

Looking back in anger? Putting in perspective the implementation of the Bologna process in Finnish and Portuguese higher education systems

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The 19th June 2019 signals the 20th anniversary of the Bologna Declaration, the greatest European intergovernmental cooperation in the area of higher education (HE). Analysing the implementation of the Bologna process through a foreign policy strategy, allows us to focus on aspects that go beyond legal frameworks and which are usually neglected by the literature on policy implementation, namely countries' cultural, political and institutional specifics. This study bridges this gap by comparing the implementation of the Bologna declaration in the Portuguese and Finnish HE systems, reflecting on the different permutations of cultural-political changes wrought by the Europeanisation of HE.

Drawing on 47 interviews of system and institutional key actors in both countries, it is argued that while Portugal has a top-down tradition of policy implementation, Finland has been following a hybrid model of decision-making, combining top-down and bottom-up approaches. Empirical data challenge the importance of the national cultural dimension as interviewees' perceptions differ more according to their role rather than their nationality. The apparent lack of visibility of national differences is explained by convergent trends such as managerialism and subsequent implications for the academic profession. In fact, political convergence owes much to the globalisation, internationalisation, and Europeanisation of HE as well as the EU soft law and the New Public Management ideology – disseminated by reviews and discourses of international organisations (e.g. OECD; the World Bank).

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FIGURE 1

Looking back in anger? Putting in perspective the implementation of the Bologna process in Finnish and Portuguese higher education systems (in brief).

