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CHAPTER 12

TRYING TO IMPLEMENT THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN RUSSIA. LIMITS AND OUTCOMES OF THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS.

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The context of this study

Higher education is set as a priority by the European Commission. Therefore, the TEMPUS programme was launched in 1990 in order to enhance the development of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) shared with countries surrounding the European Union. The programme finances institution-based university co-operation projects aimed at modernizing higher education. Projects must develop and disseminate new curricula, teaching methods or materials. Selection criteria for funding emphasize the role of quality assurance and management (Tempus Programme 2011). As researchers and participants in a TEMPUS Project, we aimed at finding out what kinds of outcomes the project achieved and how they correlate with the declared aims of TEMPUS programme policy in general.

As we experienced it in our own project, international cooperation between scholars appears to be one of the main means to reaching the objectives of modernization. Besides, it is assumed that modernization has to happen in the surrounding countries rather than in the European Union member states, with expertise transferred to surrounding countries. This raises the question of interpreting the word 'cooperation', since partners in Tempus projects have very different roles depending on the countries they represent.

The results of the survey we conducted at the end of the project show that the aim of modernization has generally been reached, but also, that initial expectations for the partnership were broader than this. Even though participants declared themselves as rather satisfied with the outcomes on the whole, the actual organization of the project did not allow us to fulfil

all the hopes that were linked to it. In this chapter we will discuss whether these limits are linked to our specific Tempus project or rather to the framework of the Tempus programme and to the constraints of the Bologna process, which our project was to implement.

The "Bachelor Curriculum for social work" project

The Tempus project in which we have collaborated lasted from January 2009 until December 2011. It was aimed at developing and implementing a Bachelor for Social Work program in the Russian Federation matching Bologna standards, that is: fitting it into the ECTS system, allowing for mobility of students inside and outside of Russia, deepening the theoretical and professional training of social workers oriented towards the actual social work labour market in Russia, using new technologies, reinforcing quality management, renewing methods for evaluating and assessing courses and students. The project also was shaped in order to improve the professional skills of the Russian teaching staff involved in the development of the bachelor programme.

It was developed jointly by three Russian Universities and by a German University, with a German NGO assisting the academics in the methodological and administrative work. In addition to these initial partners, colleagues from an Italian University joined the project with the specific task of developing an e-learning platform for the course. British and French Universities were added to the project at the final stage of preparation. The first British partner left the project very quickly after it started, so a new partner was proposed to enter the consortium when it was already running.

Altogether, the project involved 9 institutions, represented by 35 individual participants from 5 countries.

| Institution | Participants | Changes | Drop-off | Questionnaires |
|----------------------|--------------|---------|----------|----------------|
| Russian University 1 | 5 | | | 2 |
| Russian University 2 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Russian University 3 | 7 | | | 6 |
| German NGO | 4 | 2 | | 0 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| German University | 3 | | | 2 |
| Italian University | 3 | | | 1 |
| French University | 2 | | 1 | 2 |
| British University 1 | 2 | | 2 | 0 |
| British University 2 | 2 | | | 2 |

These numbers include both academics and administrative staff, who either contributed for the whole duration of the project, or at some time during the project. At least 8 individual participants left the project before its end for various reasons: conflicts at the institutional level, end of their institutional work contract, illness, etc.

On the whole the stability of the working group and of the consortium was good, except for one Russian institution where participants changed quite often, which became a difficulty and did not allow for enough consistency during the project. The changing administrative staff in the NGO led to some organisational difficulties, which appear throughout the survey.

The common work was organised as follows:

- 16 international meetings were held in the 3 Universities of the Russian Federation
- 6 study visits to EU countries were organised for Russian participants

During the meetings, the 21 modules of the Bachelor course were elaborated by Russian partners with the technical support and experience of European colleagues. European partners were asked to prepare presentations related to the organisation of training in social work in their countries.

Exchanges on the content of the modules were rather limited. Six conferences were organised during the meetings, where students and colleagues from the faculties were invited. Here the presentations were partly linked to organisational matters, and partly dedicated to the results of research in social work. The work on the modules was mainly the achievement of partnerships between Russian colleagues, because they had to fit not only the Bologna standards, but also, most importantly, the standards of the Ministry of Higher Education of the Russian Federation.

The study visits were organised by European partners, in order to show the different organisations which contribute to the education of social

workers in EU countries. Visits to Italy also were used for the purpose of implementing e-learning technology.

This brief description suggests that the main part of the partnership work and most of the exchanges between colleagues were dedicated to organisational and technical matters, rather than to the content of the courses. The content, potentialities and limits of social work itself and research in the area of social work were hardly mentioned during the project, although it seems that they are very closely linked to the training of social workers.

Why and how we realized this survey

As all programmes financed by the EU, the TEMPUS programme welcomes evaluations of the projects' quality and achievements. Also, because the work during the project itself did not allow for in-depth discussions between Russian and European participants, we wished to analyse how participants benefited from the work and what were the different points of view on this experience. In order to keep a balance in our analysis of the results, the choice was made that the survey should be conducted jointly by a European and a Russian academic.

Understanding the cooperation process rather than measuring outcomes

As usual when evaluating programmes, our survey was to measure outcomes of the work done. One of the aims obviously was to provide the EU with some evidence of the effectiveness of our work. Nevertheless, we would like to emphasize that,

"Monitoring is not an inspection aimed at identifying weaknesses and making recommendations of censure. Monitoring is a tool to identify resources to optimize the Tempus projects in general and each individual project, which is being monitored. Monitoring also helps to identify problems and jointly implement solutions" (Tempus Russia 2010).

Through this survey, we intended to find out

- Whether the objectives of the project were met,
- Whether there were other achievements that were reached,
- Whether the participants were satisfied with the results of this work.

Finally, through this investigation it was possible to understand how the cooperation process was made possible through the motivation of participants, which expectations were made real through the project, but

also, what were the limits of this cooperation process. The analysis of the participants' answers leads us to identify some of the reasons for such limits.

The questionnaire

33 months after the start of the Tempus project "Bachelor Curriculum for Social Work", we have carried out a survey of participants in order to identify their problems and satisfactions with the results of the hard work which was realized on the tasks. The questionnaire included 15 open items and was built on an evaluation model that took into account three dimensions of the intervention process (Boutin, Durning 2008): 1. The initial motivations of the participants; 2. The process of cooperation and the difficulties which were encountered by participants; 3. The outcomes which they felt were reached or not.

This model allows for comparing the achievements with the motivations. Often one can see that firstly, the expectations are not the same for all participants and secondly, the outcomes of the work go beyond the initial expectations. The description of the process helps explain the differences and similarities between initial expectations and final outcomes (Join-Lambert, 2012).

In the questionnaire we also distinguished three levels of "participants": 1. Individual participants (academics), 2. Students, and 3. Universities (institutional level). We asked our colleagues, for instance, which expectations they had for their universities, for their students, and for themselves (at a professional and personal level). The questionnaire was sent in April 2011 by electronic mail in English to all European partners involved, and in Russian to all Russian partners. After having chased them several times, by December 2011 we received seven answers from colleagues from England, Germany, France and Italy, and twelve from the partners of the Universities in Moscow, Kazan and Maykop (Adygea).

Results of the survey

Unlike in the questionnaire itself, we will first present the motivations as described by our colleagues and second, we will see how the outcomes are related to these motivations. The interpretation of results leads us to separate the answers in two groups depending on the expectations and the position of the partners inside the project. Only in the third part we will analyse the cooperation process and the difficulties mentioned by the

partners. In several examples, participants answered differently whether they came from a European country or from Russia.

Motivations of the participants to the project

When we asked about the expectations they had for their University at the beginning of the project, participants of all countries answered in a similar way.

The main motivation (44%) was developing international cooperation, developing international partnerships, participating in EU programs (for European partners), and promoting undergraduate programs to reach Bologna standards in Russia and elsewhere. All of this corresponds to the trends of the Bologna Process, which is part of the internationalization of higher education (Kremneva, 2011, 101). Universities have been very interested in learning new technologies in teacher training for students, implementing bachelor curriculum for Bologna standards, and for e-learning uses in the educational process. Participants in the survey believed that building professional relationships with major Russian and foreign universities would increase the prestige and competitiveness of their university, faculty, and/or department.

The material benefits were also a major aspect. For example, it was mentioned that in some EU countries, 15% of university incomes depend on developing external resources that come from internationally financed programmes like TEMPUS. Russian partners mentioned the developing infrastructures of their universities, since the project was also aimed at providing them with computers and books.

When asked about how they thought the project would benefit their students, 27.7% of the respondents (EU participants) said they did not expect any direct outcomes. Nevertheless, the other participants stated that the project would bring great progress for their students. Many Russian colleagues answered that besides giving their students access to a bachelor's degree in line with European standards, it would also increase the quality of their studies. For instance, the use of e-learning technology encourages students towards a more efficient organization of their independent work. Moreover, the application of interactive forms of instruction activates the student group. The scholars' participation in the project was seen as a factor for the development of a modern European-level education, including professional competencies required for activities in the field of social work, which would increase the students' competitiveness in the labour market. Participants underlined that it would be useful for students to have insights into the internationalization

processes of social work, and knowledge about the frameworks for social work and practices in several countries. This would be a way of introducing them into the broader context of the profession, into various approaches to social development. Some colleagues from EU countries pointed out that enriching their own international experience would also have a direct impact on the contents of their teaching.

Participants were asked whether their motivations were linked to their own professional and personal development. No matter which country they came from, 35% of the respondents said they expected to build new international partnerships and a network of academic contacts, in order to develop further international cooperation projects. Many participants said they hoped to gain new skills in working for EU projects, to develop stronger professional opportunities in the transfer of "know-how" through international cooperation and teamwork (EU participants), to discover a new profession of "social work", to gain skills in developing a bachelor curriculum and to practise foreign languages (Russian participants). Russian participants also underlined that participation in the curriculum development, developing new practice-oriented teaching methods, learning new technologies and work methods, national as well as foreign, would have a positive impact on the professional practice of teaching.

Russian and European colleagues similarly stated their strong interest to learn more about the Bologna process and its standards, and about the systems and practices of social work, as well as the training of social workers in other countries.

Other expectations were to participate in national and international publications, to add the various international activities of the project to one's CV (although this is reported to be rather 'decorative'). More experienced colleagues (10%) were also interested in just traveling and discovering new countries and cultures, meeting new people. On the whole, many participants said they were led by the motivation of identifying similarities and differences between countries and people, not only at a professional level.

Did outcomes meet expectations?

On some points, all participants agreed on the success of the project and on the fact that outcomes have been achieved. 50% of the survey's respondents underlined the positive development of international cooperation and the exchange experience with other colleagues. 27.7% of respondents indicated that their expectations were met, and 30% of

respondents did not indicate any additional results which had not been part of the initial tasks of the project.

The universities mainly received the material benefits which had been expected. Russian participants reported that they were provided with new technical possibilities for realizing the educational process, such as computers, interactive whiteboards, copy machines, and updates to their libraries with both Russian and foreign literature. Some of them, though, complained about books and computers arriving only at the very end of the project.

In the educational system of the Russian Federation, the rating of universities is increased through participation in projects. Our project also opened up new possibilities, strengthened our academic links in terms of developing new curricula and modern projects. In one of the participating universities, the Tempus project contributed to the discovery of social work as a new profession. One year after this project was completed, we can add that as a continuation of this Tempus project, two further projects have been submitted to the EU, one of which was successful in 2012 and will be financed in the Erasmus Mundus Programme.

Concerning the outcomes for students which were reached during the project, the most valuable one mentioned by participants was that they could take advantage of training based on international standards. When the meetings took place in Russia and in England, students had the opportunity to communicate with professors from other universities, both national and international, which gave them a deeper and more expanded understanding of social work, and allowed them to get acquainted with social problems, policies and social work practice in several countries, as well as with the requirements of the Bologna Agreements.

As for the participants at an individual level, many positive outcomes were underlined. The Russian teaching staff improved their skills, received theoretical and practical experience training social workers in Germany, France, Italy and England, got trained for practice-oriented and distance learning, in particular using the virtual learning platform Moodle. For developing professional practices, the project helped them to organize existing knowledge and experience, as well as to gain a deeper understanding of many aspects of the theory and practice of social work in Europe. 16.6% of respondents pointed out the importance of developing skills to work in Moodle, especially since e-learning is beginning to be widely used in the system of higher and further education in Russia. Many of them answered they had acquired a great experience in developing teaching materials on the basis of a competence-based approach for training students and of the modular system (Professional Education and

Training of Bachelors in Social Work, 2011). Indeed, for each module of the new undergraduate curriculum, the team developed educational and methodological complexes, including brief descriptions of the modules, core competencies and their indicators (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2006).

During the project, Russian participants had a chance to actively apply their experiences gained by implementing the educational process in their universities. Since the period of the project coincided with Russia's transition to a two-tier system of education, this knowledge and new skills occurred as precious and timely. Some Russian participants also stated that their motivation to apply their foreign language skills was fulfilled.

Many respondents noted that the project brought together and even befriended the Russian and European participants. Russian experts expressed great interest in the presentations made by European colleagues during the project (at meetings and conferences). It was noted that new contacts with partners had provided opportunities for developing new solutions and collaborative research. Promising new perspectives on cooperation with foreign and Russian partners were outlined as well.

Each year during the project (2009-2011), all participants had the opportunity to publish some research articles in special issues of the Journal of the Moscow State Regional University, and the Tempus project also gave the opportunity for publications elsewhere.

Different points of views

When comparing answers from EU colleagues and Russian colleagues, one can observe some significant differences in the evaluation of the project.

It was noted by some EU partners (15%) that they lacked the knowledge about research and practice in social work in Russia that was one of the main motivations to participate in this project. Also, they had missed discussions between European and Russian professionals about the contents of the curriculum and of the lectures, and about the reality and the values of social work. They criticized a "too bureaucratized process due to the pressure of national standards in higher education", which did not allow proper focus on the competencies, knowledge and expected outcomes of students' training. Unlike what they had expected, the cooperation was focussed mainly on administrative and formal aspects of the curriculum.

Some said they had the feeling that Russian partners acted as 'consumers' who expected EU partners to deliver knowledge, expertise,

and organize trips to Europe. Some Russian respondents also stated their expectations were not fulfilled, but for opposite reasons: they had expected more study visits to Europe and more visiting lecturers coming from European universities to Russia.

So at this stage of the analysis, we can outline several differences between expectations on both sides: some European participants had expectations that were opposed to the Russians' expectations. These differences are considered by European partners as a major burden for cooperation, whereas Russian partners would state that compromises could always be found during the cooperation.

Looking at the achievements of the project, Russian partners emphasized the success in implementing an internationally recognized Bachelor degree and adding new teaching methodologies. On the other hand, European partners criticized that the Bologna standards were implemented purely formally and only at the administrative level (ECTS, modules), whereas no cooperation happened at the level of teaching content. Likewise, links between research and teaching were not made clear.

Difficulties during the project

25% of our respondents indicated they had not encountered any problems. Among the other answers, the problem that was most commonly mentioned was communication. In communicating with colleagues from other countries, the language barrier was underlined by 23% of the participants, whereas 53% did not mention any issue about language, but rather enjoyed the dialogue, although many respondents acknowledged that some time for adaptation was necessary to find the right way of communicating. In the initial project, it was agreed upon that English would be the common language through the whole project. Nevertheless, many participants, including the leaders of the three Russian teams, did not understand English or any other consortium language (French, German, Italian). Although translation was provided during the formal meetings, some working documents were not translated from Russian to English, which made it difficult for the non-Russian speaking partners to participate in the discussions. In the survey, some organizational problems were pointed out as a source of difficulties for the partnership. The fact that some individuals as well as institutional participants had left and been replaced while the working process was already running was mentioned as a disturbing factor. About 17% of respondents expressed the need to keep the first same team in the project and were concerned that the change of participants led to misinforming the entire team of a university. Staff

training, they believe, is not only a means of improving skills at the individual level, but also primarily as a tool for improving the organization as a whole. This obviously requires a high level of stability within the institutional team.

Respondents from European universities (15%) noted difficulties for their institution regarding financial transactions. Several colleagues reported difficulties linked with the large number of meetings. But these were part of the initial project, and one could argue that frequent meetings held up a group tone, thereby achieving the objectives of the project consortium. Some participants also complained about the lack of planning, leading to frequent last-minute changes of dates for the scheduled meetings. Also, they lacked practical support for the execution of travels and meetings, which eventually meant that they could not attend certain meetings.

It is worth mentioning here that the NGO that managed the project had a great role in the organization and success of the project. Participants in the survey reminded us that it would have been impossible to manage the project without these partners although the last year of the project was worse because of staff shorting in this organization. This explains why participants were disappointed about the financial and organizational management, and the organisational support for the planned activities.

For Russian colleagues, the main difficulty was associated with developing modules and UMK (study-methodological set) (22.2%), as the concept of a competence-based approach is relatively new in their domestic sphere of higher education.

Difficulties in cooperation between organizations were mostly not outlined (61%). Answers were given that partners were able to share ideas and thoughts, even if they maybe did not always agree with the new approaches and proposed systems or processes. As a recommendation, some Russian participants suggested learning to make decisions collectively, patiently listening to each other without condemnation for having a different opinion. This seems to be an indirect way of criticizing other partners' behaviour, but the survey itself does not give any information on which partner(s) is meant, whether Russian or European. However, many conversations we had during the project give us a possible interpretation of these answers. Thus, the Russian participants from provincial universities repeatedly expressed their feeling that some of the Moscow partners lacked respect towards them.

Some European participants mentioned the hierarchical traditions inside Russian universities as an obstacle to serious partnership. This turned out to be an issue when European teams were organizing study visits for the

Russian colleagues who had been participating in the project and therefore had some knowledge basis of social work and training of social workers. But in each trip to Europe, some members of the actual team could not participate, because the deans of the partner universities and members of their families took the place of scholars who had worked on the bachelor curriculum. These people did not attend most of the visit programme that had been worked out in EU countries, and when they did, they showed lack of knowledge about social work and the Bologna process. This peculiarity of the Russian higher education system seriously damaged the partnership during these trips.

Conclusion: Limits of international cooperation in Higher Education under Bologna

If we try to summarize the results of this survey, we can state that all respondents agree on the fact that major goals of the initial project were reached, namely: formal standards of Bologna like ECTS and modules were implemented, and the Bachelor course in social work was opened in three Russian universities. Some of the initial expectations of participants were met only partially. Thus, changes in approaches to training and teaching have occurred, but changes from knowledge-based teaching to competence-based curriculum still had to be implemented more deeply. Also, the balance between theoretical teaching and professional practice within the training was not reached in the curriculum, although there obviously was a significant shift compared to the former training of social workers in Russia.

Finally, some of the expectations were not reached or were not discussed at all within the project: no work was done within the partnership on the contents of teaching, and the links between teaching and research on social work in Russia are still not clear. This has to be considered as a failure in this partnership, since the goal of the project was not only the professional development of teachers involved in undergraduate programs in collaboration with educational institutions in member countries of the EU as countries that have started the Bologna process, but also to develop a curriculum for Bachelor studies in social work in order to deepen the theoretical knowledge and professional training of social workers.

As for the limits of this cooperation process, besides the organisational difficulties which hardly can be avoided in projects of this dimension, it has to be pointed out that obviously the partners' objectives were divergent, and were met to various extents. Indeed, partners from Russia mainly say their objectives were achieved:

- getting knowledge about Bologna standards, social work training and research in EU countries
- travelling to EU countries

But several European partners say their main expectations were not met:

- gaining knowledge about social work practice in Russia
- making links between teaching and research in the contents of the Bachelor curriculum.

We would like to suggest two possible interpretations of these differences.

First, some of the European partners joined the 'Bachelor Curriculum in Social Work' project after a great deal of work had already been done on the partnerships' objectives. This may have led to different understandings of the notion of 'partnership'. Thus, the conception that underpinned the factual organization during these three years was based on a formal, uni-directional transfer of knowledge (about ECTS and modules) and of services (through e-learning and study visits) from European countries to the Russian Federation. This understanding of partnership places the partners from EU countries in a position of those who possess knowledge and expertise, and the partners from Russia in a position of 'clients' who want this knowledge with expertise to be delivered to them.

The other understanding of partnership is a rather comprehensive one that places partners on equal levels of knowledge and experience, though in different cultures, and that allows for an exchange of approaches facilitated through discussions. This understanding drove a minority of the participants in the project who had joined the project after it was written. Even when there were attempts to share knowledge, e.g. when Russian colleagues presented their own system of university quality assurance, hardly any European partner was present and obviously the translation did not make it easy to understand. So knowledge sharing was difficult not only because of different interpretations of partnership, but also because of the lack of planning the contents for each meeting, and not least because of the language barrier.

Does the framework of the TEMPUS programme allow for an including both understandings of partnership? It seems that delivering knowledge does not exclude the possibility of having exchanges about different kinds of knowledge. But this depends also on the interests of each of the participants. As we saw, a glance at the initial motivations stated by the majority of the Russian participants shows that their main expectation was not to exchange knowledge but rather to receive new knowledge. Secondly, our project can probably be considered as a typical illustration

of the concept of 'modernization of higher education' that is at the base of the TEMPUS programme of the EU, and that is embedded in the Bologna declaration of 1999. Indeed, the consequences of the Bologna process on higher education have been criticized by a group of European scholars (Schultheis, Roca I Escoda, Cousin, 2008, 9), who noticed that modernization often happened only at the formal level, leading to a shortening of the medium duration of studies, reinforcing school-type learning instead of university-like autonomous studying, and achieving a lower level of scientific knowledge and competencies for the majority of students, who don't go further than the Bachelor program. In this perspective, our survey shows that the implementation of the Bachelor of Social work in Russia followed exactly the same logic as other bachelor degrees in Europe. Thus, it meets the requirements of the Tempus programme which aims at strengthening a common model of higher education in Europe.

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