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Introduction¹

Currently, the national tertiary education facilities are restructuring themselves as part of the so-called 'Bologna Process'. This development, which is based on a legally non-binding agreement between the European education ministers, currently involves 45 countries working towards a standardized European higher education system. Just as demands for gender equity and the embedding of Gender Studies present a particular challenge to this course of action, it also contains opportunities and risks with regards to gender aspects: By actively designing the Bologna Process, gender equitable teaching and studying can be established, thus modernizing universities and academia. In contrast, ignoring gender aspects will reaffirm and stabilize the traditional, unequal gender relationships. According to an experience based thesis, gender equity has never been occurred or further developed without specific concepts and measures being in place. Furthermore, since the Bologna Process has triggered a discussion about the organization, content and curricula of Women's and Gender Studies, it plays a significant role in how they will be further developed and established.

Through the initiative of a number of gender equity activists, the goal of decreasing gender related social injustice and inequalities on both European and national levels could be included into the preamble of the European education ministers' Berlin Communiqué of 2003:

“The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and European level.” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003)

In accordance with this target developments are now being evaluated and models for producing gender equity in the higher education system are being analyzed on an international level. How seriously this goal of a gender equity is being pursued can be examined by comparing the principle of gender mainstreaming and (gender) relationships in universities and academia with the official announcements regarding the Bologna Process.

The fact that the changes related to the Bologna Process belong to the key challenges of European equity and educational policy was also reflected in the 5th European conference on “Gender Equality in Higher Education”². Experiences with gender equity during the course of the restructuring were exchanged and key

¹ Translated by Rett Rossi.

² Hosted by the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in August, 2007, this international conference has been organized since 1998 by a European network of women in academia and female equity experts (1998 Helsinki, 2000 Zürich, 2003 Genoa, 2005 Oxford).

research results as well as models for implementing gender aspects were presented and discussed. The articles presented here are based on this conference.

Obviously, there are as many different perspectives on gender equality as there are concepts of gender. Some would prefer to question the category of gender in itself; instead of just accepting so-called natural differences, they analyze them. Others understand the concept of gender as something more complex and allow for more than two genders based on individuality, sexuality, ethnicity, class and dis/ability. Still others would emphasize a more pragmatic approach, following a concept of gender based on two opposite sexes in order to more easily establish equality policies. This can either be for strategical reasons or because of a belief in fundamental differences between two sexes. Despite these different approaches, probably all speakers would agree that in order to design the Bologna Process gender equitably, it appears to be necessary to sensitize and further educate both those teaching as well as those studying with regards to competencies in gender and diversity. With regards to the structural changes, those attending the conference were concerned with finding out what position the category of gender held in the different forms of evaluation and quality assurance. There was also a great deal of interest in demonstrating how gender aspects could be integrated into disciplines and faculty cultures, especially in the natural sciences and engineering. The centre point for all this was examining the consequences of the Bologna Process for teachers and students – including the question of who the winners and losers of the university reforms would be. Will existing social, ethnic and/or gender inequities be more strongly embedded or is there a possibility that these social exclusions can be corrected?

The large need to discuss the conceptualization of “gender” also was clear: Is the notion of gender not only understood differently by different individuals, but also in the various subject areas, and if so, how? How are the disparities between humanities and the sciences distinguished? Did the Bologna Process create space for gender critical analyses to become part of the mainstream and so-called major disciplines, or, did it push these aspects to the outskirts and outside of the canon of the subjects’ knowledge?

Inter/transdisciplinarity represents a fundamental qualification of Gender Studies, however, it is still not known whether or not inter/transdisciplinary methods will be strengthened in the course of the Bologna Process. Gender Studies already exists in many European countries in a wide variety of forms. In a few European countries, Gender Studies is an independent discipline, in others, Gender Studies is institutionalized as a transdisciplinary structure and still in others, they are offered as a combination of both approaches. In order to compare things internationally, it is thus particularly important to discuss in detail which possibilities and challenges result from the different structures and to clarify how existing gender programs are effected by the restructuring. Here, we have to analyze whether or not Gender Studies can be sustainably institutionalized in the changes and evaluate which form of Gender Studies proves to be more maintainable.

It is important to incorporate local circumstances, incidents and structures in developing curricula, especially in Gender Studies. The structures in which they currently exist each have their own history of origins and are connected to the history of origins of each of the national academic systems. There are a number of facets which are particularly worth considering: First of all, how can curricular developments be integrated in a European area? Secondly how are “translation processes” from a local or national level possible on an international echelon? Thirdly, where will differences and concurrences be found in the future? Furthermore, in introducing new BA/MA Gender Studies programmes it is especially interesting to exchange which guidelines are being applied in the accreditation.

In the following bulletin text “Bologna and Beyond: Perspectives on Gender and Gender Studies” the above mentioned questions and problem areas are addressed through two key focuses of the international conference:

- 1) how gender equity and Gender Studies are effected by the Bologna Process, and
- 2) how the Bologna Process and the European Union’s gender mainstreaming policies impact course content and the professional perspectives of Gender Studies graduates.

More or Less Gender? The Challenges of the Bologna Process

The goal of integrating gender mainstreaming in developing and accrediting tiered university programmes is to design new ‘gender equitable’ programmes, thus contributing to equity between men and women in the higher education system. In order to achieve this a number of measures are required. In looking at the situation across Europe, it is noticeable that interest in ensuring that gender equity is taken into consideration during the restructuring is greater in countries which previously did not have BA and MA programmes. This is reflected especially in the contributions from Germany and Spain.

In their project report, Ruth Becker, Bettina Jansen-Schulz, Beate Kortendiek and Gudrun Schäfer demonstrate that the anchoring of gender aspects in curricula is essentially dependent on the power relations within the respective universities. Furthermore, they indicate that three equally weighted tendencies can currently be identified in Germany: 1) Gender Studies are being embedded for the first time, 2) nothing has changed with regards to integrating gender, and 3) gender content has been rejected as not ‘belonging to the immediate canon’. Moreover, the authors of the study “Gender Related Aspects of Introducing and Accrediting Bachelor and Master Programmes” indicate that since a number of issues and perspectives are relevant for all disciplines, it is possible to anchor subject specific content from Women’s and Gender Studies as well as a variety of gender aspects in all of them. Included here are professional facets of the discipline (history, career, job market),

criticism of subject knowledge (gender bias, biographies, language) and characteristics of the production and use of research results.

This connection between designing gender equitable programmes and embedding Gender Studies seems particularly successful in Spain: Capitolina Diaz reports from Spain's Ministry for Education and Science about the initiatives of her unit. As examples she describes the efforts being made to advance equity between men and women as well as to promote the Gender Studies curricula.

The Bologna Process strongly impacts the studying and living conditions of students. In order to examine this, the European Student Union (ESU) developed the study "Gender Equality in the European Student Unions". Regina Weber, a student and former member of the ESU's Gender Equality Committee, reports about the research results based on four practical examples from Austria, England, Finland and Serbia.

An especially comprehensive approach to imparting competencies in gender and diversity issues within the context of the Bologna Process is presented by Bettina Jansen Schulz from the Leuphana Universität Lüneburg. The article calls for 1) teaching structures and forms to be designed so that both genders are addressed equally, 2) gender dimensions to be established as integral components of research and teaching, and 3) key qualifications to be taken into consideration.

Gender Studies and Beyond

In the second part of this volume, contributions from participants in the panel "Gender Studies and Beyond" are documented. These take a closer look at the career and labour market perspectives of graduates from Women's and Gender Studies programmes.

The question of what employment opportunities open up for those who have studied Women's or Gender Studies is as old as the programmes themselves. In face of the current restructuring processes, the Europe-wide introduction of BA and MA programmes as well as the EU's gender mainstreaming policies, critically examining the perspectives of gender graduates regarding the labour market gains and deserves renewed and increased attention.

Many European countries have just begun to implement the gender mainstreaming requirement into political practice and there are still few, if any, BA/MA graduates in most European countries. Thus, no research has been conducted in this area yet and there are hardly any empirical results about how the Bologna Process and the gender mainstreaming policy influences the labour market's employment potential for gender experts. It therefore seemed very important to the organizers of the "Gender Equality in Higher Education" conference to more closely analyse the experiences of the previous generation of gender graduates in order to be able to profile the Gender Studies programme. The aim in doing so was to increase possibilities for future graduates to even more specifically develop their own career perspectives.

The findings of the panel discussion and the contributions presented here demonstrate an astonishing degree of agreement – independent of the country specific job markets, or the forms and traditions of the gender programmes and degrees. This applies to the reasons for students choosing Gender Studies as a course of studies as well as to the analysis of knowledge and competencies gained during their studies. Furthermore, there are a number of parallels in how they perceive the opportunities and obstacles on the job market, and the significance of internships and career oriented programme components.

The results of the large international study, which Maryanne Dever conducted in Australia, Great Britain and the USA regarding motives for studying and career opportunities, also held true for other European countries. Similar to Jeannette van der Sanden, Dever found for example, that “career or vocational concerns did not feature prominently in students’ initial reasons for enrolling in the field” (p. 64). A number of existing fears concerning the usability of acquired knowledge were unconfirmed by both the graduates’ experiences and the employers in Australia and the USA. Like other students in the humanities and social sciences, gender students and graduates oriented themselves on a very wide career area, whereby the public and academic sectors dominated (van der Sanden, Dever).

Jeannete van der Sanden, who analysed in particular the situation in the Netherlands as compared to other areas in Europe, turns to the question of which knowledge Women’s and Gender Studies convey and how this flows into the work-world:

“In the first place, this is critical thinking: a certain way of analysing, looking at something from different perspectives, distancing oneself from a problem to see it more clearly, taking things not for granted, and thinking independently. Secondly, the respondents highlighted that they gained self-confidence; they achieved self-knowledge and became more assertive. Many said that Women’s Studies had enabled them to name issues of inequality or gave them the words to talk about discrimination.” (p.76)

According to van der Sandens analysis, obstacles and difficulties for graduates of Women’s Studies arise especially due to the low social status of gender knowledge and the public’s general assumption that, as a social concern, the emancipation of women has already been achieved.

In a qualitative study, Beate Binder and Ilona Pache also pursued the question of competencies gained through studies, in this case in Germany especially with reference to graduates of the Gender Studies program at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The competencies they considered, which included professional, methodical, social and individual ones, hit upon fields of work in the German labour market, which are to some degree ‘gender open’, but also sometimes ‘gender indifferent’ or ‘gender resistant/dismissive’. Binder and Pache plead follow-up studies to orient their focus on professional experiences and the respective quality of participation in the fields of work.

One of the key challenges – according to Maryanne Dever – is for gender graduates “to imagine, identify and forge their own pathways [...] in order to do so, these graduates need to be able to understand and talk about their studies and what they have gained from them in ways that ‘translate’ effectively beyond the campus gates” (p. 71).

Jeannette van der Sanden and Allaine Cerwonka in particular, examine what new ‘transformation processes’ result from the decisions made in Bologna and the European Union's gender mainstreaming policy. Whereas, van der Sanden emphasizes the importance of internships and studying abroad, Allaine Cerwonka observes that in addition to teaching students to be analytical and to think critically about knowledge, Gender Studies programmes have to more strongly convey abilities sought in the new political fields. In analyzing the major political, economical and cultural background for the emergence of Gender Studies programmes in middle and eastern Europe and in Budapest especially, Cerwonka shows that despite the numerous described similarities, it is still worth considering each of the concrete, historical and regional/national relationships between Gender Studies programmes and surrounding social conditions. As Cerwonka states, “in Central and Eastern Europe there has been concern among feminists that while these gender positions are expanding, they still remain out of the reach of most Gender Studies graduates” (p. 90).

All of those who have considered “Gender Studies and Beyond” in the following contributions, nevertheless agree with Allaine Cerwonka when she declares:

“All of these developments at the turn of the 21st century mean that we are confronted with exciting and interesting challenges to our disciplinary vision(s). Not the least of these challenges is to help our graduates imagine possible futures for themselves as both good global citizens and, more recently, as professionals in a vast array of fields.” (p. 91)