

"Rules everyone can live with? Higher education's 'Bologna Process' as an instrument of European integration"

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In March 2010 46 European governments will launch a European Higher Education Area. This area will be characterised by structures and procedures which make diverse national higher education systems compatible and comparable. This will be the outcome of the decade-long efforts known as the Bologna Process. The premise of this paper is that a sociological institutionalism framework helps to explain how and why an intergovernmental process has been able to inspire an intense degree of regional collaboration in policy-making in higher education as participants have developed the rules and adapted their behaviour to European level-policy-making. following what March and Olsen have called the logic of appropriateness. Taking the example of the management of the Bologna process, it shows how a small group of actors has used the opportunities of a new and large European political space to drive policy change by a form of the open method of coordination, and through self-styled 'informal' rules. In the process the paper reveals the extent to which the Bologna Process, which extends beyond EU boundaries and covers a policy sector over which the EU has no direct competence, has developed largely in symbiosis with the EU, but with some important differentiation. The paper ends with a discussion of the adequacies of the 'logic of appropriateness' as an explanation of policy change.