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Achieving cultural community through rhetorical means: A study of culture in the Bologna Process documentation

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Introduction

Paradise is not created out of conference reports and Ministerial communiqués... nor can qualifications frameworks be all things to all people... an egg laying pig that produces wool and milk.
—Sjur Bergan, Chair, Qualifications Framework Group

An interesting point to consider when studying the Bologna Process, Europe's contemporary initiative to reform the higher education systems among the 47 member countries, is how culture is represented in the official Process documentation. The official documentation contains layered definitions of culture that become problematic when determining the progress or the success or failure of this reform effort. For example, in the *Sorbonne Joint Declaration* (1998), the originating document of the Bologna Process, education ministers emphasized a large, overarching, definition of culture—a European culture—when they wrote that the Bologna Process is an opportunity “where national identities and common interests can interact and strengthen each other for the benefit of Europe” (para. 13), and one year later, they committed to preserve the diversity of Europe when they wrote that the Bologna Process will take “full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy—to consolidate the European area of higher education” (*Bologna Declaration*, 1999, para. 10).

Furthermore, one of the nine main objectives of the Bologna Process is the European Dimension, which calls for working groups to ensure that the higher education framework chosen reflects the unique needs of Europeans as a whole and is populated with European content (*Trends I*, 1999). The constant reference to European citizenship in the ministerial communiqués is a double-edged sword for many Europeans. On one side, there is the advantage of European countries working together to unify in the global economy; but on the other side, an overarching European identity may reduce or even dissolve individual national identity and culture. The dichotomy of promising respect for diversity while at the same time calling for a national European identity is

a practical move on the part of the education ministers who have the seemingly insurmountable task of bringing about “harmonisation” among 47 countries. This move, however, is also an example of operationalizing culture—using culture as a tool—in order to achieve the economic goals of the Bologna Process.

In this article, I analyze the layered definitions of culture found in a selection of official Bologna Process documentation, and I discuss how the various representations of culture are perceived by several different stakeholders. Through the analysis of this selection of Bologna documents, I found patterns of rhetorical strategies that promote European citizenship as a means for achieving cultural unity and social cohesion among Bologna members. These strategies appear to be ways for the education ministers to promote a national European identity for the sake of all of Europe to prosper economically, but these rhetorical strategies also allow members, to some extent, to negotiate their own self-interests. One problem, however, is that while intent to preserve Europe’s cultural diversity is mentioned in Process documents, promoting a national European identity takes precedence over individual national culture in Bologna decisions, a move that some stakeholders perceive as jeopardizing individual national culture and identity, most especially in Central and Eastern European countries.

The contributions of this particular study to professional and technical communicators include demonstrating how layered definitions of culture are rhetorically represented in this contemporary global initiative, how collaboration and cooperation are solicited rhetorically, and how culture is used as a tool to achieve the overarching economic goals of the Bologna Process. I begin this discussion by providing background information about the Bologna Process, describing my methodology and the documents I used for this study, and then discussing the various representations of culture found in the documents. I conclude with thoughts about the implications of the rhetorical strategies found in the documents, along with considerations for professional communicators interested in intercultural and international communication.

Background on the Bologna Process

The Bologna Process is a voluntary initiative among European countries to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA): a European higher education framework by which member countries have transparent and comparable degrees. The EHEA promotes three cycles of degrees (bachelor-master-PhD) and an agreed-upon qualifications network that maps to national and institutional learning objectives and the criteria by which all students receive their degrees. The Bologna Process asserts that higher education is a public good and responsibility; thus, the EHEA is supposed to provide opportunities for lifelong learning, equal access for all citizens, and a quality education that is internationally competitive.

The Bologna Process officially began in 1998 with four signatory countries. Since that time it has grown to 47 countries as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Increased Membership

Date	Signatories
1998	4
1999	31
2001	32
2003	33
2005	45
2007	46
2009	46
2010	47

About half of the signatory countries are members of the European Union (EU), and all EU countries belong to the Bologna membership (*Trends VI*, 2010).

Management of the process

The Bologna Process is a completely voluntary reform initiative that involves the cooperation of multiple stakeholders including higher education ministers, governments, employers, students, faculty, staff, European organizations, and quality assurance agencies (EHEA, 2009). The Process is also promoted as being a democratic membership that has distributed authority. What this means is that there is no one central authority governing the Bologna Process, but rather, positions of authority are rotated among members.

Meeting structure is directly related to the organization of the Bologna Process. Ministers of higher education meet every two years to discuss progress and new directions. The geographic location and the host (secretariat) presiding over the ministerial conference are rotated among member countries. At the ministerial conferences, work is outlined for the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG), which acts as overseers for other working groups that sort out issues needed to implement Bologna objectives. The BFUG is comprised of representatives from all signatory countries and other stakeholders, such as quality assurance organizations, government liaisons, employers, and other European organizations, such as the European Commission.

Management can also be seen through the documentation hierarchy of the Bologna Process. As a result of the ministerial conferences, official guiding documents, titled “ministerial communiqués,” are drafted. It appears that there are two primary audiences for these communiqués. The first is the member states, and the second is the rest of the world. For Bologna members, the ministerial communiqués reflect the goals and expectations of the Bologna Process as determined by the ministers of higher education from each signatory country. For non-Bologna countries, the communiqués can be considered progress reports and even public relations documents. The political aspect of these documents is even acknowledged in some of the BFUG board meeting minutes where members debate and craft certain language (and omission of particular details) to be reported in an upcoming communiqué (BFUG, Bled, 2008; BFUG, Prague, 2009). While the main purpose of the ministerial communiqués is to set forth the overarching goals of the Bologna Process, they are also the face of Bologna to the rest

of the world in that they present a particular image of Europe and of progress toward the goals identified in them.

The ministerial communiqués also serve as the basis for the BFUG by outlining what needs to be done and to what ends objectives should be met. The BFUG creates working groups that conduct seminars on various Bologna objectives that need to be worked out. The working groups create recommendation reports that they send back to the BFUG, which in turn uses those recommendations to create its own report to the ministers prior to the next ministerial conference. Additionally, reports by other stakeholders and members inform the BFUG and ministers prior to the conferences. Those reports include *Trends Reports*, *Stocktaking Reports*, and *Bologna With Student Eyes* reports, for instance.

In 1999, the *Bologna Declaration* outlined six objectives for the Bologna Process, which increased to nine objectives just two years later at the ministerial conference in Prague. The nine objectives are identified and described below.

- **Comparable degrees.** The ministers asked higher education institutions to use existing “European tools” to determine full recognition of degrees so that students can freely circulate throughout Europe without fear of losing credits or declared competencies (*Prague Communiqué*, 2001). One of the most important aspects of educational reform that the Bologna Process brings to the forefront is the need for “mutual recognition of qualifications” (*London Communiqué*, 2007, p. 1). Qualifications describe learning outcomes and how students can move through the system. They also ensure that students can transfer from one institution (and country) to the next without losing credits. Mutual recognition of qualifications is necessary to unite educational systems and make degrees transferrable; therefore, it is crucial that all member countries compatibly implement the structure and qualifications of the Bologna Process in order to enhance Europe’s attractiveness and competitiveness in higher education (*London Communiqué*, 2007).
- **Two main cycles.** The adoption of a two-cycle (later changed to a three-cycle) degree structure is essential for the transfer of degrees. These main cycles include bachelors and masters degrees, and later, the PhD. Ministers declared that there should be a variety of ways that students can achieve these degrees at all institutions of higher learning to “accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs” (*Prague Communiqué*, 2001, p. 2)
- **System of credits.** Because not all countries use credits in their higher education systems, the ministers encourage members to adopt such a system to ease the transfer of student credits from one institution to the next. They suggest using an existing system called European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).
- **Mobility.** The ability for students, faculty, and staff to move about freely throughout Europe was declared as one of the main objectives of Bologna from the very beginning in 1998. Ministers ask the cooperation of governments and employers in removing obstacles to mobility, including visas and work permits.

- **Quality assurance.** Quality assurance has many different aspects in that it refers to the ministers' commitment to providing a quality education where best practices are shared among higher education institutions.
- **Promotion of European dimensions in higher education.** It is stressed, especially in the *Trends I* report, that the model used for the Bologna Process should not adopt an “‘Anglo-Saxon’ (mainly American) model” (p. 9) but rather a framework that is suited to best meet European needs and that curricula be populated with European content. The authors of the *Trends I* report and the ministers at the ministerial conferences continually emphasize the importance of ensuring that the Bologna Process does not adopt characteristics typical of American higher education because “‘Europe needs to develop its own system(s) to suit its own needs” (*Trends I*, 1999, p. 10).
- **Lifelong learning.** The idea of lifelong training and education is mentioned in the *Sorbonne Joint Declaration* as one of the effects of globalization and an obligation of Europe in regard to its citizens. Lifelong learning is seen as one way of achieving a “‘Europe of knowledge” (*Sorbonne Joint Declaration*, 1998, para. 1) and as a means of improving “‘social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life” (*Prague Communiqué*, 2001, p. 2).
- **Social dimension:** This objective is related to the idea that higher education is a public good and responsibility. It encompasses accessibility for all citizens regardless of financial or social status; it refers to the responsibility of governments to ensure that the conditions for completing a degree are suitable for students (*Bergen Communiqué*, 2005). The social dimension is tied closely to the attractiveness of a European education in that governments should make financial and social investments and accommodations so that European students want to stay and study in Europe.
- **Attractiveness:** This objective is related to the idea that, through the overall reform of higher education across Europe, the changes that are made to systems and individual institutions should ensure that the curriculum is internationally competitive so that a European education is valued among European citizens and sought after by students from other parts of the world, as well.

The Bologna Process has now entered its second decade. In 1998, Bologna ministers envisioned that by 2010 all Bologna countries would have fully implemented the Bologna objectives, thus creating the EHEA; however, that did not happen. A handful of countries claimed partial implementation, but a majority of countries had no implementation at all by the launch date. Thus, the ministers acknowledged the complexities of the Process, especially with 47 members, and the impossible timeline. Proclaiming their successes, but also acknowledging some of the difficulties and complications of the Process, they then extended the deadline for implementation to 2020.

Intercultural communication and the Bologna Process

Bologna Process documents are abundant and rich with insight into the global dimensions of professional and technical communication. Additionally, due to the numerous and diverse membership of 47 different countries, analyses of Bologna documents offer various interpretations of effective intercultural communication. This study fits into the larger dialogue of intercultural communication because it addresses how culture can be operationalized in organizational communication for the purpose of achieving, in this case, overarching economic goals.

Jahoda (2012) stressed that “‘culture’ is not a thing, but a social construct vaguely referring to a vastly complex set of phenomena” (p. 300). This vast set of phenomena can be seen in the wide array of subjects associated with the way people from various cultures communicate with each other. A great deal of research on intercultural communication focuses on rhetorical approaches and trends or tendencies that exist in various cultures and on which people rely when communicating with each other or when language is transferred from one culture to another (Ding, 2014; Ding & Savage, 2013; Fraiberg, 2013; Frost, 2013; Zemliansky & St. Amant, 2013; Zhu, 2010). Other research on intercultural communication emphasizes the constraints of viewing culture within boundaries, most especially geographic or national borders (Agboka, 2013; Bokor, 2011; Wang & Zhu, 2011). And other scholars attend to issues associated with the dangers of ethnocentrism and linguistic imperialism (Agboka, 2012; Agboka, 2013; Bokor, 2011; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2011), and achieving cultural competence or the ability to communicate with cultures other than one’s own with sensitivity and respect (Wang, 2013; Yu, 2012). To some extent, analyses of Bologna documents must take into account many of these same concepts; however, it is important to keep the economic underpinnings of the Process in mind, which are often seen as being achieved through the promotion of a more united Europe and European citizenship for all members.

Through a series of world surveys in 65 different countries, Inglehart and Baker (2000) concluded that economic development has profound impact on cultural values. They explained that industrialization affects other aspects of society, specifically, education, gender roles, and politics to name just a few. Their study, however, also demonstrated that the “value systems of rich countries differ systematically from those of poor countries” (p. 29), which is a similar issue for Bologna countries where some see the Bologna Process as a way of migrating Western European culture over to Central and Eastern European countries (Filitreau, 2011; Kovtun & Stick, 2009; Kwiek, 2004; Makarova & Solomennikov, 2008; Simon, 2014). Likewise, Bazić and Anđelković (2011) discussed the importance of national identity in the process of socialization and preservation of a community’s values and ways of life. They stated that national identity plays a role in education; however, they fear the loss of individual national identities through implementation of Bologna Process standards—standards which exist for purposes of “economic development and pragmatism” (p. 209).

Along those same lines, Machida (2012) posited that one effect of globalization is that it can create homogenization (one culture), hybridization (a blend of various cultures), or polarization (conflict among cultures). The fear of homogenization, or “harmonisation” as it is called in the Bologna documents, is one of the main criticisms of the Process from multiple stakeholders

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including faculty and students. The ministers of higher education, however, are diligent in their rhetoric in Bologna documents to avoid polarization, and in fact, they work very hard to achieve hybridization as will be discussed later.

One way to consider intercultural communication is that the communication that takes place between cultures actually creates a new culture and becomes the nexus for communication among entities that would not otherwise communicate or cooperate with each other. In this case, the Bologna Process and the EHEA become the new cultures that foster communication between the 47 Bologna members, and the creation of a European identity is deemed necessary for all members to find a place within these new cultures. In this article, I show how the dialogue about culture in Bologna documents is used as a rhetorical tool to induce cooperation and collaboration for the purpose of achieving economic goals rather than treating culture as a national or individual concept that needs accommodation.

Methods

The research in this article is an extension of my ongoing research that involves rhetorical analysis of a selection of Bologna documents in order to understand the history, progress, and values of the Bologna Process and its members, as well as identify strategies used to encourage cooperation and collaboration among members of such a diverse group. This current study is focused on using official Bologna documentation to explore the various dimensions of culture as represented in those documents and analyze how culture is operationalized through the Bologna Process. To some extent, from this current analysis, it is possible to make some inferences as to the problems and benefits, maybe even the success, of the Process.

The Bologna Process officially began in 1998 with the signing of the *Sorbonne Joint Declaration*. Since that time, over a million pages form the body of official documentation. Due to this tremendous mass of literature, this investigation on culture focused only on the documents described below.

- **Sorbonne Joint Declaration and the Bologna Declaration.** These two documents are the originating documents of the Bologna Process. The *Sorbonne Joint Declaration* was composed and signed by four education ministers (from the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Italy) who attended a conference in Bologna, Italy in 1998. The following year, the *Bologna Declaration* was written and signed by 31 countries; thus, the Bologna Process officially began at that time.
- **Ministerial Communiqués.** Beginning in 1999, the ministers of higher education met every two years at what they termed Ministerial Conferences. These conferences were a time for ministers to report on the progress of the Bologna Process and reflect on new directions or necessary changes. One result of these conferences is the final report of the conference, also called the ministerial communiqué. Each communiqué is given equal weight to previous communiqués, and these documents are considered the guiding or charter documents of the Bologna Process. They form the basis for the work of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and other working groups.

- **Bologna Stakeholder Reports.** *Trends Reports* aim to “provide an overview of structures throughout the European Union and the European Economic Area and an outline of areas of divergence and convergence within these learning structures” (*Trends I*, 1999, p. 2). *Trends Reports* are published every two years prior to the ministerial conferences and they are authored by various experts in higher education (different authors for each publication). For purposes of this study, *Trends Reports* provide information about developments in European higher education throughout the course of the Bologna Process. *Bologna With Student Eyes* are reports from students who collect data from national student unions in many Bologna countries. Students report on the student experience in higher education based on implementation of Bologna objectives.
- **Secondary Literature:** Critical articles, some from faculty and other stakeholders, were selected based on the topic of culture and national identity in the Bologna Process.

The ministerial communiqués were chosen because they are the guiding documents of the Bologna Process that convey the overall goals of the Process as decided upon by the ministers of higher education. While there is no central governing body of the Process, the education ministers are still deemed the authorities of higher education; thus, they have developed the guiding principles and guidelines of the Process that they ask all stakeholders to uphold. Consequently, these documents are critical to include in this study.

Given that there are numerous and diverse stakeholders involved in the Bologna Process, it is important to analyze the reactions, activities, and accomplishments of those who are given the task of implementing the goals of the Bologna Process. This information came from the *Trends Reports* because they hold significance to the ministers and other stakeholders given their numerous references in other Bologna documents, and they provide an overview of the state of higher education in Europe. The student perspective was researched through the students’ own reports, *Bologna With Student Eyes*, written by a student task force dedicated to analyzing the implementation of the Bologna Process.

Secondary research articles, also written by various stakeholders (mostly faculty), were selected based on two criteria. The first criterion was that the article content covered an analysis of the progress or implementation of the Bologna Process. No particular country or region of Europe was specifically targeted for this first criterion. The second criterion came about as a result of reading the first set of articles and student reports where tension between Western and Eastern European countries was mentioned. To understand this claim more fully, I conducted a targeted search for articles that specifically mentioned a dichotomy of Western and Eastern European values, cultures, and Bologna implementation rates or progress between these two regions.

While reading the selection of documents mentioned above, I focused on specific terminology, mostly the word culture, but also on terms, such as diversity, ethnicity, and national identity. The terms were not searched for in isolation, meaning the search was not automated, but rather a thorough read of each document was conducted in order to fully understand the context in which these terms were used. Documents were read in chronological order in order to trace the evolution or modification of these terms from one document or time period to the next.

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Basically, one goal was to look for and trace (if applicable) a developing narrative of culture as seen in these documents. I looked for this developing narrative within each category but also for consistency in this narrative among the various sets of documents. For instance, how the ministers used the word culture from one ministerial communiqué to the next was compared to how that term was used or modified in stakeholder reports during that same time period as well. And another comparison was looking at how critics and supporters of the Process discussed these same concepts in the secondary literature.

Given the vast body of documents associated with the Bologna Process, this research study can cover only a small selection, but the implications for the cultural narrative found in the documents are of great significance to those who study intercultural and international communication, especially those most concerned with how culture can be operationalized in order to attain specific organizational goals.

Culture and the Bologna Process

To analyze how culture is represented in official documents of the Bologna Process and what role culture plays in the Process and implementation of the EHEA, it is important to start at the beginning with the two central documents of the Process on which all subsequent ministerial communiqués are based: the *Sorbonne Joint Declaration* and the *Bologna Declaration*. The *Sorbonne Joint Declaration* opens with a strong statement of what Europe must become. Europe is not only an economic system, “it must be a Europe of knowledge as well” that builds upon the “intellectual, cultural, social, and technical dimensions of our continent” (para. 1). To understand the Bologna Process, readers must consider Bologna language, and in this case, to fully understand the previous quotation requires knowing what is meant by the word “dimensions.”

However, according to Zgaga (2006), the word dimensions is problematic. Dimension “is used in the same way as in mathematics: a number of ‘unknown quantities’ contained as ‘factors in a product’ (a product named the Bologna Process)” (Zgaga, 2006, pp. 5-6). Zgaga further explained that these unknown quantities or factors are always questioned as to what they are, if they really exist, what they are linked to, and “why do they produce certain paradoxes” (p. 6). He concluded that a better word should be used; however, in subsequent ministerial communiqués, “dimensions” is used continually, even in the official wording of Bologna goals (e.g., external dimension, social dimension, European dimension).

In tracing the cultural dimension in the Bologna documents, it became apparent that culture, like all other dimensions mentioned above, is an unknown factor that is questioned by many as to whether or not it exists in the Bologna Process and what it is linked to, and it certainly does produce certain paradoxes for all stakeholders of the Process. For instance, Rudder (2010), who conducted a study on the cultural aspect of Bologna in German higher education, questioned the paradox of education ministers making policies that all members can accept:

On what kind of common higher education policy can 47 ministers—who represent countries as different as can be—possibly agree in a voluntary process, based on the open method of coordination (Veiga and Amaral, 2005)? They can only agree on general questions, and declarations must be sufficiently vague because they have to be accepted by 47 governments. (p. 7)

Thus Rudder posed the question: How can an organization maintain diversity while standardizing operations?

This same question applies to the path by which Europe must become a Europe of knowledge in order to compete economically on a global level. This path, according to education ministers, is through higher education where ministers credit universities for their past and future roles in shaping the “dimensions” of Europe. They then describe the Europe of the future through the creation of the EHEA, “where national identities and common interests can interact and strengthen each other for the benefit of Europe, of its students, and more generally of its citizens” (*Sorbonne Joint Declaration*, 1998, para. 14). This concept of a Europe of Knowledge (now capitalized) is further emphasized in the *Bologna Declaration* as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. (para. 2)

The ministers conclude the *Bologna Declaration* by “taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy—to consolidate the European area of higher education” (para. 10). The intersection, however, between “national identities and common interests” and “shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space” is also known as “harmonisation,” often synonymous with “standardization,” and it is a term that alarmed members and critics of the Bologna Process for its impact on the diverse cultures of Europe (Note: harmonization was replaced by “comparability and compatibility” in later documents [Wächter, 2004]). Thus many Bologna stakeholders like Rudder have wondered how the Process can possibly “take full respect of the diversity of cultures” and languages of Europe while harmonising equally diverse educational systems. Thus the two most important documents of the Bologna Process set the tone for the years that have followed and for all stakeholders who have struggled to balance two competing paradigms: diversity and harmonisation.

A further look at how culture is represented in the *Bologna Declaration* is necessary before analyzing subsequent communiqués. There are many definitions of culture, and for purposes of this study, I use the definition from Hand (2006) who cites Erickson and Triandis in saying that culture ““is a set of shared operating procedures, unstated assumptions, tools, norms, and values or ways of thinking that permeate the individual from the social and political institutions that surround them”” (p. 37). In this definition, culture is viewed from a national perspective, which seems relevant to the study of a social and political initiative that involves 47 countries. In the *Bologna Declaration*, however, there appears to be several representations of culture. One is clearly a culture of Europe, which is not necessarily placed in opposition to the diverse national

cultures of Europe, but rather it comes across as a protective layer of culture that surrounds the many diverse cultures of Europe as it is called out as being achieved through “intergovernmental co-operation” (para. 10). This European culture is defined as having “European citizenship...with an awareness of shared values” (para. 2), “stable, peaceful and democratic societies” (para. 3), “citizens’ mobility and employability” (para. 4), and “extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions” (para. 8). (It is important to note that no particular country or culture is called out specifically in the cultural and scientific traditions mentioned, but those traditions, from wherever they come, are adopted under the wider European culture.)

There is also a culture of higher education institutions (HEIs), institutions that the ministers say have agreed to take on the challenge of building the EHEA. The culture of European HEIs is described as independent, autonomous, and continuously changing according to the needs, demands, and advances in society and scientific knowledge (*Bologna Declaration*, 1999). Furthermore, there is a culture associated with the Bologna Process, and in the *Trends VI* report, the authors even refer to a Bologna Process identity. While the Bologna Process is not under the jurisdiction of the European Union, it was born out of an economic treaty usually referred to as the Lisbon Treaty or the Lisbon Convention in 1997, which recognized education as a human right, a necessity in promoting democracy, and the need for transparent and transferrable degrees (*Lisbon Recognition Convention*, 1997). In fact, Bologna members are continually encouraged to ratify the Lisbon Convention as a show of their commitment to the Process. Rudder (2010) suggested that the Bologna Process is a system that “more or less regulates itself” (p. 9), and further explained that:

It could be argued that the ministerial meetings have become—in the language of systems theory—an environment of the Bologna system rather than being its master. If that is so...we may conclude that the Bologna enterprise over the years has become something like a European entity of its own, for all practical purposes...largely independent of the national governments. (p. 9)

Similarly, a European system (or culture) of higher education within the future EHEA is described when ministers outlined their original six goals for the EHEA. Those goals included:

- Easily readable and comparable degrees
- Two main cycles of degrees
- A common system of credits
- Increased mobility for students, teachers, administration, and staff
- Quality education
- A unique European dimension for curricula, integrated programmes of study, and training and research

This European higher education identity is carried on throughout the years of Bologna as evidenced in *Trends VI* when the authors comment on the existence of a European higher education identity when referring to how the rest of the world perceives the HEIs of Europe. Consequently, there are many layers of culture associated with Bologna. Bologna members must first agree to the economic treaty of the Lisbon Convention and then commit to the common

goals outlined in the *Bologna Declaration*. They must also agree to achieve those goals in a manner outlined by the culture of the Bologna Process (e.g., through democratic governance and harmonisation achieved through the cooperation among all stakeholders). Therefore, each country must, in essence, adopt the values or culture of the Bologna Process in order to acculturate to the values and systems of the future EHEA, which will also define their overall educational systems and individual institutions of higher learning. And, due to the European dimension of the Process, the culture infused into the curricula is one of “Europe,” which leads to the question: What happens to individual national cultures?

Although many supporters and critics of Bologna often cite the ministers’ commitment to respect the diverse cultures, languages, and higher education systems throughout Europe, it is apparent in the two originating documents of the Bologna Process that the culture of Europe is of greatest importance and that the way to achieve this European culture is through the adoption of the Bologna Process/EHEA values, beliefs, and operating procedures. In other words, what the rest of the world will see as a consequence of the EHEA is a united Europe made possible through the cooperation of HEIs and governments of all member countries that agreed to the common values and goals of the Bologna Process. The authors of the *Trends VI* report attribute this cooperation as the key to the success of the Process as seen in 2010. They argued that the democratic governance allowed for open consultation and multiple interpretations of Bologna goals, which resulted in national and institutional diversity when implementing the goals of the Process. It could also be argued, however, that the respect for diversity as mentioned in the *Bologna Declaration* may have meant that no one culture of Europe would dominate another; however, as time has shown, that is not necessarily the viewpoint of many stakeholders who contend that the culture of the Bologna Process is one of Western Europe, which is later discussed in more detail.

What becomes apparent in the documentation from 2001 onward is that respect for cultural and linguistic diversity is attached to other Bologna goals; it is not a goal within itself. For example, in 2001, ministers promoted the goal of mobility as a way for stakeholders, most especially students, to “benefit from the richness of the European Higher Education Area including its democratic values, diversity of cultures and languages and the diversity of the higher education systems” (*Prague Communiqué*, 2001, para. 2). In 2003, preservation of “Europe’s cultural richness and linguistic diversity, based on its heritage of diversified traditions” (*Berlin Communiqué*, 2003, p. 2) is connected with the goal of linking the EHEA to the European Research Area (ERA) to increase social and economic development through innovative research. And cultural and linguistic diversity is once again mentioned as way for European HEIs to promote mobility and joint degrees.

In 2005, the goal of increasing research is connected to cultural development, not cultural preservation as in 2003, and the importance of “intercultural understanding and respect” (*Bergen Communiqué*, 2005, p. 2) is mentioned in the promotion of another Bologna goal, increasing the attractiveness of the EHEA worldwide. The 2005 communiqué ends, however, with a statement about cherishing “our rich heritage and cultural diversity in contributing to a knowledge-based society” (p. 5) in regards to the ministers’ discussion about preparing for 2010. In 2007, the ministerial communiqué has a more economic tone, and the only mention of diversity is in

reference to how the EHEA should reflect the diversity of “our” populations; however, the context for that statement is in association with the social dimension of the Bologna Process, which has more economic underpinnings rather than national cultural ones. Although most of the communiqués mention the intent to “preserve” (2003) or “cherish” (2005) or build on (2007) the heritage and cultural and linguistic diversity across Europe, what takes precedence or becomes a continual directive from the ministers is building a European culture through the Bologna Process, which becomes a stronger message in 2007 and 2009 than in previous communiqués.

From the start of the Process in the *Sorbonne Joint Declaration* and *Bologna Declaration*, ministers are clear that the Process is open for all of Europe, and they encourage all of Europe to join. They wish to establish a “more complete and far-reaching Europe” (*Bologna Declaration*, 1999, para. 1) and a Europe of Knowledge, which will improve the lives of all European citizens. In all of the communiqués, the words citizens and citizenship are always in reference to being only European; no individual nations or cultures are ever called out except when announcing new members. Ministers call for “European cooperation” (*Prague Communiqué*, 2001, para. 10), and mutual trust and acceptance among members (*Prague Communiqué*, 2001). They describe the Europe they hope to build through the EHEA, which is “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (*Berlin Communiqué*, 2003, p. 2), a system “based on institutional autonomy, academic freedom, equal opportunities and democratic principles” (*London Communiqué*, 2007, para. 1.3). And through HEIs’ implementation of the Process in individual countries, students “may achieve their full potential for European identity, citizenship and employability” (*Berlin Communiqué*, 2003, p. 6), and prepare themselves “for life as active citizens in a democratic society” (*Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué*, 2009, para. 4). In other words, European citizenship is a means and a goal of the Bologna Process. It is only through members thinking of themselves as European citizens first that all of Europe will achieve united citizenship (and economic benefits) for all.

But in building a European culture, there is some loss to national culture, at least as seen by some stakeholders and critics of the Process. For example, when discussing the formation of the Bologna Process in relation to the presence and political clout of the EU, European Commission, and the Council of Europe, Rudder (2010) claimed that “The balance—or imbalance—between national and European policies and politics is as old as the European process. That also goes for higher education. In the long run, Europe slowly has become more European and less national” (p. 6). He further explained that the main problem with the Bologna Process is the competition between diversity (of cultures, higher education structures, languages, etc.) and reaching some sort of consensus toward comparability and compatibility of degrees that transfer equally from one country to the next. In looking at the case of Germany in particular, he concluded that by modifying existing educational systems, and adding in Bologna structures, there is some destruction to national educational systems, and that in the end, “by subsuming all European programmes and reforms under the heading of ‘Bologna’, the issue of Europeanization in higher education is obscured rather than clarified” (p. 19). In other words, even the Europeanization of Europe is somewhat lost in the effort to unify diverse cultures (national and institutional).

Similarly, Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva (2013) argued that the Bologna Process may not be applicable to countries with “cultural and economic contexts that differ from Western Europe in significant ways” (p. 990).

By looking at the structure of the Bologna Process, which is hierarchical and democratic, governance that is typical of Western European countries, there are cultural aspects of the Process that clash with those countries that have centralized decision-making structures, such as countries in Eastern Europe, namely the Ukraine (Kovtun & Stick, 2009; Shaw, Chapman & Rumyantseva, 2013). One result of this clash of ideologies is poor implementation at the institutional level. For example, universities in some Eastern European countries operate on the basis of top-down decision making; thus, knowledge and comprehension of Bologna objectives are the responsibility of administrators at a top level and such information was not passed on to faculty who implemented certain structures within the Bologna framework, such as the new credit system and even changes to curricula and the school calendar.

Consequently, the Ukrainian university underwent tremendous unnecessary and confusing changes for students and faculty because proper implementation requires a comprehensive understanding of Bologna goals and objectives all the way down to changing learning outcomes and syllabi, which faculty did not have due to the administrative structure of the institution (Shaw, Chapman, & Rumyantseva, 2013). Tomusk (2008) also made the point about the Bologna Process having a more Western European structure and appeal, which greatly affects the cultural integrity of Eastern European countries that are often viewed as being inferior to Western countries. In his analysis of how Bologna structures are implemented into Russian universities, he demonstrated that the implementation of some Bologna structures, such as the “credit transfer/accumulation system and the short—three-to four-year—bachelor’s degree” (p. 20) actually destroy “the fundamentally scientific nature of Russian higher education” (p. 20) due to disparity between Russian research traditions and the more pragmatic, workplace-oriented learning outcomes of the Bologna Process.

It is interesting to note that in the *Trends VI* report, the authors commented that the data they collected for this 2010 report shows that a majority of institutions are committed to the Bologna Process; however, they did not collect data on individual institutions’ understanding of the Bologna objectives or what the EHEA is or should be. Consequently, the lack of this discussion “has probably led to some confusion between the broad, humanistic objectives and the technocratic aspects of some of the Bologna action lines” (*Trends VI*, 2010, p. 31). This certainly seems to be the case, especially in some Eastern European countries as pointed out in these two case studies.

Even though some Eastern European countries have accepted Bologna objectives and implemented the called upon changes in their curricula, some critics argue that such implementation is not effective because there is no consideration for individual national culture. For example, Simon (2014) discussed in detail the differences between higher education in Western European and Central and Eastern European countries, which very much affects successful implementation of Bologna goals. She claimed that, generally, higher education in Central and Eastern Europe still has an undercurrent of Communism, although that

generalization is problematic as well. But despite that overgeneralization, higher education in Central and Eastern Europe is intended to create an obedient population, the curricula is subject-oriented, and the educational pedagogy is primarily instructor-led. Bologna Process documents call for a more student-centered approach to teaching as mentioned in the *London Communiqué* in 2007, and such methodology is popular in Western European countries, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium, and the Netherlands (Simon, 2014).

Unfortunately, Simon reported that for those teaching in Central and Eastern Europe, “transferring student-centered practices into teacher-centered contexts is strewn with many difficulties” (p. 79) because faculty are neither trained in such methodology nor are there readily available resources for them to learn and use in the classroom. Similarly, Kovtun and Stick (2009) reported that Soviet education used to focus almost primarily on the preparation of scientists and engineers, but the new shift in higher education, brought about by the Bologna Process where learning workplace skills along with independent and critical thinking are primary goals, clashes mightily with Central and Eastern European higher education structures and result in what some see as a decrease in the quality of education and loss of tradition. Consequently, Kovtun and Stick suggest that

integration into the EHEA should be combined with equal, if not more rigorous, efforts to maintain cultural and historic values of the Ukrainian education. ‘Westernization’ of education and a true exchange of ideas and expertise between different countries is possible, but students need to develop a strong sense of identity and pride for their own national backgrounds. (p. 100)

Students also voiced concern over the loss of culture and uneven implementation and opportunity in Western and Eastern European countries. In the 2003 *Bologna With Student Eyes* report, students listed harmonisation under the subheading “Threats and Weaknesses” where they discussed how harmonisation could lead to loss of cultural and linguistic diversity. They acknowledged cultural differences, most especially in economic terms, between Eastern and Western European countries, and they stated that such differences are not respected in the Bologna Process, and such economic disparity could result in “brain drain” from Eastern to Western countries. Cultural differences between the East and West are also mentioned in 2005, 2007, and 2009. Students also consider the preservation of national languages an important issue.

In 2005, they mentioned the importance of being taught foreign languages and intercultural communication skills, and they noted that the trend of Bologna universities to promote learning languages only, most especially English and teaching courses in English, is not all one needs to successfully communicate across cultures. In the *Trends VI* report, however, the authors stated that English, the common language, is actually a way to maintain diversity and to “understand rather than level out cultural differences” (p. 28). But the idea of a common language used to understand cultural differences contradicts the student experience where they emphasized in their reports that understanding culture extends beyond the study of language and they believed that there is not enough individual national culture included in the curricula despite the European dimension being one of the main Bologna objectives.

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The many layers of and ambiguous references to culture in the Bologna documentation have been viewed by some critics as a way for ministers to achieve the economic goals of the Bologna Process and operationalize a European culture at the expense of individual national culture. The call for a European culture and cooperation across all member states is what Rudder (2010) labeled as the “new and strong element in the European process of higher education” (p. 6), and many stakeholders and critics argued that the Bologna Process is clearly an economic and political force, not an educational one (Bazić & Anđelković, 2011; Berndtson, 2013; Rudder, 2010; Tomusk, 2008). Bazić and Anđelković claimed that although tendencies in modern society dictate changes in culture, the Bologna Process instills “a meritocratic system of values and a technological concept of education...thus subordinating education to the market needs and global division of labor” (p. 208). Thus, it can be argued that creating a national identity is a means for building an economic system and that the “construction of national identity is not an end in itself...‘but a means to create the state’” (Bazić & Anđelković, 2011, p. 209).

Consequently, “the national identity in the Bologna Process may be considered in two ways...as a reduction of national characteristics to mere preservation of ethnic characteristics, and on the other, as the pursuit of European identity” (Bazić & Anđelković, 2011, p. 209). In reading the *Trends VI* report, it is apparent that the creation of a national European identity is no secret as the authors make clear statements that what is needed from 2010 forward is a change in values and attitude of member countries, a “cultural transformation” (p. 26) in “embedding structural changes and individual Bologna tools in institutions” (p. 89).

Conclusions

The idea of identity serves as a strong motivational factor for people to cooperate. Tyler (2011) claimed that organizations can “serve as the social function of providing people with an identity” (p. 38). He further explained that people use organizations to find their own identity, especially in a group; thus, this identity provides them with further investment in the group and “they become motivated to work on behalf of the group as a way of bolstering their own identity” (p. 39). References in the ministerial communiqués to European citizenship appear to be a rhetorical strategy that allows members to identify with the Bologna Process on a personal, as well as a larger cultural, level. Based on the rhetoric of the ministerial communiqués, the ministers of higher education use the Bologna Process as a way to promote a united Europe. When members follow the guidelines of the ministerial communiqués, they identify themselves with larger societal responsibilities that will result in a better life for all Europeans as seen in this passage from the *Sorbonne Joint Declaration* (1998):

We are heading for a period of major change in education and working conditions, to a diversification of courses of professional careers with education and training throughout life becoming a clear obligation. We owe our students, and our society at large, a higher education system in which they are given the best opportunities to seek and find their own area of excellence. (para. 3)

From the beginning of the Bologna Process, the ministerial communiqués and even the working group documentation (such as the *Trends* reports) stated explicitly and continually that the

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Process will not work without the cooperation and trust of all member countries. It is reiterated many times that one country or institution cannot compete on a global level all by itself, and that the benefits that all countries get from the Process are for everyone, not just for one country or institution. Thus, in all of the ministerial communiqués, people are citizens of Europe—not of one particular country; therefore, the more members identify with the notion that they are indeed part of a larger community—a European community that benefits all—the more apt they are to work together to make this group successful.

Another way to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to work together toward common goals is to use imprecise or ambiguous words to identify organizational goals. In the case of the Bologna Process where Bologna “dimensions” are blurred concepts, such language could be a deliberate diplomatic strategy of the ministers to encourage ownership of the objectives among members. Goodall and Goodall (2006) stated that “team members feel more ownership of the team’s goals and objectives when they participate in defining them” (p. 265); thus, members have a vested interest in the Bologna Process when they can participate in defining the “dimensions” and other ambiguous terms and concepts of the Process. This deliberate communication strategy, also called strategic ambiguity, has been found useful in cultivating creativity and flexibility because it allows for multiple interpretations, which can be useful especially among diverse groups (Eisenberg, 1984). Such creativity and flexibility is exactly what the authors of the *Trends VI* report claimed happened during the implementation process. The authors stated that each country found its own path toward implementation of standardized structures. Such success, however, is debatable as seen in the case studies on Ukrainian, Russian, and German universities, for instance.

Consequently, the success of the Bologna Process is questionable, and many of those who question its success do so because of issues associated with culture. Certainly, the large and diverse membership of the Bologna Process invites cultural challenges, but in tracing culture and diversity through Bologna documents, it appeared that most of the challenges associated with culture lie in the various representations and many layers of culture in the Process itself and the official documentation. What impedes progress in the Process, in some ways, is that culture and diversity were represented as or implied to be individual national traditions in the early Bologna documents, but diversity and culture took on very different meanings in subsequent years. For instance, diversity became a reference to educational systems, but little to no attention was given as to why such diverse systems exist in the first place—because they are cultural institutions of a certain group of people. To harmonize diverse educational systems means a loss of tradition and heritage among certain groups of people. Although the European identity holds economic promise and benefits for all of Europe, such an identity cloaks the individual national identity of some members. In other words, individual national identities are subdued by the larger European culture.

For professional communicators who come from democratic cultures, the democratic governance of the Bologna Process may be appealing, but as seen in case studies by individual countries, especially those in Eastern Europe, the democratic and standardized operation of the Bologna Process actually causes cultural disparity, confusion, and results in the loss of deeply held beliefs, values, and traditions of some members. Operationalizing culture is not just a corporate

strategy used to create an organizational culture that aligns with an organization's mission statement or values; when dealing with multinational and culturally diverse groups of people, creating an organizational culture has implications beyond the end prize of attaining certain goals. In fact, as this study shows, such an approach may actually impede desired progress due to lack of attention to individual cultural differences.

The Bologna Process documentation continues to grow phenomenally each year, and the progress, as well as the success or failure, of the effort is continually debated. Further research, most especially in cultural studies, is needed to determine the short- and long-term effects of the Process on the cultures and languages of individual member states. The benefits of a unified Europe are emphasized in every ministerial communiqué and in some of the stakeholder documentation, but loss of individual national culture is a major concern. As students point out in *Bologna With Student Eyes*, effective cross-cultural communication goes beyond a common language; preservation of the diverse languages and cultures of Europe is necessary because, in the end, people study and work with people, not with a system of credits or a list of degrees or a set of work skills. Everything that the Bologna Process aims to create is supposed to be for people, and that humanistic aspect of the Process is found in the many cultural foundations of individual nations and individuals themselves.

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