

General Report  
Bologna Follow-Up Seminar  
**“Student Participation in Governance in Higher Education”**  
Oslo, Norway – 12/14 of June 2003

1 – Introduction

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**From Bologna to Oslo –  
Students’ Participation as a key issue on the Bologna Process**

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1999, 4 years ago, Ministers of education coming from all over Europe, gathered in the University of Bologna and agreed on a joint declaration later known as “The Bologna Declaration”. This declaration got its inspiration from the Magna Charta of the Universities, signed a decade before, in the same University, and also on the Sorbonne Declaration signed in the previous year by the four Ministers of Education of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.

On the Bologna Declaration Ministers saw the necessity for creating a “Europe of Knowledge (...) as an “irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship (...)”. Education and educational co-operation was seen as paramount in the “(...) development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies (...)”.

However it was very well noted by State Secretary Bjørn Haugstad in his opening speech of this seminar that even though the Bologna Declaration points to education as a key element in the development of democratic societies it makes no specific mention of democracy at the higher education institutions themselves. It is also a fact that students were not even officially invited to attend the Bologna Meeting.

Two years later a fundamental shift occurred when Minister gathered again in Prague on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2001, for accessing the developments taking place on the Bologna Process and making new commitments within the process. From the resulting communiqué coming from the Prague Ministerial Summit it was recognised that “(...) students are full members of the higher education community” and “should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions. Ministers also recognised the necessity and welcomed the role of students as “(...) competent, active and constructive partners (...)” in the creation of the European Area of Higher Education.

One of the reasons behind this achievement was the involvement of ESIB and its Member Unions on the European and National follow up process between the meetings in Bologna and Prague. In opposition with what happened before, this time students were officially present during the ministerial summit and in the end ESIB was recognised, side by side with EUA, EURASHE and the Council of Europe as fully capable participants of the ongoing process.

Students’ involvement was singled out as one of the important topics for the future discussions within the Bologna Process and the Norwegian Ministry eagerly took the call for a follow-up seminar on the topic. This is the reason why representatives from the Ministries, institutions, European organisations and student organisations gathered between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2003 in Oslo in a seminar hosted by the Norwegian Royal Ministry for Education and Research and where ESIB, the Norwegian

national unions of students (NSU and STL) and the Council of Europe were valuable co-organisers.

The seminar's main theme was the role of students' participation in both national and international processes of governance in higher education. There was a focus, from various perspectives on how legislation may include and regulate students' participation in governance of higher education institutions and on the students' participation in the academic life.

This general report tries to outline the discussion and outcomes of the seminar and together with the seminar conclusions will produce the background necessary for the recommendations to include on the Berlin Communiqué.

## 2 – Seminar presentations

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### **Bologna: a new start or the reaffirmation of practices that are centuries old?**

“In the Beginning was the student”! This was how Professor Gudmund Hernes, Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning and former Norwegian Minister reminded the participants of the history of the University organisation as we know it nowadays. In Bologna some three quarters of a millennium ago the first university was created when students emulated the existing professional guilds and created a learning place where professors were called upon to teach these first university students that among themselves organised all the necessary facilities and conditions.

From this founding moment and over the centuries HEI have spread and reinvented themselves several times with recognizable power drifts, gaining or losing autonomy, allowing more or less internal democracy, being more active transforming society or closing themselves into Ivory Towers.

Nevertheless students were always there! Indeed a HEI without students was and is a impossibility! Professor Gudmund Hernes, on his detailed presentation claimed that Institutions of higher learning are potent centres of knowledge, knowledge that is created in reaction to the challenges and crisis of time and nature. That is why they look so appealing to the economical world. HEI are also still “Centres of Literacy” where the knowledge of man is used to shape man – to form characters. Finally HEI are also “Centres of Disturbance” in the sense that not always students turn out to be or behave according to the prescription and when vitality and freedom of thinking characteristic of young students are combined with oppressive conditions the result is an explosive chain reaction that still can be heard from when it exploded in the streets of Prague, Paris, Peking or New York over different periods of our history.

According to Professor Hernes is the combination of these three elements or centres that make universities such powerful institutions with a remarkable Darwinian ability to survive. Finally we were reminded that these “explosive” moments don't happen everyday and that is essential for the HEI continuing existence to inspire “life long obsessions” that must thrill the academic community to go beyond the present boundaries and explore “terra incognita”.

Professor Hernes concluded that “In the beginning was the student. In the end – and the end – must be the student also”.

At this time I must recall that State Secretary Bjørn Haugstad on his earlier presentation and referring to the importance of student involvement went beyond the explosive

moments of the students' movement history and reminded the participants of the new challenges laying ahead when there is a shift of emphasis on learning rather than teaching, on the creation and application of knowledge rather than on passively receiving and memorizing information and where there is a demand for a more active and empowered student. A critical and participative student member of the "universitas", not a mere purchaser of a service.

This vision was in a way testified by the participation of Kamil Azhar, the president of NSU, one of the Norwegian National Students Organisations. He questioned what was really students' participation advocating that students must feel that they are taken in consideration and not only heard as part of a bureaucratic process where students are "consulted" but not truly "understood". At the same time he reminded student organisations of the responsibilities to stay in touch with the student community, to provide transparent information, to promote dialogue and participation. In this way S.O. can do what they know best... to present the student visions and opinions that as such should be heard at all levels.

In the final day of this conference we heard from the voice of Professor Fuada Stankovic, Rector of the University of Novi Sad in Serbia a testimony of the importance of student activism in the social changes occurred in Serbia, a Region in the world that survived two ideologically opposite dictatorial regimes that were not known by their tolerance towards independent student participation. Professor Fuada Stankovic raised concerns about how student organisation should be or not influenced by political parties and also explained some of the current solutions being instated to overcome the scarcity of resources in Serbian Higher Education.

Finally Johannes Fjose Berg, the president of STL presented us with a case study of how the active involvement of students could be the driving force behind ambitious and far reaching HE reforms like the ones taking place in this moment in Norway. Something that was previously recognised by the State Secretary.

Johannes spoke about the future, about how education should look like in this new millennium. Once again the thesis that students should be involved simply because they are students was reinstated. Governance at any level on issues that directly and indirectly affect students cannot pass without the students input. Students are committed, participative, motivated and curious and this provides for valuable contributions.

Students' can either be internal players within the institutional architecture or external players organising themselves in their own way, they can even be an amalgamation of the two and according to Johannes this is the best solution on his vision of the future, where the best of "independence" and "co-operation" is used and where the shortcomings of both models like excessive formality and the "trench barrier" approach in the case of external representation and the abusive use of the legitimisation of a decision because students were present and excessive bureaucratisation in the case of internal representation are put behind.

### 3 – Council of Europe Survey

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#### **Students' Participation in the Governance of Higher Education in Europe**

A survey about student's participation was carried and later on used as the fundamental background information for the success of this seminar. The survey was directed towards the three main groups concerned:

- Students (organizations)

- Representatives of higher education institutions
- Ministries responsible for higher education

Replies from one or several group representatives were received from a total of 36 countries. No answers from any of the three groups represented were received from Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Russia, the Slovak Republic, Ukraine or the United Kingdom.

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research commissioned the report from the Council of Europe for the seminar. Annika Persson wrote the report, mainly during her internship with the Council of Europe's Higher Education and Research Division. The report has also benefited from comments and suggestions by Per Nyborg, Chair of the Council of Europe's higher Education and Research Committee (CD-ESR) and Sjur Bergan, Head of the Higher Education and Research Division.

This report has its own standing value but (taking the risk of forgetting something important) I will anyhow mention some of the primary conclusions, in line with the presentation made by Sjur Bergan that also referred to a previous study from the Council of Europe on "Universities as Sites of Citizenship".

The survey focused on the issue of students' participation in the *governance* of higher education. Students' influence on social issues, housing, etc. are equally important questions, but they are not the main focus of this survey. The issue of governance has been divided into three parts:

- formal provisions for students' participation in higher education governance based on national legislation;
- other provisions for students' participation;
- the actual practice of students' participation.

Complementarily the "University as a Site of Citizenship" project identified four concentric spheres of issues in which higher education institutions or their members have a role to play:

- Institutional decision making;
- Institutional life in a wider sense, including the study process;
- higher education institutions as multicultural societies;
- higher education institutions in their relationship and interaction with the wider society.

The joint analysis of these several dimensions make me conclude that student participation often surpasses the walls of the institution and other academic frontiers following the trend that induces or obliges the institutions to open up to society.

The survey shows that there is a wide and positive attitude towards increased students' influence in higher education governance.

The respondents stating that students' influence on higher education governance should increase say that the students have a right to influence decisions and practices since they are the largest group within higher education and the main stakeholders. The students are well informed and their influence enhances the quality of higher education. Students may also be a driving force behind changes. It is also important to enhance democracy within the institutions.

Concerning the question of how student influence should increase all three groups focus on the formal aspects of governance influence such as a higher number of seats reserved for students at all levels, stronger rights to vote and speak within the bodies concerned and regulated rights to participate in evaluation procedures. All three groups mention the large responsibility of the students and student organizations to use the possibilities for influence and to organize themselves accordingly at the different levels. The students say that they need support from other stakeholders and the legal framework in order to be able to increase their participation in and influence on higher education governance. The national level is mentioned as the weakest level for student influence because of a lack of regulation at that level and sometimes no or weak national student organizations.

Sjur Bergan stresses in his article something that is also visible on the survey itself, that adequate formal provisions for student participation is sometimes not enough. It is said that is not enough to be present, I would add that besides having proper formal provisions it is necessary to "promote" also the participative will to the students and organizations, at the same time that they are considered full partners by other stakeholders.

At the HEIs Policies and regulation on student participation usually exist. Participation at the department level is less regulated and weaker in relation with the faculty and institutional level. It's also at this level that more difficulties exist on finding participative students.

The study shows that rarely more than 30 % of seats in institutional boards are allocated to students. Students usually have voting rights in the governance bodies concerned but in few cases they don't include all issues. In this case the areas that are not covered by the students' right to vote are primarily staff matters and administrative and finance issues (generally these issues are the ones where students have less influence). In half of the replies it is mentioned that law or other regulations require students' evaluation of courses and programmes. Students' influence appears to be strongest on social and environmental issues and also in pedagogical and educational content issues.

At this point Sjur Bergan defies some of the existing limitations stating that it is difficult to see why students should not vote on some issues. If the competence or stake that students have on the issues is the line of argument, then the same reasoning could be applied to the teacher less proficient on budget sciences or even to the doctorate coming from a different field.

Student representatives are usually directly elected, there are some examples where they are nominated but even on these usually they are appointed by the student organisation. The elections are properly regulated in a vast majority of the cases. The age of student representatives is in general between 20 and 27. Participation in students' elections usually varies between 16 and 30%.

Here Sjur Bergan raises the interrogation if these figures are somehow an echo of a democratic deficit in society at large. He also mentions that real influence can only be attained with the correct motivation and access to information.

Even though the participation through political student organizations is legal in most countries candidates with this background are a minority in the cases concerned. Nevertheless, political influence on student organisations is an issue still discussed on several questions of the survey.

Could the lack of transparency on information flow be used as a lever of power that could create a student political elite is the provocation left by the current speaker, that I cannot prevent from adding that it could also be the case for “apolitical” student organisations and even for the other stakeholders.

In the majority of cases students have regular contacts with the government and the national rector's conferences or equivalent bodies. Very few times governmental contacts are restricted to certain topics nevertheless there are at least 10 countries where such regular contacts do not exist at all. National parliamentary assemblies are also reachable for a narrow majority of the cases.

Besides the identified formal and informal procedures treated by the survey, other common forms of participation have been singled out like informal consultations and seminars, student representation in temporary working groups or projects of the ministry, informal contacts between the students and the Ministry and the parliament and representation in national councils or committees on higher education and student affairs. However this is not the case on 22 countries covered.

When the levels exist, regular communication between national and institutional levels is the mainstream. In most of the countries information coming from the governance bodies is public; this is not the case in 15 states. It is considered that university administration and the student organizations should take steps to disseminate information

However more information about the participatory rights of students and the means to attain them must be made available by all stakeholders and it's also necessary for enhancing accountability and information mechanisms on decisions and discussions taken.

The survey identified the necessity for further studies between the provisions for participation and the actual practices at the different levels. Also the role and organisation of student structures, their interaction with other stakeholders and the often low turn out rates in elections need further examination. In fact a study on higher education governance including all the relevant stakeholders is necessary. This could be the way to see the broader picture of inter-stakeholders relations.

I take the liberty here to make a reference on the recently presented draft summary of the “TRENDS III” report that is an opportunity of attaching concrete significance to the conclusion of the prior survey. In the section dedicated to the role of students in the Bologna Process it is mentioned that at 63% of universities in Bologna signatory countries, students have been formally involved in the Bologna process, through participation in the senate or council or at faculty/departmental level. The same trend is valid for the non-signatory countries in SEE. A significantly lower degree of formal participation in the Bologna Process at institutional level can be noted in Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Iceland and the UK.

Half of the students, as represented by their national and European student associations, feel they are playing a very or reasonably active role in the construction of the European Higher Education Area. At institutional and particularly at departmental level, the inclusion of students in the deliberations concerning a qualitative reform of teaching and learning structures, methods and evaluation in the spirit of the Bologna declaration still leaves considerable room for improvement.

Student representatives express the highest hopes concerning the principles of the Bologna reforms and the harshest criticisms concerning its implementation and

frequently reductive interpretations. The students' contribution to the deliberations on the Bologna reforms has been particularly strong on issues of the social dimension of Higher Education and the emphasis of HE as a public good, and in connection with discussions of the possible consequences of GATS on Higher Education Institutions. Students have also continuously stressed the values of student-centred learning, flexible learning paths and access, as well as a realistic, i.e. empirically based, estimation of workload in the context of establishing institution-wide credit systems.

#### 4 – Case Studies on Student Involvement

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##### **Confirming the diversity of students' participation**

During the first two days of this seminar, students, institutions and ministries had the opportunity to present their national practices concerning student participation. This was an effective way to “means test” the previously known results of the survey on student participation.

##### **Formal provisions for students' participation in higher education governance based on national legislation.**

As expected, considerable differences exist within the legal framework that supports students' participation. In some of the examples given legislation covers in a small amount of acts the full provision of students' participation at the different levels of governance (examples of Austria and Hungary) or just at the national level (Italy). It can even happen that the national/regional legislation limits or forbids some forms of students' organisation (Germany). On the other side we have organisations that use the existing framework to establish themselves as simple NGO's (Romania and Serbia) and also others that by the increased influence gain legislative space for example on the regulation of national advisory boards (Sweden, Ireland and Finland).

The presentations also demonstrated that the institutional level is generally better provided in terms of legislation than the national, being it by ruling of law or by the internal institutional settings. At the national level the general trend is that formal interaction with the members of the government at different levels exists.

##### **Other provisions for students' participation.**

Event when having a strong political influence, students' organisations don't discard the possibility of using other means to obtain their objectives like media and marketing actions, information to students, direct actions, etc.

The creation of networks of cooperation is also common to the majority of the organisations present not only with similar structures representing for example other students but also with labour unions, rectors conferences, etc. These networks can even include government structures.

Good cooperation between the national and institutional level also secures adequate follow up of measures decided at the highest level (as pointed by Finland).

##### **The actual practice of students' participation.**

Students' organisations legitimate themselves in different ways. Some have compulsory membership of individual students (Sweden, Finland, Austria) or from their local councils or organisations (Hungary, Czech, Macedonia). Others have voluntary membership of local councils and organisations (Ireland, Serbia, Germany and

Romania). There are even cases of voluntary membership of individual students (as is the case with the current member of ESIB from Italy – UDO).

Direct involvement through a political party organisation is treated very differently by several organisations. They are visible and accepted in Austria and Finland and rejected in countries like Serbia, for example.

Election results are usually below the expectations of student organisations and should be tackled together with the other stakeholders

Differences exist on the “modus operandi” of student organisations which in some cases limit their work to direct student issues while others have a broader view about their role in society.

Within the national organisation a high priority is given to the training of student activists on the national and also the local level, as a way to improve the “performance” of students’ participation at all levels (this was mentioned among others by Ireland, Czech, Hungary and Serbia). Whenever it is affordable student organisations equip themselves also with adequate human resources that provide not only organisational but also expert advice to student representatives. In fact the need to access and produce relevant research material was very emphasised, even by the youngest organisations, which are still in a development process.

### **Expectations and shortcomings**

The participants were generally critical of the fact that some levels of decision-making are still not fully available to them and that sometimes the formal involvement is not a guarantee of actual participation as equal partners. Some of these structures still face and compete with non-functioning and less democratic ways of organising students.

The ongoing discussion between students as partners or consumers is clearly on the agenda of the student organisations with growing concerns that the opening of higher education institutions to the market could rapidly transform HEIs into societies or companies.

Finally I would like to stress that all these organisations show that they have played and are indeed playing an important role in the development of more democratic societies. They are schools of citizenship not forgetting their responsibilities in society towards co-operation and solidarity work.

### **Comments from ESIB and EUA**

Stefan Bienefeld, the chairperson of ESIB, considered that no unique model of student representation can be outlined and that students’ participation can be organised formally or informally at different levels (Department – Faculty – Institution – National – International). The existence of a legal framework does not always assure correct participation. The correct attitude and the cultural environment is also necessary for assuring strong participation.

It is necessary for students’ organisations to promote a shift from a conflict towards cooperation between stakeholders approach. While respecting diversity student organisations should spread best practices and further develop their working structures. The work done at the European level could be used as an example, but is necessary also here to assure a minimal framework that can provide opportunities for dialogue between the different stakeholders.



Finally he expressed concern about the diminishing power of collegial organs against the current trend to introduce managerial structures into HEI. After all the recent examples of lack of transparency and corruption of big enterprises prove that the model has severe faults

Professor Lucy Smith, Vice president of EUA and former Rector of Oslo University started her intervention by stating that participation of students at all levels will enhance the quality of HEIs. She referred to the different temporal perspectives that professors and students have within HE governance. She recognized that sometimes students' representatives and the students that they represent differ on opinion, but this is possibly because students' representatives tend to have the long turn vision while the individual student is more immediate.

Attention should be given to the low turn out rates and also to the qualifications of the students' representative. The better the student the more influence he/she could achieve, therefore there is the necessity to device ways to transfer knowledge between outgoing and incoming students. This would insure a stable student representation.

Students and students' organisations should place on their agenda solidarity work, they should respect and promote freedom of expression on their own campus and definitively work against the commercialization of education.

## 5 – Workshop Outcomes and Discussion

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### **Workshop 1**

#### **Students: Partners or Consumers?**

This workshop focused on the different approaches governments, International Governmental Organisations (CoE, UE, UNESCO, etc.) and Higher Education Institutions could take towards students. On the one hand there is a concept of students as junior partners in the education process. On the other hand, a number of new developments in Higher Education governance and Higher Education financing conceptualise students as consumers and introduce a more market driven approach. These two different concepts are to a certain extent mutually exclusive, or, at least, their compatibility is questionable. However, with the extension of the activities of Higher Education Institutions in the field of Lifelong Learning, there are also some grey areas between the two concepts, which are getting increasingly important. The workshop tried to find answers to the following questions:

#### **Are students to be seen as partners or consumers in Higher Education Institutions?**

The workshop found that many aspects of students' participation in higher education reflect a role that is both partnership and consumer based. In reality it may not be possible to reach a situation where a student is only a partner or only a consumer.

Feeling like a partner or just as a consumer depends very much on the relationship between the staff and students of the institution. The massification of higher education presents challenges on practicing the concept of partnership.

Clearly students can be described in many ways: consumers, partners, participants, learners. The important debate is around which of these descriptors is used to define the relationship between the student and their time in higher education.

The workshop accepted that students at times have some characteristics of consumers, but this should not define their role within the higher education community. The workshop agreed that students, teachers and researchers are colleagues with different but equal status within higher education institutions

**What does the notion of a student as a partner imply with regards to student participation in governing structures and what are the implications of considering students as consumers?**

Having students as partners implies the existence of an interactive relationship based on mutual trust and equal treatment. For students it also implies bigger responsibilities shared with the other stakeholders, the obligation to perceive the long-term perspective and the necessity to deal with information gathering and dissemination and with the transmission of knowledge among the students' body.

Students have good knowledge of their Higher Education "environment" and are interested on being partners. This gives them a possibility to change the organisation from the inside, motivating them and preventing conflicts. It makes Higher Education more democratic and also adds up the societal skills of the student involved. Questions regarding further motivation, time availability, access to information and knowledge loss between transitions were points of concern.

Seeing students just as consumers can reduce their internal participation in decision-making and lower their feedback. It can make them more individualistic and narrow-minded. If from one side it could increase managerial decision making it could also increase the use of legal tools to resolve disputes, this could prove more time and resource consuming than the partnership approach.

There is a role for student organisations and other participatory structures in both approaches to students' involvement. In a partner approach democratic structures such as students' unions and programme/department/faculty representative structures can be used to facilitate governance. It can also help to shorten distances in between the academic community. While one academic may not be able to actively engage in a deep partnership based relationship with every student it is possible to collect and communicate students' opinions through these organisations. From a consumer perspective student structures could become consumer protection organisations, outside the higher education institutions working with the legal instruments available to influence decision-making and problem solving.

It was clear for the participants that in a partnership based approach it should be recognised that this creates both rights and responsibilities for all stakeholders.

**Can students be considered consumers of a service? In what way are students consuming services offered by the university and what impact do they have on the process of production of these (consumer protection)? How do these concepts apply to adult learners or people participating in a lifelong learning arrangement besides work who are upgrading their professional capacity?**

Higher education is more than just a product or service because it has an important role in the practical development of society. The role of the consumer is very individually focused on a personal benefit whereas higher education as an entity has wider benefits to society and the economy as a whole. The student often contributes to

the collective knowledge and innovation as a whole through the development of new thinking such as the writing of a thesis.

If higher education is to be regarded as a consumable product or service this opens up the possibility of the sector being market driven and therefore the provision of courses and qualifications may become demand driven and may restrict free choice. Seeing Education as a service could influence negatively quality and demand standards.

The workshop didn't conclude on the two last items of this question.

## **Workshop 2**

### **Impact of Internationalisation on student participation**

Internationalisation of Higher Education implies an increasing number of international students in many Higher Education Institutions throughout Europe as well as activities of Higher Education Institutions abroad in Trans-national Education (TNE) arrangements. The second workshop discussed the impact of those trends on students' participation. The following questions were addressed:

#### **How can a participation of international students in structure of Higher Education governance and student unions be ensured?**

International Students should have access to information about their general and participatory rights; the Erasmus Student Charta was seen as a good practice in this case with space for improvements. Local and national student organisations should be "aware" of international students, creating mechanisms for communication and involving them on their regular decision making processes. The creation of specific representation bodies for international students was seen apprehensively in the sense that this could take them apart of the normal governance processes and diminishing their full academic and cultural integration. Student organisations should be pro-active and visionary in the representation of international students because sometimes problems have to be solved before the student actually enrolls in the institution.

It was noted that sometimes bureaucratic and legal problems (residency laws, work permits) take away precious time for studies and participation

Internationalisation poses new challenges for traditional representation. Mobile student involvement in education governance is not yet a practice with some examples of students participating in special bodies that still lack a regulatory framework. They should be more motivated to participate in student bodies. Students involved in Vertical and Horizontal mobility have some different needs. Language should not be an obstacle to full participation. Every student should have the same possibilities concerning voting and running for office.

#### **How can the rights of students in trans-national programmes be guaranteed? What do TNE arrangements have as a consequence for the student unions of the home country?**

Representation structures should be available in the host country. Student representatives at the home institution or country could make sure that the same criteria on participation applies abroad and thus ensuring participation. They should also cooperate with existing organisations in the host countries or other stakeholders when they don't exist.

It is not always possible to regulate students' participation in TNE because of legal limitations in private law; therefore a way to assure it could be making it part of accreditation mechanisms. Students' participation could become part of UNESCO/CoE Code of good practice. There should be student participation in quality assurance mechanisms in TNE. There should not be TNE where students' participation cannot be guaranteed.

### **What is the responsibility of governments and Higher Education Institutions to strengthen the participation of international students in Higher Education Institution governing structures?**

They should provide better study, social and legal conditions, so that international students can use their right regarding representation and participation. They should prevent the abuse of marketing techniques for attracting students with false or misleading information

### **How can an appropriate representation of students in international governmental organisations be ensured?**

Students' participation and representation should be a prerequisite at all levels and in all issues concerning higher education. Student Organisations at this level should be representative and accountable. Decisions at the European Level should include European level organisations. The participation of students should be among the participation of other stakeholders in Higher Education.

### **What consequences does global trade in education services have on the participation of students in governance?**

Trade in education by lack or inadequate regulation can prevent students' participation even in countries where that is a common practice.

### **Workshop 3**

#### **In which issues of HE governance should students be involved and how can they be motivated to participate**

Students and student unions should have legally guaranteed rights for participation in the governance of Higher Education Institutions. The question remains disputed however in which areas of Higher Education governance students should be involved and how students can be motivated to participate in structures of governance of Higher Education. The workshop addressed the following questions:

### **Which are the areas of Higher Education governance in which student unions should be involved?**

Students' participation can have three levels of involvement: advising, monitoring and decision-making. Students usually are involved in governance for four complementary reasons: Advocating the students' interests, participating in the development of the institution, learning democratic citizenship and personal development.

There was a consensus that students should be necessarily involved in decision-making. The essence of this is that democracy does not necessarily have expertise as a prerequisite. It is not possible to distinguish clearly between student issues and academic issues so therefore students should be involved in all areas of decision

making at all levels of the institution, faculty/department and national level. Participating means the right to vote on all matters and sometimes stronger rights.

**How can student participation in these structures be organised? Are laws necessary or can other means be devised?**

Legal provisions should exist ensuring that students have to be involved in all decision making organs, however and respecting institutional autonomy and diversity they shouldn't have too many specifications. A normative framework for students' participation in governance with regards to specific issues, i.e. budgeting, appointment of staff, etc could be established.

**How can an increasing number of students be motivated to participate in Higher Education governance? Should participation in such structures be officially recognised (e.g. through official papers issued by the Higher Education Institutions or ECTS points for extracurricular activities)?**

The capacity for students to participate in decision making could be enhanced more effectively by giving student unions means and information to educate the students to participate and funding expertise input (research within student unions). Leadership trainings organised by students and HEIs together to promote a better understanding of topics under discussion is also a good solution, but this should be free of policies as such but deal with technical matters, this should generally also be done for other groups in HEIs.

The use of mechanisms of accreditation of prior learning and the inclusion of relevant information in the Diploma Supplement could be used to recognise students' involvement. The potential awarding of ECTS credits was seen as less relevant than the first two suggestions.

Students who participate in decision-making shouldn't be economically disadvantaged. Therefore there is a need to extend grants for this period or prolong study and exam periods. There was a consensus that students in decision making should not have to privately pay extra costs of their involvement.

**How can Higher Education Institutions and governments stimulate participation of students and which structures can motivate more students to participate in those?**

There was a general consensus on the necessity to increase voter turnout and participation, this could be achieved by active promotion activity of student unions but also by the involvement of the HEIs and governments on the motivation to participate and vote.

HEIs are sites of citizenship, where students can experience the values of democracy and develop into responsible citizens. Students' Participation is also a good opportunity for personal growth. Student's participation should be promoted as a valuable extra qualification by governing authorities (HEIs, Ministries) towards employers.

Participation has to be made more relevant but rights come with responsibilities. There must exist information feedback, increased transparency and accountability of student representatives.

**Workshop 4**

## **The support of the international community for students' participation**

This workshop focussed on the participation of students in international processes of Higher Education governance. Several IGOs such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the EU Commission as well as Higher Education NGOs such as the EUA have in recent years been establishing structures to facilitate exchange with student organisations and increase their input into international processes. However, other institutions are largely closed for student organisations and their participation and input. How can IGOs with their long-term processes make it easier for student organisations, which have a quick turnover of people, to get involved in international processes on Higher Education. The following questions were addressed:

### **1. How can IGOs devise structural involvement of student organisations into their processes?**

Students' participation should not depend on the "good will" of the different stakeholders. Students should be included from the beginning. Clear and transparent procedures are necessary, on all levels and on all relevant issues. Information on the topic and procedures should be easily accessible and understandable. The formalisation of procedures is necessary since that ensures students' participation.

### **2. Which good practices are existing?**

The system of working parties (CoE) and collective consultation (UNESCO) are seen as good examples. The Council of Europe assures students' participation on its internal procedures and also promotes the idea of students' participation when helping countries to join and participate in the Bologna Process. UNESCO is including NGOs (students' organisations) into the discussions from the very beginning and in preparation of the meetings. They even grant resources for interregional student meetings.

The workshop also discussed the role of some other stakeholders and was of the opinion that follow-up structures of the Bologna process have to secure the participation of students at seminars and meetings between the conferences. It was also said that the European Commission could have more clear and transparent consultation procedure, avoiding "a posteriori" consultation of NGO's, defining better guidelines for the consultation processes and involving at all levels and sectors. The World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and OECD were classified as hard to reach players but with an increasing important role due to GATS and other commodification processes. On the other hand it was suggested, for example that UNESCO could have an important role in Quality Assurance under GATS.

### **3. What kind of support is needed from IGOs to empower students to effectively participate in their processes?**

The question refers more to the financial and organisational issues. There should be support for the student presence at all meetings and seminars and equal treatment of students regarding other stakeholders. The participation in the Bologna process was seen as a bad example because sometimes no support for students' participation is given and also there are preferential treatments of some stakeholders.

### **4. How can national governments make it easier for students to get involved into international processes on HE?**

Participation at the international level must not exclude participation on the other levels; these should exist at the same time. There should be national support for international activities and also international support for national activities

## 6 – Seminar conclusions

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The following paragraphs try to enhance the strong points raised during the seminar and constitute part of the message to be delivered towards the Bologna Follow-up Group.

1 - Further involvement of students is needed at all levels of decision making, this involvement should not only be legally permitted but effectively encouraged by providing the necessary means for active participation both in the formal and informal approaches.

2 - This encouragement could include mechanisms of recognition and certification of the experience and of the competences and skills acquired by being a student representative. It should also require effective involvement of other stakeholders in the motivation for students to become students' representatives and even for simply participate in elections and on the decision making process

3 - Further involvement brings further responsibilities and demands. Mechanisms of assuring accountability, transparency and the flow on information to other students should be prioritized.

4 - An ethical obligation of handing over the knowledge acquired while a student representative should exist independently of who is going to be the next legitimate student representative.

5 - Usually the higher the level of representation the higher the demand level also is. Students' Organizations should be supported on obtaining the financial, logistical and human resources necessary for creating a situation of equality on participation. Informed and motivated students are many times the driving force behind beneficial reforms instead of being the grain of sand in the clockwork.

6 - Definitely universities that assure students' participation and students' organisations that organise this participation must be seen as schools of citizenship and agents of development of society not only at the local level but also within an international responsibility of solidarity and co-operation. With an effective work on this level it will be the society that will emulate the Higher Educations Institutions environment and not the other way around. Having this in mind students cannot be considered simply consumers or clients.

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