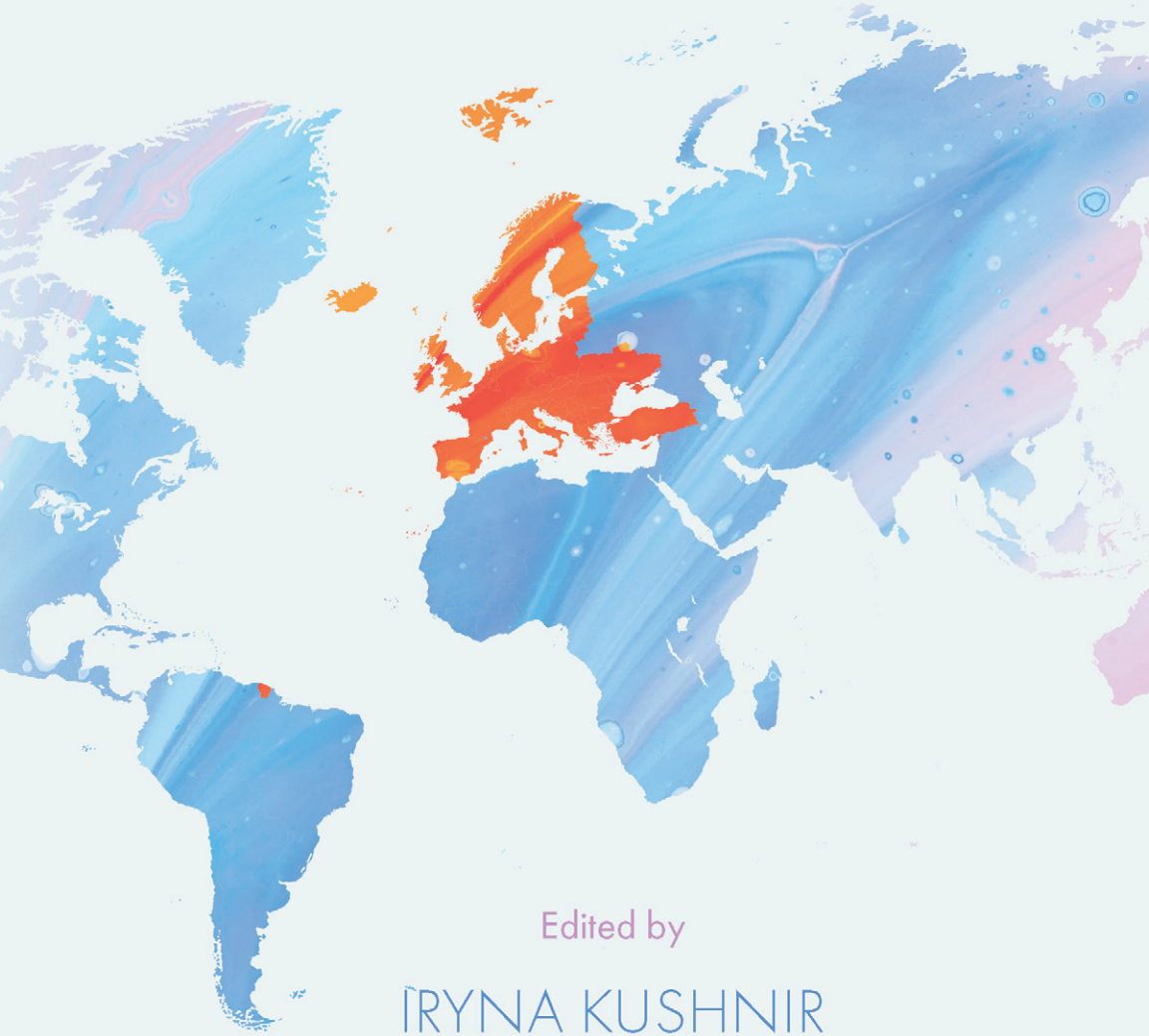
TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE NEOLIBERAL BOLOGNA PROCESS



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This book is dedicated to everyone who attempts to make this world a better and fairer place for all of us and future generations to come.

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List of Abbreviations

BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group
BP	Bologna Process
CEMAC	The Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa
CFA	Commissioner for Fair Access
CoHE	Turkish Council of Higher Education
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	The European Association of Quality Assurance
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
HE	Higher education
ISCED	The International Standard Classification of Education
LLL	Lifelong learning
LMD	The 'Licence-Master-Doctorat' reform
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SCL	Student-centred learning
SCQF	Scottish Credit & Qualification Framework
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America

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About the Editors

Iryna Kushnir is currently a Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University. Prior to this, her mobile academic career throughout her studies and work took her to experience academia in five countries across seven universities, which includes work at the Universities of Edinburgh and Sheffield in the United Kingdom. Dr Kushnir's interdisciplinary research combines the following main areas: higher education policy and sociology, post-Soviet Europeanisation and social justice. She is particularly interested in higher education policy and politics of the European Higher Education Area. Her interdisciplinary approach has led to empirical and theoretical contributions, which reveal how education policy on the one hand and Europeanisation processes and post-Soviet transition on the other hand are interrelated and mutually shape one another. A wider societal impact of Dr Kushnir's work is in co-establishing and co-developing the Ukrainian Education Research Association which has become the biggest national research association in Ukraine and a hub for education research and quality. She is also the author of the monograph *The Bologna Reform in Ukraine: Learning Europeanisation in the Post-Soviet Context* with Emerald Publishing Ltd and one of the reviewers of the current BERA Ethical Guidelines to recommend revisions for the new edition. Dr Kushnir was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Bergen (Norway) and is currently leading a research project funded by Spencer Foundation 'Europeanisation agenda and membership in the European Higher Education Area post-2020: stakeholders' perspectives from the UK, Germany, France and Italy'.

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Melissa Moncrieffe is Jamaican-American and the founder of Valued Educational Services, a global education company that focuses on lifelong learning for youth and young professionals. Considered a polymath, she has years of professional and academic experiences in the arts (visual and piano), international studies, languages, education and history. Specific to the fields of international studies and education, Dr Moncrieffe obtained her Master's in International Studies at the Graduate Institute in Geneva and her PhD in Education from the University of Edinburgh. Her PhD thesis was a comparative study of non-formal learning and national community education programs in the United States and Scotland. Dr

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Iryna Kushnir and Elizabeth Agbor Eta

Abstract

This opening chapter introduces the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the project for its development – the Bologna Process, and it explains the growth and current structure of the EHEA and the governance of the Bologna Process. It also explains the interest in Bologna beyond the 'boundaries' of the EHEA and introduces the idea that Bologna is linked to promoting social justice in higher education while operating in a neoliberal context. The structure of the book is outlined as well.

Keywords: Bologna Process; European Higher Education Area; inclusion; social justice; neoliberalism; governing

1. The Book: What Is in the Spotlight and Why

This book explores neoliberal aspects of the Bologna Process, or in other terms – Bologna, and the growing voice of social justice (or inclusion) in it – defined as the promotion of equal access to and participation in higher education (HE). The book sheds light on the interaction between neoliberal and inclusion aspects of Bologna and highlights avenues for further promotion of inclusion in it, particular in national contexts.

The Bologna Process is the project for the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for the harmonisation and improvement of HE systems, as well as the strengthening of their international connections, according to EHEA (2022a). Further, according to the source, the Bologna Process provides a framework for the development of different aspects of HE in its signatory countries. It includes a range of so-called Bologna 'action lines', such as the adoption of a credit system to measure students' workload, three cycles of studies (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD), a comparable diploma supplement, quality assurance mechanisms, the promotion of lifelong learning, student-centred learning, the social dimension, the European dimension, and student and staff

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academic mobility. These action lines have developed over the years in relevant international documentation. The list itself has grown and the meaning and structure of these action points have been evolving (Kushnir, 2020). The year 2020 represented a big milestone in the development of these ideas as it marked the deadline for the achievement of a fully functioning EHEA. Ministers of all signatory states and other interested parties met virtually on the 20th of November 2020 to take stock of what had been achieved and declared their commitment to further development of the EHEA until 2030, supporting its evolving international dimension (EHEA, 2022b).

This book combines research about neoliberal and social justice aspects of the Bologna Process from leading scholars in this subject area. The term 'neoliberalism' has been mentioned a lot in various sources since 1980; however, its definition is very often left out, making this term, in Thoresen's (2010, p. 188) words, an 'imprecise buzzword'. It is not that easy to provide a definition of neoliberalism due to the scope of what this broad phenomenon may cover, being associated with various stages of the development of social and economic systems. Arguably, these stages may vary from place to place and time to time. Nevertheless, it is paramount to identify a reference point for understanding what neoliberalism means. Davies and Bansel (2007, p. 248) challenge the assumption that the term 'neoliberalism' is self-explanatory by defining it as: '...the transformation of the administrative state, one previously responsible for human well-being, as well as for the economy, into a state that gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledges through which people are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives. We suggest it is primarily this reconfiguration of subjects as economic entrepreneurs, and of institutions capable of producing them, which is central to understanding the structuring of possible fields of action that has been taking place with the installation of neoliberal modes of governance'. This definition proposes the idea that the development of neoliberalism has induced a change in the identity of citizens, transforming them from passive recipients of support to active consumers and, moreover, active competitors. A large body of literature on the EHEA mentions, in one way or another, that the Bologna Process is a neoliberal endeavour (Antunes, 2012; Commisso, 2013; Damro & Friedman, 2018; Fejes, 2008; Hujak & Sik-Lanyi, 2017; Jayasuriya, 2010; Kašić, 2016; Kushnir, 2020; Lorenz, 2012; Lucas, 2019; Lundbye-Cone, 2018; Pritchard, 2011; Tabulawa, 2009). Specifically, Antunes (2012) recognises market-driven factors in the development of the EHEA, whereby the knowledge-based economy is the aim, with knowledge being a major driver of the economic development in the region (Hujak & Sik-Lanyi, 2017). Cosar and Ergul (2015) suggest that academia in general is turning into one big market in the EHEA.

Nevertheless, a social justice discourse has been part of Bologna, such as its lifelong learning (Han, 2017), student-centred education (Sin, 2015) and social dimension (Jungblut, 2017) action points. This book presents neoliberal and social justice discourses as complementary rather than opposing, contrary to a popular perspective on these two discourses in the wider literature, such as Liasidou and Symeou (2018). The eclecticism of the perspectives discussed in the

book aims to shed light on the interaction between neoliberal and social justice discourses in Bologna by exploring neoliberal aspects of Bologna and the growing voice of social justice in it. This analysis is very important particularly now, as it allows us to identify pitfalls in the social justice agenda in the Bologna Process and call for the attention of Bologna policymakers on the international level to address them in their work on the Bologna Process post-2020 deadline.

2. The Growth of the EHEA and the Bologna Process

Some would question how influential Bologna is in instigating HE reforms in the EHEA post-2020. For example, Bergan and Matei (2020, p. 361) pose a question about whether the EHEA is a '*Fata Morgana* or Continuing Policy Journey'. By using the phrase 'Fata Morgana', these scholars mean a 'mirage', questioning whether Bologna has any practical significance, whether it is now more of an abstract idea than a reality since most of the related reforms have already been implemented across the EHEA at least to some extent. Nevertheless, the scholars confirm the tremendous influence Bologna continues to have in the EHEA. This idea negates a pre-mature claim by a few scholars that Bologna is a thing of the past, as in Pires Pereira's work (2021, p. 1, added emphasis) about 'initial teacher education *after* the Bologna process', or in Mendick and Peters's (2022, p. 1) work that mentions 'post-Bologna' policies.

A number of scholars suggest that Bologna is the biggest and most influential HE initiative in Europe (Scheerlinck, De Brucker, & Kerkhove, 2019; Scott, 2012; Vögtle & Martens, 2014). They explain that Bologna encapsulates previous European HE developments and further develops them. The Bologna Process seems to act like a snowball in the EHEA, attaching other initiatives to itself as it develops. This is implied by Dobbins and Knill (2009, p. 398) who state that '. . .it is often difficult to disentangle Bologna from. . . related convergence-promoting factors. . . These include, to mention a few, cooperation with the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and World Bank'. Such a combination of different HE aims in the EHEA prompted Veiga (2012, p. 389) to suggest that it is 'difficult to delineate clearly what in effect Bologna policy was(is) and what it was(is) not?'.

There are currently 47 members of the EHEA, which include all European Union (EU) members states and many of its nearby states that are signatories to the European cultural convention as adopted in Berlin Communiqué (2003). This number excludes Russia and Belarus whose memberships were suspended in April 2022 following the military assault on Ukraine (EHEA, 2022e). The European cultural convention facilitates cultural cooperation and promotes the mobility and exchange of people, as well as cultural goods within Europe. Similar to the Bologna action points, the membership of the EHEA has been growing. The first formal acknowledgement of the plan to build the EHEA was expressed by education ministers from only four countries – the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy. The ministers met in Sorbonne in 1998 to initiate relevant work and called upon other countries to join them (EHEA, 2022b). The next meeting in

1999 in the Italian city of Bologna attracted 29 countries and marked the start of the Bologna Process project.

3. The Structure of the EHEA and Governing of Its Bologna Process

Joining and participating in the EHEA is a voluntary initiative for countries as the Bologna Process is governed through the open method of coordination, or in other terms, 'soft' power (Fejes, 2006). The 'soft' power is considered 'as powerful as direct control mechanisms' by some scholars, such as Hudson (2011, p. 671), whereas other authors argue that the voluntary nature of Bologna places limits on how far the convergence of higher education system in the EHEA can go (Kushnir, 2015; Veiga, 2012). To encourage maintained commitment of the signatory countries and associated stakeholders, such incentives as stocktaking and benchmarking are used. Thus, the Bologna Process gradually evolved from 'voluntary participation to monitored coordination' (Ravinet, 2008, p. 353) and from a non-binding commitment on the international level to a more binding endeavour on the national policy-making level, exercised through soft laws, such as the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), evaluations of national and stocktaking reports (Brøgger, 2014). Fejes (2006, p. 224) maintains that 'no longer is governing made through legislation. Instead, it is made through different techniques/tactics [the open method of coordination]' by a range of policy actors. There are the following three major groups of policy actors in the EHEA: (1) international governing actors who govern and implement the reforms in the EHEA, (2) consultative members who consult the governing actors in the reform process and (3) BFUG partners which are the organisations that want to be associated with the Bologna Process but do not meet the criteria for consultative membership (EHEA, 2022c).

One of these major groups of actors – international governing actors – includes the international BFUG and its Secretariat. *The international BFUG* includes representatives of national BFUGs from all member countries (Voegtle, 2014), currently amounting to 47 BFUGs following the suspension of Russia and Belarus memberships in the EHEA (EHEA, 2022c). The international BFUG oversees the progress of Bologna in the signatory countries in-between the international ministerial conferences. It usually meets once every six months to set up working groups that deal specifically with certain action lines (EHEA, 2022c). *The Bologna Secretariat* is the second international governing actor. This actor cooperates with the international BFUG in coordinating the Bologna Process, accepts and reviews the implementation reports from the national BFUGs prior to the international ministerial conferences (Voegtle, 2014). Currently (between 1 January 2021 and 30 June 2024), the Secretariat of the BFUG is held by Albania (EHEA, 2022d). Aside from the international BFUG and its Secretariat, some scholars recognise the European Commission as a governing actor in the EHEA too (Telegina & Schwengel, 2012; Zahavi & Friedman, 2019). In particular, Zahavi and Friedman (2019, p. 28) state that the European Commission has been

'the Process's unofficial leader (both ideologically and organisationally) as well as its main source of funding'. However, this is counter-argued by Voegtle (2014) who equates the role of the European Commission in the Bologna Process to that of other international and non-governmental organisations that participate in Bologna. As such, Voegtle (2014) does not consider the European Commission to be a Bologna governing actor. The EHEA website presents the European Commission as an additional member of the Bologna Process, along with the BFUGs (EHEA, 2022c).

Apart from these governing bodies, there is a range of non-voting *consultative members* of the EHEA which include international and non-governmental organisations. They include BusinessEurope, Council of Europe, Education International, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, European Students' Union, European University Association, UNESCO, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education as well as the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education which has received the status of the consultative actor while remaining a non-voting member and presented on the EHEA website in category 'consultative members' (EHEA, 2022c). These organisations take stock of the implementation of the Bologna action lines in the signatory countries and give suggestions at the international ministerial conferences about further developments in Bologna (Voegtle, 2014).

Next to the governing actors and consultative organisations, Bologna also involves BFUG partners which are 'organisations that wish to be associated with the Bologna Process/the BFUG but do not meet the more demanding criteria for consultative membership' (EHEA, 2022c). These include: the European Association for International Education, EUROCADRES which is a trade union, the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers and EuroScience (EHEA, 2022c).

As evidenced above, the structure of the Bologna Process is quite complex which suggest that the development of reform ideas and their implementation is not an easy task. In fact, the deadline for the implementation has been prolonged for the third time. Ministerial conference documents suggest that the deadline was first 2010, then 2020, and it is now 2030 (EHEA, 2022b). However, each time the overarching tasks for the deadlines were framed slightly differently. For instance, the 2010 deadline was building the EHEA, whereas the 2020 deadline was for the achievement of a fully functioning EHEA. The 2030 deadline is for implementing 'an inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA' to achieve a new vision of the members for the EHEA which 'will fully respect the fundamental values of higher education and democracy and the rule of law' (Rome Communique, 2020, p. 4).

4. The Influence of the Bologna Process Beyond the EHEA

It is also important to highlight that aside from the countries that are currently members of the EHEA, there are also countries in other parts of the world that have chosen to align their systems of education to the Bologna Process or are considering doing so. For example, there is research about the adoption of the

Bologna Process in Africa. According to Eta and Mngo (2021), Bologna adoption started in Africa as early as 2000 by individual nation states (starting with Morocco) and gradually evolved into sub-regional and continental initiatives. At the African continental level, Bologna reforms were integrated in the 2007 African Union Strategy for the Harmonisation of HE Programmes in Africa. According to the African Union (2007), harmonisation among African systems has the potential to create the African HE and research space (African Union, 2007) similar to the EHEA.

At the sub-regional level, the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa emerged with the aim of promoting cooperation among its members: it currently includes Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. People in this region speak a common language (French), use common currency and have a common passport. To integrate further the countries that comprise this economic and political union, the Bologna Process has been adopted in 2005 (Eta & Mngo, 2021). This book presents one case study from this region – Cameroon – by Eta in Chapter 8.

As well as the spread of the Bologna Process in Africa, it is clear from the literature that the Bologna Process is also a matter of interest in other regions and countries, such as Canada (King, 2019), New Zealand (Shannon, Doidge, & Holland, 2019), the United States and some countries of South America (Terry, 2010). Student market incentives are a dominant source of this interest. This interest in the Bologna Process has also been motivated by special interest; using the Bologna Process as leverage to justify reforms at home (Ravinet, 2008), the need to feel a sense of European belongingness, especially for non-EU countries, as the Bologna Process emphasised shared European values (Kushnir, 2016). The need to gain legitimacy at the international level especially as the Bologna Process suddenly became the universal educational model and the new benchmark (Fulge, Bieber, & Martens, 2016) has fuelled interest in the Bologna Process.

Additionally, Bologna has also had impact on HE systems, particularly their credit transfer systems in Australia, South Africa and the United States of America (Netswera, Wilson, Cassidy, & Makombe, 2017). According to Netswera et al.'s study (2017, p. 91), in Australia, for example, 'Credit transfer across different post-schooling institutional types, i.e., vertical transfers, got better defined' as inspired by Bologna in the EHEA. Whilst less interest has been expressed by East Asian countries, there have been studies investigating the readiness of, for instance, China and the Association of South Eastern Asian Nations, to participate (Zeng, Adams, & Gibbs, 2013). This interest in the Bologna Process in different parts of the world suggests that it is possible that its implementation will extend beyond the borders it has currently reached in the EHEA.

5. Book Structure

The book starts with theorising social justice and neoliberalism and their link to the international context of Bologna. Chapter 2 explains key ideas about

neoliberalism and inclusion that frame the discussions in the book and details the evolutions of the meaning of 'inclusion' in the neoliberal Bologna. It sheds light on the ongoing efforts at the international level to consolidate the measures in the pursuit of social justice in the neoliberal Bologna Process. The rest of the chapters examine a range of case studies that highlight different aspects of the domination of the neoliberal agenda in the Bologna Process and how the social justice discourse becomes integral to it. They also highlight the areas where further action is needed to promote social justice in the neoliberal Bologna Process. Chapter 3 examines the European context broadly and focuses on the case of Scotland (which is continued to be examined in Chapter 4), showing how the inclusion specifically of disabled and other socially disadvantaged students has been promoted in the EHEA and celebrating the achievements of this process. Chapters 4–8 examine the cases of Slovakia and Spain as EU countries, Turkey as an EU candidate country and Scotland that has left the EU together with the rest of the United Kingdom (both Turkey and Scotland are part of the EHEA while not being part of the EU), and Cameroon as the country that has been pursuing the Bologna Process beyond the boundaries of the EHEA. The final Chapter provides closure to the debates presented in the book reflecting on the case studies, exploring how social justice discourses evolved in the neoliberal context of the Bologna Process and summarising which aspects of the social justice agenda require policy attention at the EHEA international level post-2020.

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