Reply

Comment to the Article ‘Setting Policy Agenda for the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process’

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Reply to: Comment to the Article ‘Setting Policy Agenda for the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process’ by Yasemin Yagci by Orr *et al.* doi:10.1057/hep.2014.8; published September 2014.

In September 2014, Orr *et al.* published a comment on the article ‘Setting Policy Agenda for the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process’ arguing that it has an erroneous and incomplete statement. The article in question explains the development of the social dimension of the Bologna Process as a policy item, focusing on the agenda setting stage of it. The article is based on a wealth of document analysis and a theoretical framework, the Multiple Streams Framework. The framework defines indicators (their definition and the collection of data) as one of the important factors explaining the agenda status of a policy item. Having this one stated, I would like to reply to Orr *et al.*’s reply:

(1) The statement ‘[r]elevant indicators for the social dimension started to be developed at the European level rather late’ is criticised for being erroneous claiming that initiatives started earlier. The subject of the article is the social dimension of the Bologna Process and not the history of EUROSTUDENT as such. EUROSTUDENT gets into the scope of this article as it became a part of the follow-up structure in 2007, when it was assigned to the task. Furthermore, the article is based on the analysis of the document produced by the main Bologna Process actors. These policy actors, as understood in this article, are described on pages 7–8 and do not include EUROSTUDENT. As the whole article focuses on the actions of these policy actors, the ‘rather late development of indicators’ is addressed to those policy actors and does not refer to the work of EUROSTUDENT until that point.

(2) In this article, the EUROSTUDENT Survey is analysed in terms of the type of indicators and the number of countries based on the EUROSTUDENT III Survey. The time scope of the analysis is clearly stated as ‘the empirical base of the contribution is composed of different documents for the time period 1999–2010 that treat the social dimension of the Bologna Process’ (2). This means the publications of EUROSTUDENT beyond 2010 are not included in the analysis.

(3–4) Difficulties of collecting internationally comparable data is a known fact, experienced by any project. Orr *et al.* refer to some of them, such as limited comparability, partial inconsistencies in the data in their reply point (3). The article states that the data set does not include all Bologna countries and focuses on access-related indicators and accommodation and funding. However, it does not cover other student support services, such as the provision of guidance and counselling, and services for academic and daily life of students, or any indicators on the completion of studies. In this article, the social dimension is ‘understood as ensuring that societal diversity is reflected in the student body accessing to, progressing in and completing higher education studies (London Communiqué, 2007)’ (3). That is why the indicators are not considered comprehensive enough.

All in all, the parts of the article referring to the data collection argue that the indicators relevant for the social dimension need further development. This argument is addressed to the policy actors of the Bologna Process and as a matter for the follow-up process. It does not aim at destructively criticising EUROSTUDENT. Reading the article without decontextualising it would certainly help avoiding such wrong conclusions.