makers, administrators and others subordinate to the various power processes.

Such a model enables introducing uniform criteria for the estimate/assessment of the social benefit "product" of educational processes; the model interpretation needs to be viewed at two levels:

- a) **strategic level**, which implies setting the framework for regulation and the principles for application of the basic tenets of educational policy: *product, service, investment or identity*; and
- b) **production level**, which implies a well established network of mutual relations among institutions that offer education services. These include universities and institutions of higher education that comprise it, such as the schools of higher learning, higher schools and other institutions of higher education outside the university system as in Croatia, regardless of the ownership structure and program orientation.

Both levels are analytically present in different approaches to (higher) education as a public good. In the Preamble of the Berlin Communiqué is focusing on higher education as a public responsibility. The final goal is the development of a *coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area* by 2010.

In Table 1, column A is central to the common policy process. This context represents the diverse production process of education. In this sense, knowledge should be understood as the potential for (individual, community) action that depends not only on stored information but also on the way in which individuals interact with it. Based on Hövels’ opinion, knowledge occurs in interaction and is made valuable by the ability to act upon it. Interaction between higher education and economic life is of a particular relevance (Hövels, 2003:2).

As a consequence, HE institutions (individual university or faculty/school/academia) are forced to change their traditional, passive role in transmitting knowledge, and to use more competence-based methods of producing and applying knowledge in the (higher) education process. Different institutional mechanisms should serve to develop new forms of knowledge creation. The institutional perspective on educational innovations highlights the importance of a social entrepreneurship strategy both in higher education and in academic research. The complexity of collective decision-making may be simplified by considering an analytical strategy useful in making decisions on social issues in different countries. The benefits of implementing this strategy can be substantial if a concerted effort is made to deliver an optimal view of activities to the public, to key decision-makers, and to university administrators. Institutions that want to build and nurture successful as well as effective inter-organizational forms will have incentives to decentralize authority down to the production level.

Table 1
 Diversity of analytical
 approaches to education
 as a public good

The education is defined as:				
	A. Product	B. Service	C. Investment	D. Identity
1. <i>Establishing the process</i>	Production	Providing service	Opportunity	Shaping
2. <i>Social benefit</i>	Possible accumulation of “stock”	Momentary Use	Postponement of the adopted values	Morally acceptable
3. <i>Benefit for an individual (interest)</i>	Knowledge	Experiences in learning	Increasing lifetime opportunities	Quality of life
4. <i>Possibility of measurement</i>	Degrees and test results in transitions between levels	Involvement / participation	Employment and/or continuation of schooling	Culture / values

Source: Mitchell, 1998:222

More than before, development strategies of higher education aimed at satisfying the basic (desirable) **criteria of social effectiveness** imply the presence of:

- a) Stratified structures of higher education institutions;
- b) Appropriate and stable financing of the activity (educational, as much as research-development);
- c) (International) Competitiveness in the market for providing higher education services;
- d) Flexibility in preparing and implementing the education programs (higher education curriculum) with a system of implementing (international) standards; and
- e) *Value - neutral* scientific orientation (in Weber's definition of the concept, *op. value-free scientific orientation*) in a program field as well as in research.

Systems of higher education developed in this manner may expect increased interest on the international market for knowledge and skills which will occur by reflecting upon the increase in quality of their educational contents.

THE LIMITED EFFECTS OF POLICY DESIGN – A CROATIAN PERSPECTIVE

Over the last decade, Croatia, like other transitional countries, has experienced fundamental changes in its economic, social, and cultural dynamics as well as changes in a number of significant demographic characteristics. These changes have important implications for the way education and training programs in schools, faculties, universities, and the workplace are designed and delivered.

Formal interpretations and implications (UNESCO, EURYDICE et al.) have generated several broad issues and questions about the positioning of education in the specific **social context**. Furthermore, educational systems are forced to respond to the challenge of globalization. The challenges of diverse forms of modernization are now inevitable. One of them is certainly the need to shape the criteria for standardization. From a perspective of new economic sociology, that need is defined as a type of social intervention (or social invention) within the circle of the EU's Member States. But, the main demand is very clear: *efficiency in providing (educational) services* which should provide *transferability* (a matter of special concern because national practice in areas such as student assessment, performance, and evaluation revealed immense variation), and *portability* of student financial support. This efficiency is crucial for re-shaping of complementary of qualifications.

Following current reform activities in Croatia, the introduction and acceptance of European standards in higher education became one of the objectives reinforcing the means to act:

1. On a **strategic level**: based on the new Scientific Research and Higher Education Law, introducing standards should be one of the basic goals of the upcoming reforms of higher education in Croatia at the university level. Among the many goals of the future transformation of higher education, *standardization* and implementation of the *instruments of integration* are the inevitable requirements for every national system of higher education. Over the ten years that the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been running, it directly reinforced the integration of European universities. Accordingly, Europe’s adjustment to globalization additionally contributes to the harmonization of national systems of higher education. Therefore, Croatia like all other countries approaching accession to the European Union, must – among others – adopt the standardization requirements. The requirements are adopted with the attempt to make *qualitative assessment of benefits that academic knowledge and skills yield*. Among the well-known goals of ECTS implementation, one is *the principle of general social benefit* resulting from the transformation of higher education. The principle should complement actions such as:
 - a) *Formulation of an effective and efficient system* that will promote the high quality of academic knowledge measured by educational standards;
 - b) *Promotion of equal opportunities in education* in the context of equality in the approach to educational institutions;
 - c) *Harmonization* of the ability to grant financial support to institutions of higher education with national, economic and political needs for development;
 - d) *Responsibility* of the institutions of public administration and their *managements* for achievement and maintenance of the high qualitative level of the educational processes, which occur on various levels of higher education and in various fields of science.
2. On a **“production”** (operational) level:
 - e) Creating scientific (expert), as well as administrative support in overcoming the existing misunderstanding of foreign educational systems (originally undergraduate and graduate);
 - f) Defining the length of individual curricula (per week/semester);
 - g) Overcoming the problem of low level of student preparation when transiting between academic years as well as the low number of graduates relative to the total number of students etc.

Considering that "Europe of knowledge" surely cannot postpone the use of acquired knowledge and skills, the changes of current condition should be approached decisively.

FOOTNOTE

¹ Along the same lines, the OECD has suggested that the society's benefit of knowledge, compared with natural resources, physical capital and low-skill labour, has taken on great importance. "Although the pace may differ, all OECD economies are moving towards a knowledge-based economy" (OECD, 1999:7).

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