

«BOLOGNA PROCESS» WITHIN THE ITALIAN UNIVERSITY

El proceso de Bolonia en la Universidad italiana

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ABSTRACT

This paper exposes the Italian reform of higher education beginning from the ministerial law of 1999 and put really in practice in the Italian university since 2001. The structure of the university, the different types from courses, doctorate and agencies of established evaluation and advising are explained, as well others decrees concerning documents, specially the supplement to diploma.

Later the article analyzes the reality of the change in the higher Italian education and presents the difficulties due on the one hand to the increase of the demand of higher education in the country and by another one to the economic difficulties motivated by the budgetary limitations and the little tradition of the Italian university with respect to the diversification of the financing sources.

The author comments next the change about the methodology and the difficulties and contradictions between the model proposed by the process of Bologna and the reality of the university students in whom the profile has changed and in its majority not rather deals with students of twenty years dedicating full time to yours studies but the students that at the same time works and adult people who have arrived after the university.

Referring to structure of degrees, he comments the difficulty that has had to happen of the traditional Italian structure of «laurea quatriennale» to first cycles of three years in which in many occasions the studies have

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been compacted that previously lasted four years. Next to this, the diversity of the academic offer in the Masters with a great freedom on the part of the universities make something difficult to future financing of these studies and their viability in the different universities.

Finally it refers how the implantation of system ECTS has benefited mobility in the Italian university when facilitating specially equivalences between the European universities and consequently to assure to the student the taking in consideration from the work made in its period mobility. The article ends annexed a terminological one with respect to used the organizational and educational vocabulary in him himself.

KEYWORDS: Italian University, Bologna Process, EHEA, Methodology, ECYS system.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo expone la reforma italiana de la enseñanza superior iniciada a partir del decreto ministerial de 1999 y puesta en práctica realmente en la universidad italiana a partir del 2001. Se explica la estructura de la universidad, los diferentes tipos de cursos, de doctorado y de agencias de evaluación y asesoramiento establecidos, así como los decretos referidos a documentos, especialmente el suplemento al título.

Posteriormente el artículo analiza la realidad del cambio en la educación superior italiana y constata las dificultades debidas por una parte al incremento de la demanda de educación superior en el país y por otra a las dificultades económicas motivadas por las limitaciones presupuestarias y por la escasa tradición de la universidad italiana respecto a la diversificación de las fuentes de financiación.

Después se comenta la realidad del cambio a nivel didáctico, indicándose las dificultades y contradicciones entre el modelo propuesto por el proceso de Bolonia y la realidad de los estudiantes universitarios en los que el perfil ha cambiado y en su mayoría no se trata de estudiantes de veinte años dedicándose a sus estudios a tiempo completo sino más bien de estudiantes que al mismo tiempo trabajan y de personas adultas que han llegado con posterioridad a la universidad.

En el ámbito estructural, se comenta la dificultad que ha habido para pasar de la tradicional estructura italiana de «laurea quadriennale» a unos primeros ciclos de tres años en los que en muchas ocasiones se han compactado los estudios que anteriormente duraban tres años. Junto a esto, la

diversidad de la oferta formativa de los segundos ciclos (masters) con una gran libertad por parte de las universidades, dificulta en gran medida la financiación futura de estos estudios y su viabilidad en las diferentes universidades.

Finalmente refiere cómo la implantación del sistema ECTS ha beneficiado la movilidad en la universidad italiana al facilitar especialmente las equivalencias entre las universidades europeas y en consecuencia asegurar al estudiante la toma en consideración del trabajo realizado en su período de movilidad. El artículo acaba con un anexo terminológico respecto al vocabulario organizativo y docente utilizado en el mismo.

Palabras clave: Universidad Italiana, proceso de Bolonia, EEES, ECTS.

1. THE PRESENT SITUATION

The adjustment of the Italian University administration and organisation through the «Bologna Process» represented a very important step towards innovation but, because of its complexity, such a process has not reached an end yet, although it started some ten years ago.

At the moment, the Italian University is founded on the decrees issued by the Ministry of Education (MIUR, Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca) in 1999 and 2004, regulating the autonomy of each university, and adopting the norms of procedure provided by the «Bologna Process».

According to the Ministerial Decree of 1999 (widened in 2001) the structure of the university degrees is composed of *three main cycles* – *Laurea*, *Laurea Magistrale*, *Dottorato di Ricerca* (Research Doctorate); but often the structure is a two-cycle one – *Laurea Triennale* e *Laurea Specialistica*, the latter got after two other years of course.

It must be remarked that the ones having already an «old-system» degree – a four-year course equivalent by law to the *Laurea Specialistica* – can attend an alternative course of study of at least 60 credits; they can also attend a *Master Course*, but have no chance to be admitted to a Research Doctorate.

The *Laurea* (L) enables students to acquire knowledge about academic principles and specific vocational competencies.

The *Laurea Specialistica* (LS) offers students an advanced training for the jobs requiring a high degree of knowledge.

The *first level Master* (1st M, *Master di primo livello*) offers academic and vocational specialisation in specific fields.

The Ministerial Decree of 2004 introduced the instructions for the «third cycle» programmes: the *Research Doctorate* (DR), training postgraduates in highly academic specialisation research.

Compulsory courses are though not planned yet, but periods of research abroad and periods of training in public or private research agencies and in industrial labs can be introduced. This activity though provides no credits, as it is based on the individual research and on the collective participation to scientific seminars.

In Italy, moreover, among the university qualifications, there are the *Specialisation Courses* (CS, *Corsi di Specializzazione*), organised in compliance with the EU directives, offering postgraduates advanced knowledge and specific competencies intended for particular jobs.

Then, the *second level Master* (2nd M, *Master di secondo livello*) is a 60-credit programme at a national level and is equivalent to a higher or vocational academic specialisation. The programmes permitting to attend the previously mentioned kinds of certification can be organised in collaboration with foreign universities leaving a «joined diploma».

The Ministerial Decree of 1999 introduced the «Diploma Supplement» in bilingual version (Italian and English), for all students, free or paid, according to the university discretion, issued for the first time in 2005 in conformity with what provided by the Berlin Communiqué (2004).

In 1999, a National Committee for the Assessment of the University System (*CNVSU, Comitato Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario*) was founded: an institutional body in charge for the «Quality Assurance». This body fixes the general evaluation criteria and draws up an annual report about the evaluation system of the universities. It promotes the experimentation and implementation of procedures, methodologies and prac-

tices for the assessment of quality, also planning annual programmes of external evaluation for each university or each teaching unity.

The members of CNVSU are appointed by the Ministry of Education; the body is therefore independent and interacts autonomously with the universities and with the Ministry itself. Consequently each university activated a system of «internal evaluation» of the operating governance, of the teaching, of the research and of the assistance services for students. Its name is *Nucleo di Valutazione di Ateneo* (University's Assessment Unit), comprising five up to nine members, two of whom are students. Students are asked to fill up anonymously a questionnaire about teaching activities and facilities; every year the results are spread within the university.

An «external evaluation» is obligatory to accredit new universities, both public or private, and «virtual campuses» (e-Universities, which are 11 at the moment in Italy).

Since 1998, Italy is a member of the European Network for the Quality Assessment for higher education (ENQA) through the CNVSU.

2. LIGHTS AND SHADES

Also in Italy, lights and shades characterised the way towards the «European common space» – the actual priority of the *Bologna Process*. It is in fact a matter of taking a historic step, for the new role that the university is attributed within the «Europe of knowledge»: from an institution conceived as a «*turris eburnean*», outside the external surrounding reality, to an integral part of the civilised society and driving force of its development, which spurs the economic and social system.

In Italy, the change in the university mission generated and is still generating a series of problems, such as the increase in the demand for higher education – reported in the last ten years – and the relevant absorption of such demand, resulting in high rates of unemployment, even for people having one or more higher education qualifications.

A closer co-operation between university and enterprises must be developed through innovation and knowledge transfer, as well as through the creation of new enterprises possibly joined by the universities themselves (*spin off*).

According to the conclusions of the 5th Conference of the Ministers of Education (London, May 2007), considering the difficulties of many countries in carrying out the «Bologna Declaration», it was decided to support the efforts made by the academic world to conform to the European education offer and to become therefore «appealing» to teachers, students and researchers.

In order to achieve these goals, the Conference of Rectors of the Italian Universities (*Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane — CRUI*) put forward proposals for the revision of the governance, not only as regards the relationship between the central government and the single university, but also within the universities themselves, aiming at modernising their management.

It became essential now that the universities diversify their financial sources, in order to face also the present economic-financial situation, which is becoming more and more problematic at a European and international level, making us imaging moreover a relevant reduction in the public funds.

Nowadays the expenses for higher education in Italy weighs on the general state taxation with more than 80%.

As regards the didactic systems, the university must furthermore take into account last years change among the users: students are not only twenty-year-old young people, who have just finished high school; the number of working students is increased considerably, as well as that of adults and workers who begin to study again, bringing with them a cultural and professional background the university cannot ignore.

This considerations involved also the political world and spurred the academic one to make a great effort to revise the didactic systems of the courses of study – an operation that will end with the beginning of the next academic year 2009/2010.

Started in 1999, the path of adjustment to the *Bologna Process* is coming to a conclusion with all its lights and shades.

Among the positive aspects we can include the fact that, before the reform, gaining an academic qualification took about 8 years; now the average decreased to 6 years.

The average age of a postgraduate (a second level one) changed from 28 to 27, remaining still higher with respect to the European average; that proves though that there is a tendency of alignment of Italy to the other European countries.

The most important aspect, however, is the widening of the «social dimension» of the university: many graduates nowadays belong to the sectors normally considered «disadvantaged». The university attracts more and more students coming from different social status, so not only people from middle-high ones as it happened until the '80 of the last century.

One of the critical points is the fact that the reform of 1999 «compacted» the previous 4-year system – characterising the most of the Italian degree courses – into the first cycle of the university path (Laurea triennale), through the introduction of the three-cycle university structure (3 + 2 + Doctorate; Specialisation Course; second level Master); that increased the didactic workload for the students, and the number of the exams shattering at a didactic level the curricula and the teaching units into little fractions of formation¹.

With regard to the structure of the system, a proliferation of the courses of study was remarked, getting now to the activation of 53000 courses as the formative offer for both the first and second levels.

This is a real problem, because university teaching has reported a distortion and a «disqualification», forcing the Ministry (MIUR) to «corrective» interventions since 2004, in order to encourage the flexibility of the different paths and to discourage the indiscriminate increase in the number of the courses of study in the universities.

The Ministerial Decree of 2004 also helped eliminating a typically Italian critical point: course leaving before the degree; it was reported an average of 20% with peaks of 38% in Humanities.

According to what stated in 2005 by the Conference of the Higher Education Secretaries (Conferenza dei Ministri dell'Istruzione Superiore), the creation of the National Agency for the Assessment of the University and

¹ Cfr. Binanti L., *Il contesto universitario attuale. Lineamenti per un'interpretazione di scenario*, in Binanti/Salvatore, *Il management Didattico*, C. Amore Editore, Roma 2005.

Research System (*Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerch — ANVUR*) guarantees an assessment – out of the system and independent towards the administration – of the quality of the universities and of the research agencies, both public and private, which are the receivers of the public funds.

There is still the problem of internationalisation: the rate of foreign students in the Italian university is 2,5% against the notably higher percentages of the other countries.

With this regard, it was recently approved the document starting the fourth step of the programme to support the process of internationalisation of the university system, which provides *ad hoc* funds to activate the initiatives aimed at making the Italian university more competitive and more «attractive» in the international panoramic.

3. ECTS SYSTEM

We intentionally analysed as last theme the *ECTS* system, the most important, meaningful and representative aspect of the *Bologna Process*. It has been used since 1989 as a system to transfer the credits for student mobility within the *Erasmus Programme*; thanks to the activation of the *Bologna Process*, the *ECTS* system became the central element of the process to pursue a higher coherence in terms of European higher education structure.

With reference to the student mobility and to the development of international programmes, the importance of the system above was highlighted in the communiqué of the Conference of the Ministers of Education of September 2003 in Berlin.

The *ECTS* is becoming the general ground for the Italian national system of credits (CFU), since the signatory countries were encouraged many times to implement it not only as a system of credit transfer, but also as a system of credit accumulation.

According to the present definition², the *ETCS* system is considered implemented when the introduction plans of the system are provided by the law

² See *Focus*, etc. (All.).

in force, when it becomes part of all the programmes offered by the different universities and meets the 60-credit requirement on the basis of the single student workload.

Introduced between 2000 and 2005, the ECTS system was implemented in many countries with the issue of a specific law.

Among the countries or regions having a national credit system in 2004-05, other countries adopted it: apart from Italy, there are also the Netherlands and Norway.

4. ANNEXED TERMINOLOGICAL

4.1 Classification used: International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997)³

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is a tool suitable to compile statistics about education at an international level. It covers two variables of cross-classification: the fields of study and the levels of education, including the complementary dimensions of general, vocational and pre-vocational guiding and the passage to the labour market. The present version, ISCED 97 (⁴), lists seven levels of education:

- 0, pre-primary education;
- 1, primary education;
- 2, lower secondary education;
- 3, upper secondary education;
- 4, post-secondary non tertiary education;
- 5, first stage of tertiary education;
- 6, second stage of tertiary education.

³ *focus upon the structure of higher education in Europe – 2006/07* (www.eurydice.org/publications).

⁴ <http://unesco.org/en/pub/pub0.htm>

4.2 ISCED 97 levels in the present publication.

Level 5: first stage of tertiary education: entry to these programmes normally requires the successful completion of ISCED level 3 or 4. ISCED level 5 consists of tertiary programmes, divided into theoretically based (A type) and vocationally based (B type), the latter generally shorter than the former and geared for entry into the labour market.

Level 6: second stage of tertiary education: this level is reserved for tertiary programmes which lead to the award of an advanced research qualification (Ph. D., or doctorate).

4.3 Terminology and other definitions

Diploma Supplement: the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the UNESCO/CEPES collaborated to work out the Diploma Supplement, aiming at improving international transparency and at facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.). In a widespread European language, the Supplement – attached to the higher education diploma – describes the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies carried out and completed. The Diploma Supplement provides further information about the system of higher education of the issuing country, so that it becomes possible to set the diploma within the educative context of reference.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS): ECTS is a student-centred system, based on the workload students need to achieve the expected learning objectives of a programme of study, which are defined in terms of learning outcomes and acquirable competencies. ECTS was initially established for the credit transfer. The system promoted the recognition of the period of studies abroad and so enhanced the quality and the level of the student mobility throughout Europe. Recently, ECTS developed in a system of accumulation to be implemented in all the programmes in institutes, regions, countries and European context. It can be used in a great variety of programmes and with different modalities. The main features of ECTS are:

- The agreement according to which 60 credits are the workload of a full-time student during an academic year. The workload of a full-time-programme student in Europe is in most cases 36/40 weeks a year and, in these cases, a credit corresponds to 24-30 working hours. The workload refers to the time in which an average student could theoretically expect to complete his/her formative path.
- The link with the outcomes of the formative path, represented by a series of competencies expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to at the end of a study phase, independently of its duration. The ECTS system credits are awarded only when the work is finished and subject to the assessment of the outcomes achieved at the end of the formative path.
- The ECTS credit system is based on the official duration of a cycle of a study programme. The total workload necessary to gain a first cycle diploma, lasting officially three or four years, is expressed in 180 or 240 credits.
- The workload of a student within the ECTS system involves the time used to take part to lessons and seminars, to study autonomously, to prepare for and to take exams, etc.
- Credits are allocated to all the educational components of a study programme (modules, courses, stages, dissertations, etc.) and reflect the quantity of work that each component required with respect to the quantity of total work necessary to complete an entire year of study within the relevant programme.

The credit systems that do not found on the workload of the student, but for example on the hours of contact, are not compatible with the ECTS system.

European Network for the Quality Assessment for higher education (ENQA): created in 1998, the European network was meant to spread information, experiences, the best practices and the most recent developments in the field of evaluation and higher education quality assurance. Such exchanges regard all the concerned parties – among them, the public authorities, the institutes of higher education and the agencies for the quality assurance.

Qualification Diploma: it is achieved at the end of a complete study programme (with or without a final exam) that permits to enter the job world.

Intermediate Diploma: it is a formal test at the completion of the first cycle of a course, necessary for the enrolment to the second cycle of the same course. It is not therefore neither a diploma for an end of a study course nor a qualification permitting to enter the labour market.

Procedures of selection: all the procedures or selective criteria complementary to the possession of a secondary school diploma, which are aimed at limiting the number of people enrolled for higher education courses (for example, an entrance examination, a closed course or any other kind of selection). The candidates can be selected at a national, regional or school level.

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Fecha de recepción: 7 de julio de 2009

Fecha de aceptación: 18 de julio de 2009