

Doctoral Programmes in Past and Future

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European higher education has undergone radical changes towards a common university structure during the last twenty years and this process is still ongoing. My cooperation with Western Balkan universities, and especially with the two universities in Tuzla and Sarajevo, started in 1998, a year before the foundation of the Bologna Declaration of Higher Education, which marked the starting point of this change process. The following cooperation within education and special needs education between the University of Oslo and Western Balkan universities took place during and in the continuation of the two projects, SØE 06/02 and WB 04/06. In 2003 all six countries participating in the WB 04/06 cooperation project; Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia and Norway; had become signatories of the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Declaration, 1999; The Official Bologna Process Website July 2007 – June 2010). Information exchange and discussions related to changes in higher education processes therefore became an important issue already in the first project (SØE 06/02). Discussions continued in the next cooperation project, where one of the three main goals and activities focused on sharing knowledge and experience related to the process as stated in the project application:

The Bologna principles and process of choices and practices of content and structure of higher education are of great relevance for all participating universities, who find themselves on different places in the joint European co-ordination process. To change traditional study structures and limit them in order to fit into a study structure based on three cycles of 3+2+3 years reveals a number of dilemmas and difficult priorities

for most university disciplines. So also for regular and special needs education. The objective of Part 3 is therefore to use the possibility that the project workshops give to proceed with sharing of knowledge and experience related to implementation of the Bologna process (WB 06/04).

Thus, the time for information exchange and discussions regarding the on-going Bologna Process of Higher Education was allocated to all the project workshops at the same time as the often difficult changing processes were underway at these universities. The discussions highlighted similarities and differences between the universities in the transforming process of higher education. They also revolved around the history and context of higher education in general, particularly the establishment and conditions for education and special needs education as research and higher education disciplines, including development of doctoral studies within the disciplines.

Doctoral studies represent the highest of the three university degrees, and the authorization to adjudicate doctoral degrees is generally considered to be an acknowledgement of a higher education subject as a research discipline. Special attention is therefore given to the history and conditions for doctoral studies in the two disciplines, education and special needs education. Opportunities and possible difficulties as well as dilemmas in the future development of doctoral studies within the Bologna Process is therefore the topic of the three articles in this second part of the book. However, a thorough understanding of the current conditions and an approximately realistic view of the development in the near future needs to be based on past developments. The developmental history of doctoral degrees in education and special needs education is also fundamental in order to understand similarities and differences between the seven cooperating universities in the two outskirts of Europe to the northwest and the southeast.

Out of the following three articles, one describes and discusses the development of the University of Oslo, paying particular attention to the establishment of the two disciplines education and special needs education (Johnsen, 2013a). The next focuses on the development of universities and doctoral studies in the participating Western Balkan universities, with a sideways glance at the University of Oslo (Johnsen, Rapačić, Wagner and Cvitković, 2013). The two articles are mainly based on text studies. The first of these three articles is, however, based on an interview study of four senior researchers within education and special needs education at the University of Oslo (Johnsen, 2013b). These researchers have been engaged in research and research related tasks throughout the

transaction period from the traditional “free” Dr. Philos degree to the current structured PhD studies in education and special needs education. Their experiences add rich and more extensive information about the development of the two research disciplines during the last half century, supporting and visualising the written material from documents and debates in the two text studies.

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