



European student movements against “commodification of education”: international norm and counter-norm in new higher education policies

Geneviève Myriam Jacqueline Madeleine Désirée Genicot

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Geneviève Genicot,
ATER (assistant fellow)
at Institut d'études politiques de Grenoble (France)

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Introduction

The emergence of social movements defining themselves as opponents to the commodification and/or privatisation of education, including first and foremost students but also teachers and other actors, accounts for the changes occurring in the field of HE policy nowadays.

In this paper we shall address the new forms of HE delivery from a double perspective, combining the study of policy takers' and policy makers' representations of how higher education should be delivered.

We shall depict this binary normative structure and show the potency and dominance of policy makers' norm and the relative weakness of policy takers' one.

We shall then try to explain this difference exploring two potential explanatory factors:

- First, the hidden diversity of policy takers' representations;
- Second, the diffusion mechanisms of the norms.

Methodology

We have been studying these movements for 5 years now in several countries: Belgium (both French speaking and Flemish communities), France, Italy and Portugal. These countries were chosen for the diversity of their HE systems (and for our capacity to do field work in the language of each case).

The study was spread on different levels of policy making: the national level, the local level (HE institutions), but also the delegation of national student representation on the European level, specifically the action of the European student federation ESIB (European Student Information Bureau - The National Unions of Students in Europe) in the framework of the Bologna Process.¹

We have studied both institutionalized representation and protest movements, the latter including both minor organizations not recognized by policy makers and movements like the European social forums, which are not involved in HE policy making but work on this issue a great deal.

Our field study intends to offer a broad view of student movements of different kinds and at different levels in these 4 countries.

The study was intensive, with 63 interviews from 1 to 3 hours, a lot of participant observation (meetings from 1 hour to 8 days) and a hundred informal conversations.

¹ *ESIB (European Student Information Bureau) - The National Unions of Students in Europe* is the student umbrella representing student's interest on the European level. It is recognized by the EU, the Council of Europe and it is a consultative member of the Bologna Process. Founded 23 years ago with an aim of cultural exchange between European students, ESIB opened up a lot to new topics in the 90's when the changes in HE began to occur. Then it began to be willing to *represent* the European students. Now having 50 members associations and unions from 37 countries inside and outside the EU (43 full members, 7 consultative or candidate members), the umbrella claims to represent indirectly more than 11 million students. See www.esib.org.

1. A picture of the binary normative structure of the HE field today

The study depicts a binary normative structure in the field of HE policy today, with the opposition of a "norm" and a "counter-norm". The first would be the new international norm driving HE policy reforms, the last would be the corresponding norm opposing these trends.²

1.1. The norm

Only the analysis of the militant discourse regarding new HE policy reveals what has changed exactly in HE, especially about language and representation of what HE should be. However, and despite the fact that it is not specifically my topic, I tried to build a map of this new international norm, consulting information from various sources (see annex 1). Since the focus of this paper is set on the weakness of the *counter-norm*, and since the participants to the workshops are specialized in HE policy changes, we will not develop here the study of the sources but only its results.³

With the multiplication of joint degrees, student exchanges and installation of branch campuses on a world scale, a new norm emerges, demanding institutional autonomy (both financial and pedagogical), classified efficiency from institutions, competition between these and excellence, by means of selection of students as well as brain-drain. These elements encourage HE institutions in making themselves more visible and attractive, i.e. by fusions, scale economies and readable degree offer. I tried to systematize these phenomena in a new international "table of the law" of HE, that recommends:

- realizing a knowledge-based society as inclusive as possible (lifelong learning education and training, literacy and e-literacy strategies, programmes for children and adults);
- making education institutions efficient;

² We do not use the concept of « referential » because it is centered, globally speaking, only on the policy makers community, and we want to consider the policy takers at the same time. The concept of « norm » seems thus more suitable for the purpose of this study: even if it also refers to public action analysis (learning and diffusion theories), it also has a sociological and anthropological use, that is larger.

³ Chapter 1 of my PhD thesis focuses on this much deeper. Cf. Genicot, G., « L'intérêt étudiant face à l'Europe. La représentation étudiante en Belgique, France, Italie et Portugal dans le Processus de Bologne, 1999-2005. », to be presented in September 2007.

- measuring the efficiency of education institutions and systems, for example by the means of rankings, and specifically with the measurements tools from OECD (like PISA for secondary education);
- using « best practices » in education;
- giving Universities more autonomy and simultaneously developing quality assurance mechanisms (following this idea, we find policies of deregulation and liberalization and treaties like the GATS, General agreement on trade of services);
- assuring HE excellence in the international competition by training competitive graduates;
- selecting students on their competencies to promote excellence;
- looking for alternative private HE financing sources, for example augmenting tuition fees;
- promoting international attractiveness of HE institutions towards foreign « brains », by
 - making HE institutions more visible by the means of fusions, associations, regional or international networks that give a critical mass to the institutions and allow them economies of scale;
 - making programmes easily readable (ex. the Bologna Process);
 - augmenting fame of joint degrees or programmes such as 'Erasmus Mundus' Masters;
 - developing an original identity through inventive programmes;
 - opening the degrees to a large public, for ex. proposing courses in English;
 - using advertising and marketing techniques, which makes HE institutions, to some extent, kind of companies selling a HE product and an image.

1.2. The "counter-norm"

On the other side, the discourse analysis of the interviews, conversations and leaflets and documents of anti-commodification activists in Belgium, France, Italy and Portugal reveals a strong attachment to values such as equal opportunities of studying, publicly financed HE, free admission to programs and non selection of students, with a subsequent critique of elite programmes and the development of privately financed institutions and programmes.

I must however stress the neat difference between Portugal on the one side, and Belgium, France and Italy on the other. In

Portugal, the new international HE values seems to have gained power over the students and the students' representatives. We would probably find the same situation in Eastern Europe countries, because of the structural similarity of these countries regarding the lack of public education availability and the growing offer of private HE (in the past for Portugal, now for Eastern Europe).

A first evidences of the existence of an anti-commodification discourse is the campaign launched by the French union UNEF (Union nationale des étudiants de France: National students' union of France) in October 2001, and that was called "L'éducation n'est pas une marchandise" ("Education is not a commodity"). The Union even invited the organization ATTAC (Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide aux Citoyens : Association for the Taxation of Transactions to Help the Citizens, founded in 1998) to join the campaign.

Another example, still in October 2001, is the first World Education Forum that was held in Porto Alegre between the first and second World Social Forums. The reason for this is that education was recognized as a very important topic to which was not given enough attention during the first World Social Forum. During the World Education Forum, teachers and some students unions joined to talk about alternative pedagogical perspectives but also the privatizing of HE. Students present at the event have stressed during interviews the opportunity it had been to exchange about national experiments of changing HE.

In the beginning of 2002, the small Belgian group MML (Mouvement marxiste-léniniste: Marxist-Leninist movement, youth organization of the Parti des travailleurs de Belgique : Party of the workers in Belgium) puts up a huge poster "No to Bologna" on the façade of its Louvain-la-Neuve headquarters and launches a petition to stop the process.

In the meantime, the 13th of December, a European student block is present at the Euro-demonstration connected to the EU Laeken Summit (closing of the Belgian Presidency of the EU). The block was united by a call against commodification of education and its consequences: privatisation, selection, inequalities, abolition of non cost-effective programmes...

Before Laeken and on the occasion of the European education ministries council on the 29th of November, the AGL (Assemblée générale des étudiants de Louvain: General assembly of the Leuven students, the local students' organisation) invades the campus by

night and changes the name of the buildings (originally Montesquieu, Coubertin or Thomas More) with the name of multinational companies : Vivendi, Microsoft, Adidas.

Numerous actions of the kind are held across Europe, organized by students' or teachers' unions. We are here in a reverse world where people are worried about HE evolutions and try to act against these.

I analysed my interviews with the structural analysis technique of Jean-Pierre Hierneaux, sociologist at the Université of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium. This method, which I shall not explain here in full details⁴, allows us to "see" in a graphic way the political symbolic system of militants. In the diagram, the subject (S) acts (A) pursuing decisive ends (U) ; he is helped by some means (M) which he receives from the "addressing" (D) who gave him the "mission" to be accomplished. The diagram is polarised between positive and negative, since in the one case the subject sees itself as a "good" subject, and in the other one, as a "bad" subject since he is not doing what he should to accomplish his mission. We consider here exclusively the political symbolic system of anti-commodification militants. As we analyse a political vision, the subject (positive or negative) is collective (the community). The tale tells how the community accomplishes or not its mission, which is to ensure that the community realizes the best education system possible.

The positive S is defined in opposition to negative S : businessmen in e-learning companies, people financing privately research or education, selling education products and informatics equipment related to education (ex. Windows certifications), educative software designers (ex. IBM's e-learning software to put courses online), agencies promoting national education systems abroad (ex. Edufrance in France), people and institutions going to the (now closed) World Education Market⁵ and in general every company interested in educational matters on profit aims.

⁴ For further details see Genicot, G., *Protestations émergentes en France et en Communauté française de Belgique face aux mutations de l'enseignement supérieur : européanisation, mondialisation - marchandisation ?*, DEA Thesis, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Grenoble, September 2002, 192p.

⁵ In its 3rd year of existence, this forum was presented by the organizers in this way :

The positive U (ultimate aims) assigned to HE corresponds to this image of the self where private initiative functions like a foil. The ideal education system at all levels and including HE, would pursue the following aims: emancipation of the individuals by the means of knowledge transfer and critical teaching, sometimes explicitly referred to the Enlightenment; social reproduction like the French well-known sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described it since the middle sixties is criticized. Personal self-fulfilment and socialisation are also considered important aims of education: a person must be able to feel comfortable in all contexts and work on a job that will bring him happiness - not only money. Education merchants are considered unable to accomplish these socializing missions.

These arguments are structured in opposition to two main negative U - employability and profit - and completed with a critique of sponsoring and advertisement of education.

"Employability" means the character of education and training strictly centred on the competencies to be acquired and thus very specialized. It is described in the interviews in 3 different ways.

The first ones argue that HE should give professional skills but deplore the adaptation of programmes to employers' needs and subsequent short-term qualifications curricula. Benefits on a long term basis of a polyvalent education guaranteeing critical judgement formation are skipped. (Ex. the CIC Bank distributed a game about stock exchange speculations and was criticized very much by the French teachers union FSU (Fédération syndicale unitaire: Undivided union federation). This discourse also defends non profitable course

"Now in his third year, WEM is the world's only professional event dedicated to the international business of *education, training and lifelong learning*.

The World Education Market is an annual *marketplace*, showcasing educational resources for all levels and ages of learners, for use in the classroom, the workplace or the home, and available on a full range of technologies, from satellites to books and from television to the Internet.

Participation is *international and multi-sectorial*, with senior executives from school systems, technical institutes, universities and distance learning, governments and international agencies, the vast training and adult consulting industries, book publishers, satellite, telecommunications and cable companies, and the computer software and hardware industries.

The focus of the Market is on *commercial transactions* - buying and selling products, rights, services and systems as well as finding partners, institutional models and expertise that best respond to specific needs.

WEM is also about *networking* - a superb occasion to meet the leaders, the decision-makers and the chief executive officers from a myriad of industries, with education as their common purposes. [...]"

([Http://www.wemex.com/App/homepage.cfm](http://www.wemex.com/App/homepage.cfm), 03/06/2002.)

of studies (philosophy, literature...) because they answers individuals' needs, which are considered as more important than companies' ones. Elite formation is also considered an aim of education, which therefore should not be limited to working force training. Elite must be able to think collective society project and « change the world if it is not like it should be » (sociology student, member of ATTAC, Belgium). This vision of the world is not really far from a knowledge society vision, but the negative vision of companies hinders militants to note the similarity between these visions of the world.

Second vision argues that HE must not provide professional skills but only teach individuals to understand the world they are living in. Transmission of knowledge, culture, critical mind and history are considered essential and professional skills, of secondary importance.

A third vision sets that professional skills and intellectual formation to a discipline should be given in different types of institutions.

To summarize, the same concern (preserve to HE another dimension than professional formation) is declined on three levels: professional training is seen as integrated, inexistent, or separated from general formation. Anyway the image of HE institutions as diplomas' factories is stigmatized as well as the language describing how a "product" is "delivered" by the "educative company" to a "client".

Profit is the second negative U in the symbolic tale of militants. Imposing profitability requirements to HE is very much criticised since education is considered by them as something "that has no price". Some things are of such value that they are worth a deficit (or a better financing) : equality, emancipation, democratizing of education, fulfilling society's needs and knowledge as such, *pour l'amour de l'art*.

All these arguments originate in a global critique of personal interest as an aim for society. In this prospective we can understand better the rejection of companies and the preference for public services. Some militants interviewed even verbalized the U of their political symbolic tale in a very clear and dramatic way: without access for all to education, society will end up becoming totalitarian, poor, wars will happen, and it will be "the end of our societies" (French militant, socialist party and ex member of UNEF).

The rejection of a for-profit HE is thus linked with the life and death of the community.

The M category is *per se* articulated around the idea of regulation and deregulation. Rules and regulation are indeed the best way for the positive S to act in order to produce a positive society, that is to say: a society where every thing is how it should be. In our case, the negative rules are generally speaking the ones of the liberal capitalist economy. First is criticised the public under-financing of HE and the consecutive private financing of HE (privatization, spin-offs, loans to students instead of grants...); in this system, the dependence to the backer is criticized. Second is condemned the transformation of HE in a profit-machine, for ex. by signing the GATS. Third is denounced the manipulation of HE according to employers' needs. Finally, generalized deregulation of HE by the introduction of concurrence mechanisms is criticized (autonomy margins conceded to HE institutions in order to implement Bologna Process, introduction of private institutions and creation of a really open market of HE, marginalization of institutions without alternative financing sources...) because deregulation develops or augments different kinds of inequalities :

- inequalities in access to HE (depending on financial possibilities of individuals) and in HE achievement (depending on social origin of individuals), these two elements being often strongly dependent;
- geographical inequalities (depending on the wealth of the area and the existence or inexistence in this area of elite HE networks)
- social inequalities after graduating (depending on the HE institution frequented: its selection mode, its fame) ;
- employment inequalities (depending on an individual negotiation with the employer - this negotiation was once collective and in charge of workers' unions - on the basis of competencies - and now on the basis of collectively recognized qualifications ; in this negotiation, the cultural capital of individuals will be highly predictive).

The worst case scenario would be if the richest with a higher social background would frequent the best HE institutions with the best students and then get the best jobs. On the other side, we would have the poorest and socially disadvantaged frequenting low profile

institutions with low level students and get a mediocre degree, that they would anyway not be able to defend on the job market because of their weak cultural capital.

These elements are in the interviews clearly linked with the liberal capitalist economy, through three pervasive themes: the contract, the market and the profit. This anti-capitalist discourse about University is not new; 30 years ago, French sociologist Alain Touraine interviewed students in Amiens and Bordeaux (France) striking against a reform of curricula. These students were opposed to the invasion of employers' interest in the universities and developed arguments against employability. We have thus in this case a "recycling" of old arguments.

However, some elements of the discourse are completely new: elements regarding contract regulation and transformation of HE following a for-profit orientation.

The table hereafter proposes a summary of new and old mobilization themes.

Old themes	Recycling of old themes	New themes
Democratizing of access versus selection	Inequalities because of market regulation	Individual basis contract system : -private financing of institutions by private renewable chairs -financing of research by contracts -student loans in the place of student grants -education as a payable service -individualised interviewed between the employer and the employee
Achievement inequality		
HE institutions autonomy →		
Training in the interest of private companies (profit on the 2 nd degree) →	Misused employability (profit on the 2nd degree)	Profit on the 1st degree : -Education companies generating profit by selling classes -Privatisation permitted by the GATS agreement -ITC "Trojan horse" introduced in education institutions

Figure 1

The actions (A) follows from the means (M) and I shall not enter in the details about this: positive actions are regulating, negative actions deregulating, etc. There are then diverse militant strategies of action, but this is a separate topic and we only focus here on the vision of the world according to militants.

The normative sources (D) are predictable just the same: capitalism *versus* collective interest ideology or even communism, liberalism *versus* regulation theory, particular interest *versus* collective interest and solidarity, management *versus* demanding political choices. Amongst negative sources we find the ideology of institutions propagating the new norm: EU, WTO, World Bank, OECD, IMF.

To end this section, let's give the word to a former president of the principal Belgian student's union (FEF, Fédération des étudiants francophones: French speaking students' federation): this abstract shows the gap that separates partisans of the norm and the counter-norm: people from these two normative universe don't have anything to say to each other according to the interviewee. "Eh, when I see guys like these ideologists from IMF and from, from WTO - and here I will be simplistically anti-American - who eh, who are capable to say that kind of things, to to, to affirm in such a, such a barbarous and radical way, eh, that there is no cultural exception, that there is eh, that there is'n-- [incredulous laugh] that the market is the only, is the only law valid to determine economic allocations, to postulate this kind of, of laws so mind-numbing for the human being, and furthermore to be willing to impose these to the rest of the world eh - in the Third World this is a real situation - I, I don't see how it is possible to to, to deliberate soundly with, with that kind of characters, and thus it gets me worried about... what can become... the world, well... Obviously people will come to blows if, if eh, if on the one side there are people who say that and on the other... well, personally I don't see what I can say to that kind of characters." ⁶

⁶ Interview, 19 February 2006. Translated from French.

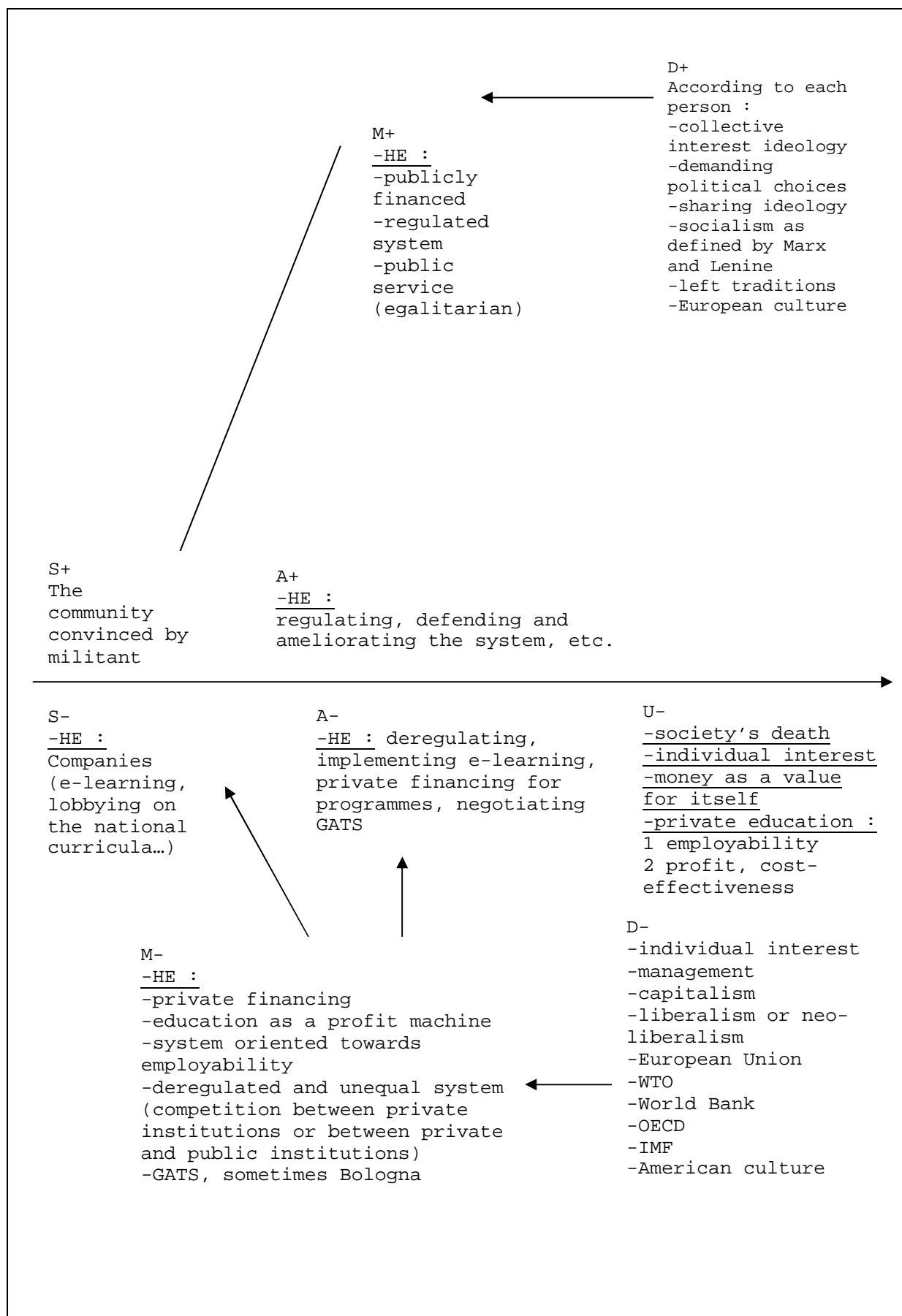


Figure 2

1.3. Bologna, between the norm and the counter-norm

The Bologna Process can be considered as a "transitional object", disputed by the people in these two normative universes. It is the European regional expression of global changes in HE and appears thus as a subsystem of diffusion of the norm. This appears particularly in the growing correspondence between the Bologna Agenda and the European Commission Program "Education and Formation 2010", initiated in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy to make EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world".⁷ However, the definitive orientation of Bologna and its alignment with the Lisbon objectives is not sure yet and this ambiguity is precisely what makes the case interesting. We can indeed consider the European Higher Education Area created by Bologna as a normative battlefield where the diffusion of economic norms opposes humanistic norms.

2. A weak counter-norm

2.1. Hidden diversity of the anti-commodification discourse

The coherence of the policy makers normative universe regarding HE can be proven by the actions they take, and which seem to follow the same track. The shared economic analysis of HE on which relies this norm is a key factor of that coherence.

On the contrary, the coherence of the normative universe of the anti-commodification militants is proven to be fragmented by diverse elements: the norms are not exactly the same at all levels and in all countries. Despite a common discourse, common global values and a common semantic dimension, national traditions and national cultures decline indeed the new norm in quite specific ways. Broadly speaking, the themes of the mobilisation are the same for all militants: they mobilize against what they call

⁷ See for ex. REINALDA, B., « Intergovernmental Momentum of the Bologna Process 1998-2004 », *epsNet Kiosk Plus, The Net Journal of Political Science*, vol. 3, n°1, June 2005, in particular pp. 11-12, or BALZER, C., and MARTENS, K., « International Higher Education and the Bologna Process. What part does the European Commission play? », *epsNet Kiosk Plus, The Net Journal of Political Science*, vol. 3, n°1, June 2005, p.22 : « the Bologna Process has been more and more integrated in the Commissions work and is an integral part of a bigger target by now ». On the economicist orientation of EU Youth policy, see also EBERHARD HARRIBEY, L., *L'Europe et la jeunesse. Comprendre une politique européenne au regard de la dualité institutionnelle Conseil de l'Europe - Union européenne*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003, coll. « Logiques politiques », pp. 239-240.

"commodification" and sometimes also use the word "Bologna" in a negative way, referring to it as a huge enterprise to privatize HE in Europe. However, these themes are interpreted in a different way according to specific contexts, values and symbols. This is what we will explore now.

The study on European students representatives showed that the huge majority of them can identify with the slogan "Education is not a commodity" when it was submitted to them during the interview. Conversely, asked about the Bologna reforms, a lot of students had something to declare, and generally something negative. However, students activists based on the local level (the local branch of a union, on a campus or in a university) proved sometimes to know less about these topics. Anyway, the two words "commodification" and "Bologna" are *meaningful* and *recognizable* for a lot of student activists, and coordinated European mobilizations occurred on these themes in the last years.⁸ But is that meaning really significant? What is indeed *exactly* "commodification" or "Bologna"?

"Commodification" is a broad and polysemic term. That is the reason why it is so well adapted to the struggle: like an envelop,

⁸ Two examples :

(1) On the 13th of March 2003 was organized an European decentralized day of mobilization against GATS. That day should have been the day when was decided in the WTO the list of services offered by every country under GATS agreement : the Article of the committee 133 (C133) was supposed to discuss the second draft of EU services offer under GATS. That discussion was in the end delayed. Anyway the 13th was chosen by different social movements and particularly the students during the European social forum of Firenze (2002). The preparation was done by mail by few people. The actions done on the 13th were most of the time original but, unfortunately for their organizers, did not go into the press. For example, in Berlin, different organizations (*BUNDJungen*, ATTAC and others) performed on *Alexanderplatz* the reception of the embassy of an imaginary country: Monetania. They performed a scene of GATS negotiation using a cow. The bargaining about the cow (being the object of commerce) happened on the red carpet of the embassy, near a black limousine with which arrived the European delegates. On the 13th there was also a general assembly in the Université libre de Bruxelles (Free Brussels University) in order to inform the students on the risks of GATS. In Belgian non-university HE institutions, information on the topic was given during the classes. In Austria, OH, member of ESIB, organized a demonstration against GATS, privatization of education and education-based market, after having organized awareness-raising actions from the 10th to the 12th. In Italy, diverse schools in Turin and the universities of Pavia, Forli, Sienna, Messina and Ferrare were transformed in supermarkets.

(2) Another example is the European Education Forum. There were 2 editions of this forum, one in Berlin (September 2003) and the other in Bergen (May 2005), both occurring at the same time as the Bologna follow-up European education ministers conference. Main topics were Bologna, GATS, commodification and alternative pedagogy. A few hundred students from various European countries joined these 3-days initiative (no more than 500 participants but we must think of this number knowing that these are students this is to say a relatively poor population).

it encloses a lot of claims. Activists don't ignore this. In fact, asked "What does 'Education is not a commodity' mean for you?", some of them answered but also stressed the vagueness of this formula, like this French student elected to the Executive Committee of ESIB : "Do you know the slogan 'education is not a commodity'?" "Yes... but it is used nonsense and it has lost meaning." Or this other French student from ATTAC: "But 'commodification' is kind of provocative. You see, it's like 'privatization of education': it doesn't mean a thing. Because we already are in the privatization of education. To buy, well to pay tuition fees, which give you the right to enter the library, which give you access to computers, it is already a commodification of education. Do you understand? Do you see? Not everybody has access. So well, it's, at the same time provocative and inappropriate. But at the same time it's relevant-- well, it's rally--, it's rallying, it rallies-- You see, it rallies the crowds."

We have thus here a large framing. Regarding Bologna, we also find large frames of mobilization. However it must be stressed that the Bologna Process is not always understood as a European Process, but rather seen as a national reform (which it is in fact), and calling it "Bologna" in their own way : "Bologne" in Belgium and "Bolonha" in Portugal, but also "il 3 + 2" in Italy, "le LMD" (licence, mastère, doctorat) in France. All these expressions function as a reference point for the mobilization, but in the two last cases we have lost the reference to Bologna as such. This means that the Bologna mobilization framework presents some weaknesses: in a number of countries, the Bologna Process has a national name and is seen as a national process; the common vision of this process amongst activists of different countries is, thus, not guaranteed, and the norm can be considered as fragmented. The best example of this is when diverse times Italian students' representatives interviewed discovered during our conversation that the reform known as '3+2' was in reality the Italian version of a European process. These were students of youth party organizations, central to student activism in Italy, non members of ESIB; they did not know about the existence of ESIB, and even mentioned the idea they had to build a European student network, in order to be able to react to future European directives regarding HE! This means that at least a part of militant students in Europe, even if they share the same ideal of HE and have a global common framing of their struggles and follow the

same principles, can ignore totally one another and not be conscious of the common interest they share.

If we consider now the "commodification" topic, we see that the discourse is fragmented exactly as it is for the "Bologna" topic. Here it is not a question of frame, since we saw that frame was common to a huge majority. The division occurs at an inferior level: the level where the words become significant in a concrete and particular context. For example, communist students in Sicily presented the commodification phenomenon as linked to mafia organisations, and not to the global economic changes in the field. In Portugal, a student representative from a little HE institution was very reactive to the topic of commodification, but described it as a process where the student is filled up with knowledge without critical mind. Other students just are very vague in their definition of what commodification is, though sincerely sharing the concern.

To summarize, for what concerns Bologna or the commodification theme, we are facing topics that concern different geographical levels of policy-making: European, national and local. At every level the problems are put into a certain perspective ; the large frame is reduced and the slogans upon which are built demonstrations, forums or actions like the 13th of March ANNEE mobilization, are reduced to a mere envelop when it comes to everyday militantism. At each level, language and references change.

On the contrary, the norm opposed by the militants is unique and has the same meaning everywhere it is in use, this is, a common economic analysis of the field of HE today.

To summarize, the reasons for opposing the norm are diverse whereas the reasons to follow the norm are the same, and this induces a relative weakness of the opposition to the new international norm.

2.2. Diffusion of the norm and the counter norm

Now the question is: why these strong differences? After all, the norm is also spread on different levels corresponding to different realities. We propose to address this question studying the diffusion of the norm and counter-norm. How is it passed from a group to another, from the European to the national and then the local level, for the policy makers as well as the policy takers?

Once again and obviously we will find that the diffusion of the norm is weaker on the side of the policy takers than on the side of the policy makers. That is to say, there are more obstacles to the diffusion of the counter-norm than to the diffusion of the norm. The question now is: why is that so? In this part of the paper we would like to explore the diffusion chains on one side and on the other, accounting for the delay opponents have shown in their knowledge of policy developments and economic analysis of these.

The figure hereafter presents in different colours the diffusion chain mechanisms that we want to describe and explain: vertical and horizontal diffusion, between the same actors and between them.

Level	Policy making organizations/networks			Policy taking organizations/networks			Level
International							International
European							European
National	Country1					Country1	National
	Country2	Ministry X Lobby Y		OrganizationX OrganizationY OrganizationZ		Country2	
	Country3					Country3	
	Country4					Country4	
	Country5					Country5	
Local	Country1	CityA			CityA	Country1	Local
		CityB			CityB		
		CityC			CityC		
		CityD			CityD		
	Country2	CityA			CityA	Country2	
		CityB			CityB		
		CityC			CityC		
	Country3	CityA			CityA	Country3	

Figure 3

The opposition between norm and counter-norm is present on each level:

- on the local level when there is a conflict inside the institution, for example about augmentation of tuition fees ;
- on the national level, when new laws or decrees are negotiated between the ministry, the rectors and the students (I refer here particularly to the laws and decrees implementing the Bologna Process in the different states and which often were subjected to

critics because they introduced measures considered as commodifying education and abusing the Bologna Process (autonomy of universities, introduction or augmentation of tuition fees);

- on the European level, when there are discussions between the European Commission (which spreads market ideology), European education ministers council (whose members have diverse opinions but can not ignore the evolutions), ESIB students (largely defending a public HE) and EUA⁹ rectors (which promote his members' interests in the European university market) ;
- on a world scale, when the World Education Forum meets to elaborates strategies against the introduction of education in the GATS agreement, which they strongly condemns.

a. Diffusion of the norm

The omnipresence of the norm in the social world, also visible in the counter-norm which opposes to it, leads me to question the origin and the diffusion mechanism of that norm.¹⁰

■ The norm first and foremost circulates vertically and on a top-down way, on the left-hand side of the diagram coloured in orange. Norms are descending following territorial policymaking scales: from a transnational scale or even a world scale (institutions and international organizations) to a regional level (EU) and then a national level (national laws) to end up on a regional or local scale (universities) and finally inside the universities (faculties and departments). Scales can be skipped (influence of international institutions directly on some countries without the intervention of the EU; relationships between, the EU and the Regions without intervention of the national level) and some individuals can be present to different levels (like the rectors which defend their interests at the national level but are also implementing new policies on the local level in their institutions). The same education policy paradigm is thus diffused through the diverse elites. I shall here recall the concept of "policy transfer" defined by D. Dolowitz and D. Marsh as: « the process by which knowledge of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the

⁹ EUA (European University Association) is the lobby of the European universities rectors and a consultative member of the Bologna Process.

¹⁰ The topic of the normative diffusion mechanism is vast and I had to work looking for intersections between clues and hypotheses.

development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system. » ¹¹

Different elements sustain the evidence for this diffusion mechanism. First the indirect control exerted by OECD¹² on governmental policies in general and HE policies in particular. Governments fear bad ranking and act in strict congruence with OECD recommendations. In the end, OECD furnishes them new arguments justifying public action. In the specific case of education, if the mission of universities in the XIXth century was exalting Nation through literature and romantic history and producing patriotic individuals, nowadays the taboo on nationalism and protectionism current since World War II made these missions obsolete. Trade should ensure peace as Kant said and the only way seems to be economic liberalism - even more since the collapse of the communist experiment. In the end the OECD advocates for a total materialism (the individual produces in order to consume) guaranteeing prosperity and peace by a liberal, innovative, knowledge-based global economy.

Let's stress that UNESCO works still more with OECD. The two organizations published in April 2003 *Financing Education - Investments and Returns*, a study examining how education level of workforce is related to economic growth in 16 emergent economies and concluding that investing in education, at all levels, is highly beneficial in terms of national and individual wealth.¹³ Both institutions together have also published in December 2005 "UNESCO/OECD guidelines on "Quality provision in cross-border higher education" to the attention of public authorities, HE institutions, quality assurance organisms, homologation institutions and students' associations, in the context of growth of cross-border education during the last 20th last (more mobility, branch campuses, Internet

¹¹ DOLOWITZ, D., AND MARSH, D., « Learning from abroad : the role of policy transfer in contemporary policy making », *Gouvernance*, 13 (1), p.5, cited in ENOS-ATTALI, S., JÖNSSON, A., AND SHEPPARD, E., « Phénomènes de convergence dans un contexte européen. Quel rôle pour l'europanisation ? », contribution to the study day « Européanisation des politiques publiques et intégration européenne », Ecole doctorale de l'IEP de Paris, 13 February 2004, <http://www.sciences-po.paris.fr>, p.24.

¹² UNESCO could have played this part but does not have enough financial resources in order to do this. US desertion during 12 years until 2004 cost a lot to the institution.

¹³ EURYDICE, *Education in the News : Europe*, n°23, April 2003, p.2 ; source : « Investing in Education Pays Rich Dividends, UNESCO/OECD Study Confirms », <http://www.oecd.org/EN/document/0,,EN-document-590-17-no-12-39002-590,00.html>, 08/04/2003.

education).¹⁴ The work of UNESCO, an institution created to deal with education matters, is thus coming closer from OECD's one, whose topic was in the beginning strictly economic: UNESCO is working with OECD - and not the opposite.

Networking of elites and experts occurs in this context: "Creation of transnational institutions for consultation, expertise, evaluation or information contributes to accentuate cooperation of actors participating in the elaboration of new political solutions or to reformulate public action in different national cases. Capable of sharing the same motivations, information and expertise on a given topic, these actors convey a common vision of a given public problem, then diffused to policymakers of different countries."¹⁵

These mechanisms are similar to what has been called by DiMaggio and Powell as « normative pressures » i.e. pressures underlain by a cognitive basis common to the different transnational actors.¹⁶ The diffusion also propagates itself from every member of the network, that distributes within its own decision-making area the same logics and norms of action.¹⁷

That would put a name on the fact that the OECD "influences [...] the European Commission that often only copy-pastes" its texts. The fashionable themes among the European persons responsible of the education such as "knowledge economy", "learning economy", "learning organization", "lifelong learning", are mere resummptions of notions elaborated by the OECD."¹⁸ The European Union would itself play a role in the observable mechanisms of imitation. First on the fashion of the network of experts that I have just given: "introducing,

¹⁴ REPRESAS, S., « UNESCO e OCDE exigem novas regras no ensino internacional », *Diario economico*, 13 December 2005, http://www.diarioeconomico.com/edicion/diario_economico/edicion_impresa/universidades/pt/desarrollo/599557.html, 15/02/2006, and OCDE/UNESCO, « Lignes directrices OCDE/UNESCO pour des prestations de qualité dans l'enseignement supérieur transfrontalier », 5 December 2005, http://www.oecd.org/document/37/0,2340,en_2649_201185_35793253_1_1_1_1,00.html, 15/02/2006.

¹⁵ ENOS-ATTALI, S., JÖNSSON, A., AND SHEPPARD, E., « Phénomènes de convergence dans un contexte européen. Quel rôle pour l'europanisation ? », contribution to the study day « Européanisation des politiques publiques et intégration européenne », Ecole doctorale de l'IEP de Paris, 13 February 2004, <http://www.sciences-po.paris.fr>, p.28. Translated from French. A subdivision of this type of mechanisms is the diffusion of a given conception of the topic and of which actions should be done by the actors having an interest in the diffusion, like advocacy coalitions (Paul Sabatier), multinational companies, associations or non governmental interest groups, international organizations etc. (p.29).

¹⁶ ENOS-ATTALI, S., JÖNSSON, A., AND SHEPPARD, E., « Phénomènes... », *op. cit.*, p.28.

¹⁷ EID., p.28.

¹⁸ LAVAL, CHR., AND WEBER, L., DIR., *Le nouvel ordre éducatif mondial. OMC, Banque mondiale, OCDE, Commission européenne, Nouveaux Regards - Syllepse*, 2002 p.77. Translated from French.

coordinating and financing networks of experts or elites to the Community level, [the community institutions] contribute actively to the proliferation of such forms of intellectual cooperation. [...] the community level is therefore susceptible to intervene to encourage the progress of public policies in the member countries to evolve in a same direction."¹⁹

I refer to the seminars and meetings animated by the Commission around the Bologna Process, in a spirit of open method of coordination. Then, as it is stressed by Enos-Attali, Jönsson and Sheppard, "it is difficult to disregard the role of the EU completely in the mechanisms of imitation : if the political decision-makers on the national level appear as the essential actors behind these steps, [...] these decision-makers act anyway in a European space. Therefore one can think the European integration contributes to the starting point of the imitation mechanism, on the one hand while creating multiple opportunities of contact and exchanges between political decision-makers of different member countries and, on the other hand, while making more visible different political solutions implemented in the countries members of the EU or advocated directly by the EU. We find again this shape of action to the very heart of the instruments developed on the Community level since the last decade", this is: open method of coordination, benchmarking and diffusion of good practices."²⁰

From the examples treated in their article (social policies in direction of the families, policies of defence, foreign security policy), authors conclude "that the EU actively and deliberately participates to encourage mimesis processes in order to favour a progressive and voluntarily harmonization of the policies driven by its members countries."²¹

Bruno Jobert lightens up the symmetrical part of this norm diffusion while unveiling the reasons for European elites to convert to neo-liberalism advocated by the OECD amongst others: "the receipt of neo-liberalism in the governmental practices [...] depends [...] first of the level of wear of the policy formulas that oriented until then the political exchanges. [...] The degree of receptiveness to the neo-liberalism doesn't seem to depend too narrowly on the

¹⁹ ENOS-ATTALI, S., JÖNSSON, A., AND SHEPPARD, E., « Phénomènes... », *op. cit.*, p.29.

²⁰ *EID.*, p.27.

²¹ *EID.*, p.28.

ideological orientation of the governing parties. [...] This way, the Thatcherian voluntarism is worthy of the disillusionments caused by the inability of the old models to stop the economic decline. In the same way it is the obligation to submit to IMF injunctions to adjust some financial growing difficulties who drove the French socialist government to a radical revision of its strategy. [...] The neo-liberalism predominantly presents itself like a powerful set of arguments between the hands of political actors aiming to modify the terms of the political exchanges in the name of a national survival requirement." ²²

Besides, this conversion to the neo-liberalism comes generally from "the old elites that, often with success, looked for perpetuating their influence, even if they had to modify the orientations of it. The promoters of neo-liberalism are mostly repentant touched by the grace of this new verb [...]." ²³

These findings confirm the vision according to which the imitation "of the programs, the solutions or the norms of action having had success in another country or political system (or, on the contrary, [...] the lessons from the experiences that have functioned less well elsewhere)" appear to be interesting for the decision-makers "in a phase of assessment of the actions led in the past, and in a phase of reformulation of the solutions." ²⁴

For DiMaggio and Powell, the choice for « isomorphous mimesis » "emanates from an uncertainty that, felt at a given time by organizations, would incite these to model themselves on other organizations valued as more legitimate or successful." ²⁵ The context of present political uncertainty explains therefore why, for a lot of decision-makers, the neo-liberal option constitutes the only alternative. Beyond national political elites, some even say, in a Marxist perspective, that there is a global "transnational capitalist class". For William I. Robinson and Jerry Harris for example, « A transnational capitalist class (TCC) has emerged as that segment of the world bourgeoisie that represents transnational capital, the owners of the leading worldwide means of production as

²² JOBERT, B., DIR., *Le tournant néo-libéral en Europe*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994, pp.18-19.

²³ JOBERT, B., DIR., *Le tournant néo-libéral en Europe*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994, p.15.

²⁴ ENOS-ATTALI, S., JÓNSSON, A., AND SHEPPARD, E., « Phénomènes... », *op. cit.*, p.26.

²⁵ EID., p.26.

embodied in the transnational corporations and private financial institutions. [...] The TCC became politicized from the 1970s into the 1990s and has pursued a class project of capitalist globalization institutionalized in an emergent trans-national state apparatus and in a "Third Way" political program. » ²⁶

This vision of the things means to show a reality passing the national setting, to which Pierre Muller gives a particular attention while underlining for example that "the legitimacy of the neo-liberal program depended on the capacity its promoters to find some correspondents in the symbolic stock of the different national cultures : the reactivation of the old liberal ideas in Great-Britain, of the republican idea in France, was more propitious to the reception of this programme, than the ordo-liberal German tradition or that the interventionist consensus shared between governing parties and communist party in Italy. [...] In the case of Great-Britain, the innovative impulse first resides in the government himself that drew its expertise from private institutions, the famous neo-conservative think tanks [...] Elsewhere, the most meaningful impulse towards neo-liberalism rather comes from the experts who provide solutions and new 'recipes' for the networks of the monetary and economic politics. Their influence [...] [can be assessed] in the imposition of a set of constraints [...] Here prevails thus a process of encircling the management-like neo-liberalism carried by the economists of State in France, by the Italian *professori* or by the experts of the Ministry of the German economy." ²⁷

On the opposite, Robinson et Harris stress the de-territorialization of the ruling class²⁸ : « The traditional assumption by Marxists that

²⁶ ROBINSON, W. I., AND HARRIS, J., « Towards A Global Ruling Class ? Globalization and the Transnational Capitalist Class », *Science and Society*, vol. 64, Spring 2000, p.11.

²⁷ JOBERT, B., DIR., *Le tournant néo-libéral en Europe*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994, pp.16-17.

²⁸ Authors use the word "class" because they point the existence of a common socialization for this group of decision-makers : « The Transnational State has been one important forum of transnational class socialization, as have world class universities, transnationally oriented think tanks, the leading bourgeois foundations, such as Harvard 's School of International Business, the Ford and Carnegie Foundations, policy planning groups such as the Council on Foreign Relations, and son on. » (p.19) The World Economic Forum represents the quintessence of the class socialization institution (in this case the class being the TCC, transnational capitalist class) : according to van der Pijl, the WEF presents strict admission criteria that preserve its peer character . (VAN DER PIJL, K., « The international level », in BOTTOMORE, T., AND BRYM, R. J., ÉD., *The Capitalist Class : An International Study*, New York, New York University Press, 1998, p.133.) The WEF is formed

the capitalist class is by theoretical fiat organized in nation-states and driven by the dynamics of national capitalist competition and state rivalries needs to be modified."²⁹ That "historic bloc" would be made of "transnational corporations and financial institutions, the elites that manage the supranational economic planning agencies, major forces in the dominant political parties, media conglomerates, and technocratic elites and state managers in both North and South". We pass thus national elites and the authors clearly indicate, according to the findings of Leslie Sklair³⁰, that the TCC does not constitute the collusion of the national capitalistic bourgeoisies, because of its objective and subjective position as well as its composition.³¹ This is why they use the term of *transnational* capitalist class and non *international* capitalist class. Refusing intergovernmental approaches, the paper intends to stress a fundamental and qualitatively new phenomenon. One would have attended the emergence of transnational fractions within the dominant local groups since the years 70, and these fractions would have taken the power in the years 80 and 90: "They have captured the "commanding heights" of state policy making : key ministries and bureaucracies in the policymaking apparatus - especially Central Banks, finance and foreign ministries - as key government branches that link countries to the global economy. They have used national

of « the CEOs of the top 1000 TNCs (this component body is known as "Foundation Members" and is the core of the WEF) ; representatives from 100 of the most influential media groups worldwide ("World Media Leaders") ; key policymakers from national governments around the world and from international organizations ("World Economic Leaders") ; select academics and experts from political, economic, scientific, social and technological fields ("Forum Fellows"); and so on. "A body of this scope clearly has not existed before", observes van der Pijl. "It is a true International of capital. » (p.19) However this « class » has intern disagreements, between conservators of free market defending global *laissez-faire* (they even ask for abolition of MF) and a nonrevised version of the Washington consensus ; neo-liberal structuralists advocate for the adaptation of this consensus by the means of the action of a superspetructure stabilizing volatility of the world financial system (it is the more numerous group, including Bill Clinton, George Bush (Junior et Senior), Michel Camdessus, George Soros, etc.) ; and the neo-liberal regulationists, who propose a post-Washington consensus and advocate for a large stabilization and securization of the political system. But even the last ones do not propose a new kind of Keynesianism or redistribution mechanisms or state control system.

²⁹ ROBINSON, W. I., AND HARRIS, J., « Towards A Global Ruling Class ? Globalization and the Transnational Capitalist Class », *Science and Society*, vol. 64, Spring 2000, p.11.

³⁰ See SKLAIR, L., *Sociology of the Global System*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, or SKLAIR, L., « The Transnational Capitalist Class and Global Capitalism : The Case of the Tobacco Industry », *Political Power and Social Theories*, n°12, pp. 3-43.

³¹ ROBINSON, W. I., AND HARRIS, J., « Towards A Global Ruling Class ? Globalization and the Transnational Capitalist Class », *Science and Society*, vol. 64, Spring 2000, p.13.

state apparatuses to advance globalization and to pursue sweeping economic restructuring and the dismantling of the old nation-state-based Keynesian welfare and developmentalist projects. They have sought worldwide market liberalization (following the neo-liberal model) and projects of economic integration such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, and the European Union. They have promoted a supra-national infrastructure of the global economy, such as the World Trade Organization [...]"³²

A transnational state, not yet centralized, is even emerging according to the authors. It would consist of the transformed State Nation as well as of the supranational economic forums (IMF, World Bank, WTO, regional banks, World Economic Forum, etc.) and the supranational political forums (G7, recent G22, United Nations, OECD, EU, OSCE etc.).³³ The program produced by this new elite promotes a political and economic restructuring centred on market liberalization ('Washington consensus'), and whose expression is for example the beginning of the structural adjustment policies imposed to the Southern countries from 1982 on (WTO Summit of Cancun, Mexico).

I think that these approaches are not incompatible. We would have on the one side a transnational elite group evolving in largely de-territorialized contexts, and on the other side, national elites gradually converted to the ideas of that "class" diffusing its ideas in the abovementioned institutions and groups.

■ Various additional movements complement this vertical diffusion, notably horizontal halo effects between actors of the left amount of the scale, coloured in purple. The first possibility is the diffusion from a local configuration to another, like when a good "recipe" is imitated from a University to another. For example, in January 2003, the Portuguese government announced the implementation of a MIT pole in the Science and Technology Faculty of the Lisbon Universidade Nova (the pole is dedicated to postgraduate education).³⁴

³² EID., p.18.

³³ ROBINSON, W. I., AND HARRIS, J., « Towards A Global Ruling Class ?, *op. cit.*, p.18.

³⁴ X., « MIT em Portugal », <http://ww.esupmetablog.blogspot.com>, 3 January 2006, from QUEIROS, M., « Universidades contestam atrasos no Plano Tecnológico e Bolonha », *Diário economico*, 3 January 2006, http://diarioeconomico.sapo.pt/edicion/diario_economico/edicion_impresa/universidades/pt/desar_rollo/605225.html, 06/03/2006.

Another possibility is the diffusion from a state to another. It is the case when peer pressure mechanisms and best practices diffusion occur, like in the Bologna Process. A Belgian student representative active in ESIB at the time told me a very interesting story. Before the Summit of the ministers of the education in Bergen, the possibility of publication in the press of a map showing with a colour (green, orange, red) the progress of the implementation of the Bologna Process in every member country provoked panic amongst ministries of the orange- and red-coloured countries: "There was all that story of the stocktaking with all the colours : green, orange, red... Well there was this valuation that was done, by a working group once again, where everybody was represented, and which had, according to questionnaires that every administration of every country had sent back to the group etc.-- colour codes were attributed to the countries. And indeed there has been, in the last days, there has been [...] crises, because, for example, they had been given an orange colour whilst the neighbour had had a light green colour and that was not ok, and that 'frankly', that 'how could we have a red colour since we do everything very well' ; 'and how is it that two months ago your own administration told us that you did not do anything about that topic?' : 'yes, no, but it is because they are incompetent' ; well it was incredible. [...] And they were scary! They were scary that it would go in the newspapers! We had the last meetings of the *Bologna Follow Up Group Meeting* and of the *Board*, we had meetings where people were saying 'But if it goes in the newspapers, my minister will be very angry, no, we must prevent that, we must remove the colours.' And I think that indeed one of the compromises was that we removed the colours. So you had only the, you see the different shades of grey, you see, very dark, very clear, you couldn't see very well anymore, you didn't see anything! [laugh] That was what they expected obviously. It was, it was, it was staggering, I would not have imagined that they could be scared stiff on that. So it works. And that was the aim of course. Because before you had no such things. But there you had that thing and I can tell you... It was renewed of course... And one of our big successes in Bergen is to have win that the social dimension will be in there [in the stocktaking]." ³⁵ The fear described is a good ratio of the strength of peer pressure operating in the Bologna Process.

³⁵ Interview, Brussels, 27 February 2006.

■ A vertical diffusion can occur inside of the policy takers spheres (coloured in blue), if the information channels function well. The penetration of information in local environment will however be difficult if the topic is in discussion only on an international level and is not really part of the local news (in particular if we consider that a lot of students' representatives are elected for one-year terms). A delay in the circulation of information and the norm seems almost unavoidable. But the setting up and the consolidation by the policy takers of a reactive speech (often opposing the changes), will sanction at the same time the norm.

■ Last, a horizontal diffusion more or less belated, coloured in green, brings to the knowledge of the policy takers the new policy orientations. This occurs during the phases of discussion or implementation of the policies. It is the last way for the students to be informed about the norms and processes. Time to think is extremely short if no information has been looked for before. Among others, SUD Etudiant Grenoble militants declared to me about the increase of the tuition fees in universities: "the students don't want to believe this; they believe it only when it happens to them."³⁶

b. Obstacles to the diffusion of the counter-norm
(differentiation of the information and visions of the world
and its consecutive weakness

Besides this, the right-hand side of the diffusion scale is well less structured than the left-hand side one, because the information circulates less well there. The channels of communication can indeed be damaged because of intra-group concurrence. It is the case between FEF and UNECOF, the two legally recognized federations of students in French speaking Belgium, which are rival (even if UNECOF presents a really lower profile in the political world and the media, its existence is guaranteed by the interests of politicians to have not only one interlocutor). The two organizations never collaborate: the information FEF receives from ESIB (the European federation whose FEF is a member of, whilst

³⁶ Conversation, Grenoble, July 2006.

UNECOF is not) is not passed to UNECOF. The transfer occurs thus only via the public website of FEF, on which are posted summarized information about all topics, including international ones like commodification and Bologna.

But apart from this concurrence between groups of activists, we should first and foremost consider, in order to explain the difference of structure between policy makers and policy takers, that the activity of the people on the left and on the right are of the diffusion scale not the same. The first ones are dealing with economic activities, the second ones are defending principles and are part of a social movement. In the second case, we should also consider that our students are for the huge majority doing volunteer work, and thus choose an activity which they like to dedicate time to. Not everybody choose the same. And therefore, the focus of attention in the flow of information will not be the same.

Let's thus start from the idea that people dedicate voluntarily their time on something that they find interesting. The definition of "something interesting" is not the same everywhere, it differs from group to group. Indeed, "social networks, because they make interactions easier, function [...] as places of production or maintenance of the meaning. [...] Through interpersonal relationships is defined the consensus founding our perception of the reality."³⁷ In the case of this study we have identified diverse groups with diverse definitions of what is important and how it should be fought for. We enter here in a description of the organizational landscape of the European student representation, which is larger than the one of the anti-commodification movement, but includes it for sure. The following diagram shows different networks in the mobilization and their relationships. The important here is not to understand which organization is doing what, but to understand that different people are acting at different levels and in different types of organizations, each level and each type of organization implying a vision of the world and of what is important in the world. Let's try to give a broad picture of this diversity, without entering too much in the details regarding the organizations.³⁸

³⁷ Mann, P., *L'action collective. Mobilisation et organisation des minorités actives*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1991, coll. « U Sociologie », p.150

³⁸ For a detailed analysis of this organizational landscape, see my PhD thesis, Genicot, G., « L'intérêt étudiant face à l'Europe. La représentation étudiante en Belgique, France, Italie et Portugal dans le Processus de Bologne, 1999-2005. », to be presented in September 2007.

he themes of Bologna and the commodification of education, which are the translation in militant language of the changes occurring these days in HE, are central only to international militants, i.e. those dedicating time to an explicitly international organisation, such as ESIB, ESN (Erasmus Student Network), AEGEE (Assemblée des états généraux des étudiants d'Europe), EINFS (Education is not for sale) or the EEF (European Education Forum). This may seem logical - Bologna, the GATS treaty, joint degrees and branch campuses are highly international matters - but it is not - Bologna remains a coordination of national reforms of HE, and the GATS, the joint degrees or the branch campuses are individual challenges for the nations ; finally, the daily life is changed at the local level because of these changes. To summarize, it is not normal at all that international matters only for the more internationalized.

In actual facts, they are all interested but they use another language and they don't pay attention in the same way to these topics. ESIB students (column A) use the language of HE experts, they know international institutions like the EU, the Council of Europe or the OECD and they know the topic in details, which is essential for them to lobby these institutions. ESIB students treat thus international HE policy making as a major concern and collect high level information on this.

Other professionalized organizations presented under B present a non isomorphous structure with the EU; unlike ESIB, they don't have a national level but are federations of local groups directly on the Europe level, in a federalist spirit. The structure here does not allow these organizations to get information from the national level, where they have no contact. The vision of HE reforms will thus neglect the national level and the national problems, to focus on the direct consequences of reforms on the local level.

Other international activists have again a totally different prospective on the HE changes : the participants to European Education Forums or European Social Forums are critical on the action of ESIB and generally the professionnalization and cooptation of student representation in the EU, stressing the "participation trap" and the domestication of protest. Surely these actors obtain less information than the first ones, which is the price to pay to conserve their independence.

Already on the European level we can see that not every actor has the same information (it depends on its position inside the policy making system) and also that different type of actors like different type of information: some are interested in the exact process of policy building, others in the concrete consequences of this, others in reflecting about the ideology of the policies.

The issue complicated even more when we come to the national level, where even inside of the ESIB network, international delegates from national NUSes experience difficulties to communicate about international issues before their arrival on the national scene. Numerous interviews showed that it was not easy for the delegates to talk about these subjects and that the interest of the national staff was limited. The actuality was often considered more important than the next processes to come, and the result is that often people at the national level were not really prepared when Bologna reform appeared, since they did not want to spend time on this issue before it came in the news. The same problem exists in every country between the national and the local levels : people are much more preoccupied by the immediate projects than by the ones who will come next year. If we need now talk about national and local organizations who don't have a link with ESIB (D), we need to say that people active there have poorer information on the issues.

This picture of the situation shows the difficulty to anticipate issues and stresses the importance of the immediate context of the action. On the European level, time is not the same as on the national and the local level : when the draft of a Ministerial Communiqué is being prepared, people on the national level have to cope with a drastic augmentation of tuition fees, while at the local level, students mobilize against the introduction of a numerus clausus in their Faculty. All these issues are one single issue demultiplied but the activists do not necessarily see the link between the topics, because the pragmatic conditions in which they act influence them. International activists for example present a lot of times a high cultural profile: they master different languages, are used to travel, and have developed an international sociability. On the national level, activists prefer the environment of the national politics and national media, maybe looking for the door to a political career. On the local level, most of the students dedicating time to an association are doing so as a hobby and to conduct a project during their time at the University;

they are not interested in travelling forth and back to the European spheres or international anti-globalization forums, nor want them to be on TV or to meet a minister.

This attitude towards the tasks (how people see their roles) affects a lot the way they look at the policies. A European activist of ESIB will consider the role of the European Commission with interest, whereas the national unionist negotiating with the ministry will consider only national actors as responsible for the implementation of the decisions, and finally the local unions will consider the role of local authorities more than anything else. By doing so, activists give a particular orientation to their claims, and speak a language which has not the uniformity that has the one the policy makers. In France, the new tendencies will be interpreted in the frame of republican values and seen as an attack to equal opportunities of learning; in Belgium, the lack of financing of the French speaking Community (the authority responsible for HE in French speaking Belgium) will be linked to the issue of the federalisation of the State. In Catania, Sicily, we interviewed unionists who understood the idea of commodification of HE with the influence of a mafia on its management; in a little HE institution of Lisbon, Portugal, we interviewed the president of the local association who described the commodification as the fact that students had to learn things by heart and carry them like a heavy bag.

To summarize, every place, every network induces a symbolic vision of the issues.

Conclusion

A new international norm on HE exists and is diffusing amongst HE policy makers and takers. Anti-norm values also exist. However, the norm is diffused better than the anti-norm, since the large common frame of the latter is fragile and subdivided according to:

- the countries of the activists;
- their geographical level of action;
- the aims of their organizations (political youths or organizations focussed on HE; European, national or local organizations; protest organizations or lobby oriented organizations).

Therefore the individuals are not always conscious of their common values and interests. A coordinated protest against the new

HE norm seems thus far from reach. The current situation is well described by this Italian student activist from UDU (Unione degli universitari, Italian student union with an independent purpose): "On the issue of commodification, how do you see it now, with your experience... What are the most important issues to mobilize, where is it necessary to mobilize? In these days?" "[sigh] The impression that I have now is that by now there is no much left to mobilize on. I mean that the principle-- the idea that education is a right and not a commodity, that it is a public service, a public responsibility, and not a commodity, is not considered in practice. [...] almost everywhere, it is possible to commodify in the easiest and useful way, for who takes the biggest advantage of it. And... And so the question is about limiting the damage. More than combating commodification of knowledge. And very often I am really confronted, this is, the discussion, with a number of interlocutors, is not 'education is a right or not' or 'is a commodity or not', but: 'knowing that you say that it is a commodity and that I say that it is a right, you give me proposals, and I have to answer using your language.'"

Annex

The two main sources used to understand what the new international norm in HE is, were two press reviews addressed to HE professionals : *Education in the News* and the *Observatoire Boivigny*, together with national fonts. The press reviews were the main source because they broadcast information used by HE stakeholders. The diversity of the sources proves the uniformity of the discourse - and of the facts - on the side of policy makers.

■ The magazine *Education in the News*, consulted on a 3-year period (issues 17 to 36, April 2002 to October 2005) is published by Eurydice (The Information Network on Education in Europe) and summarizes information from the following sources:

- Websites of Ministries and national authorities:

- German Federal Ministry for Education and Research

- New Zealand Education Ministry

- Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research

- Danish, Portuguese, English and French Ministries of Education

- Belgian French speaking Community Education Ministry

- Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research

- Irish Ministry of Education and Sciences

- Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports

- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

- Canadese National Council of Statistics on Education

- E-mail bulletin of the British Council

- Study in Sweden, website promoting Swedish HE

- European and international websites:

- European Commission

- National Units from Eurydice

- OECD

- Newspapers:

- The Times Higher Education supplement*

- The Guardian*

- Diario economico* (Portugal)

- The Age*

- This month in Europe*

- The Achiever*

- BBC News

- Other websites

- like the one of the 14th International Meeting of University

■ The "Observatoire Boivigny" website is published by the "Association Boivigny" created in 2003. This association functions with the contributions of 5 persons, 3 of them being journalists. Editors are volunteers and have another job. Functioning expenses (amongst others the informatics) are financed by advertisement. This observatory is thus a private initiative, without link with a party, a HE institution or a company. It wishes to be as much as possible a professional letter, even if its rhythm of publication (monthly) not always allows articles about immediate news. I have looked systematically at the information given by the "Observatoire" over a one-year period (2005).

■ Amongst complementary sources, I shall mention, without being exhaustive:

- Newspapers and magazines from the 4 countries studied : *Le Monde* (France), *Libération* (France), *Le Soir* (Belgium), *La Libre Belgique* (Belgium), *La Repubblica* (Italy), *Publico* (Portugal), *Diario economico* (Portugal), *Diario de noticias* (Portugal), etc.
- The portuguese HE metablog (blog of blogs) www.esupmetablog.blogspot.com.
- Emmanuel Davidenkoff's blog "Carnets de correspondance", today closed. (Davidenkoff was a journaliste to the French newspaper "Libération" and specialized in educational issues).