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The Politics and Policies of Bologna Reforms in Hungary
(background study)

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The objective of our research was the study of the introduction of Bologna process and two-cycle degree system from a multiactor, multidimensional and multilevel perspective. The research aim was to analyze the change processes in higher education, and the actor beliefs and structures. The perspective on Bologna process is primarily political (the politics and policies of Bologna process), rather than technical-structural one, though we provide a presentation even on this aspect. Accordingly, the analysis involves not only the study of higher education policy contents, but how these policies are evolving and altered under the policy actor games. We are conceptualizing the Bologna process as a new platform for the higher education policy debates and struggles. In the article the primary structuring principle was the interpretation of the Bologna-policies on different (governance) levels and the entire policy process (higher education problem structuring and agenda-setting, policy programming, implementation and evaluation of reform performance) in the research of national implementation.

The understanding of the dynamics, policy ideas and functioning of national and institutional-disciplinary implementations is at the centre of the focus of the empirical research. According to the complexity of studied phenomenon we were using varied methods and data sources with multiple operationalizations and triangulations (critical multiplism) in an iterative manner. In the research process we were collected the interpretations of actors and affected policy communities at various levels of implementation (e.g. government, central educational administrations, political opposition, leading academics, expert groups, buffer organizations, universities and colleges, disciplinary organizations) regarding the reform policies unfolding under the Bologna-umbrella. The primary data sources were the semi-structured interview and various document texts (e.g. press articles, committee minutes, expert analysis, reports), on which we conducted content analysis. The outcome of this empirical work is presented now through a case study on Hungarian Bologna process.

1. The Educational Reform Politics and Policies after 1989/90
Behind the walls of monolithic ideology of totalitarianism the dynamics of interest struggles, bargaining and pragmatism formed the central and local educational policies (Halász, 2001); some invisible processes conceived as existing only in democracies. In practice, the political pluralism well preceded the democracy in Hungary (Bozóki, 2003), and this pluralism can be identified in the attitudes of intellectuals toward reforms and competing policy alternatives formulated by them (Körösényi, 1987). In 70s and 80s the educational policy research evolved under central policy planning headings mostly from an Anglo-Saxon perspective. The fresh approach conceptualized as a paradigmatic change (Kozma, 2001; Sáska, 2001) produced new outcomes and insights for education. The educational policy researchers concentrated on local and institutional interest conflicts, the relation between local power structures and intellectuals, the bargaining mechanisms between different actors and levels of policy-making, and generally on rival interest groups formed around schools and education. Through their expert roles explicitly they institutionalized a novel form of policy discourse and planning concepts, whilst implicitly a call for democracy and pluralism in a classical - and more idealized “Western” – sense.

These educational policy insights produced the basis of alternatives developed by educational researchers. In the mid 80s they were claiming the de-concentration and decentralization of power, widening the forms of actor’s interest articulation, the new and open models of planning, the linking of markets and self-government in different policy making levels, and consequently for the emancipation of education from state shackles (Kozma, 1992, 2001; Sáska, 2001). These ambitions have been packaged into politically legitimized argumentation for greater professional autonomy of teachers as the precondition of effective school work. In higher education despite the failures of top-down reforms, in some innovative higher education institutions - governed by reform communists - have been implemented internal restructurings (e.g. introduction of short-cycle study programs and Anglo-Saxon degree programs in Karl Marx University and Technical University of Budapest). Consequently, the higher education institutions and their academic community also pressed the central governance for greater institutional autonomy and academic freedom. In 1985 when the reform communists came to power in education these alternatives or policy ideas turn into governmental policy. Although in the up-stage bargaining process several elements of progressive reform policies was softened, altered or even removed in order to make politically acceptable for old-fashioned socialists and anti-reformist academics.

In the period of democratic transformation (1988-1990) there awakens repeatedly the need for comprehensive reform in education. The reform vision in character it was liberal and anti-etatist, emphasizing the decentralization and autonomy as general solution for various problems. Since then to nowadays the most important watchword of stakeholders is autonomy and academic freedom echoed also by central governance, even if this is guided by the interest to introduce new control mechanism under the umbrella of new public management.

The educational researchers were skeptical toward top-down, universal reform ambitions
grounded on classic technocratic planning (Kozma, 1988; Lukács and Várhegyi, 1989; Bajomi, 2001; Halász, 2007). Based on the reform implementation experiences of the 70s and 80s they opposed the concept that the education crisis symptoms could be alleviated with centrally directed, traditional reforms that shocks the whole system (Lukács and Várhegyi, 1989). They were suggesting a shift from closed technocratic planning to deliberative educational planning, where the policies are evolved in open and democratic debates between various actors of education. Due to the lack of whole scale social support the comprehensive reform has been rejected. The reforms were sustained only by a small minority of political, intellectual and local-institutional actors. Thus it was demagogy to speak about reforms (Kozma, 1988). Instead of restructuring they propose the emancipation of educational institutions from central control with deregulation in order to give way for local and institutional stakeholders influence over the questions affecting them. The systemic reform in this perspective is accumulation of bottom-up change initiatives (Halász, 2007). In contrary to other reform ideas concentrating on structures and arrangements this focus on regulations and civil rights instead of to give power to one-sided institutional, teacher or government perspectives (Kozma, 1988).

In addition, there can be emphasized the gradually increasing pluralism of policy actors with various possibilities to influence the higher education policy formulation. The culture of interest articulation and mediation from then is and remain corporative. In the second half of 80s enters the education policy arena the Hungarian Rector’s Conference and student’s self-government, as new interest representative and mediating actors. Whilst right after transformation such professional corporations or buffer organizations as the Higher Education and Research Council (HERC) or Hungarian Accreditation Agency (HAC). Next to this under the umbrella of central government has been created several forums for interest reconciliation of different parties. This process starts to demolish the concentration of power in the hands of a political elite minority and creates democratically elected bodies. However, as can be argued the authority over education there has been only moved to and shared with professional elites, but continuously remain exclusive in terms of the participation of wider social groups in policy making.

In transition periods despite the periodically emerging top-down reform agendas - especially with progressive governments – the change in higher education remain incremental and internalist process. In fact, the radical change initiatives in every case were quieted under the pressure of interest groups to a small-scale reforms and gradual change. The single radical change was the expansion of higher education in terms of the institutional network and learning ambitions. The student body and system parameters expanded, but in a higher education culture for elites, which changed slowly. The progressive governments view the higher education institutions as conservative entities where a considerable adaptation to political, social and economical transformations, the identification of external needs articulated by the stakeholders, and even finding of adequate organization, content, management and funding structures cannot occur without the central intervention in the form of universalist reform plans. In this approach the institutional autonomy turns into a burden, thus for an effective reform it is necessary to shorten, what will be realized gradually. Naturally, the motivation for these governmental interventions
was reflected the perceived external pressures on education, but also proper national policy aspirations.

2. The Evolving Political and Professional Agenda of Hungarian Bologna Process

Hungary in 1999 joined the European Higher Education Area between the first signing governments. At this time the central decision makers and national higher education system were concerned with the implementation of “World Bank reforms” inherited from previous government. In addition, in one hand the political and professional elites were engaged with the institutional mergers, whilst in other hand there reigned the idea that the Bologna Declaration will have the same destiny as other supranational agreements in the field, without any real effect. In the first years this attitude was almost widespread in Bologna-countries. The Prague Ministerial Conference in 2001 revealed that there was little progress in harmonization of higher education architecture. In order to remedy the whole scale inertia and absence of enthusiasm was formulated a proposal for establishing the Bologna Follow-Up Group and elaboration of progress reports financed by the resources of European Commission.

The external and internal events (e.g. change of political-administrative control of education) induced the conservative government to create the policy framework for the implementation of Bologna objectives. The development-oriented policy envisioned a small-scale transformation where the main aim was to introduce the two-cycle degree program without comprehensive sectoral reform or educational paradigm change. In fact, this vision conceptualized the degree reform as a simple formal process, where the main task is the harmonization of national degrees with Bologna framework, or in other words the integration of new structures into old arrangements. This would have meant the sustaining of binary configuration, the optional institutional implementation of two-cycle programs, and consequently the parallel operation of old and new structures, at least for a time. For example in this concept the short-cycle three year college programs were translated as BA/BSc, whilst the long-cycle academic specializations it would have been divided into two parts (e.g. 3+1 or 3+2). As a consequence, under this frame the three year BA/BSc academic programs would not have given professional qualification, only a record on fulfilled studies and acquired credits which authorizes its owner for further studies. Clearly, the concept defines the academic Bachelors from universities as preparatory and selective period for Masters. This approach to implementation, which mirrors the perspective of traditionalist academics, was legitimated by governmental policies, however, never implemented due to the political elections from 2002.

The new liberal-democrat educational government becomes engaged into a great reform process from 2002. The minister of education and allied experts were the same people who were not able to accomplish their reform goals from 1996 to 1998, because in 1998 the conservatives came into power. As a result, they have put again into agenda the previously unrealized reform plans and the Bologna-
objectives in one reform package. The political and professional (experts) rhetoric legitimated the governmental change priorities with international policy frameworks and agreements (the Bologna process and Lisbon process). The Hungarian Bologna process is chiefly identified with these reform attempts. In the next sessions we will present the policy process evolved under this political umbrella.

As Kingdon (1995) argues the process of fixing attention on one problem rather than another is a central part of agenda-setting, and there is a difference between condition and problem. The Bologna process in Hungary shows how the international competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education (conditions) frame the agenda-setting process, rather than the problems deduced from the national system. However, the agenda changed over time since this reform communication was not sustainable and turns into a problem-centric approach.

In this process a narrow and closed political and expert group achieves the ability to control the interpretation of conditions and problems, which ideologically (neoliberal) and disciplinarily (economics, management) was markedly unilateral. The pattern of agenda-setting chiefly suit to the ‘mobilization’ and ‘inside initiation’ model (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995) practiced by socialist one party states in one hand and in other by autocratic bureaucratic regimes. In the Hungarian case the decision-makers and some influential groups put an issue or problem on the agenda, but trying to avoid the contestation with a large public, however with little succes. In sum, the policy is formulated behind close doors by a small group of actors from political-administrative level and associated professional elites.

The agenda-setting approach influences the membership and activities of involved policy subsystems (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991). The ministry of education in 2002 invites an expert group whose membership had a long professional-political acquaintance, with common ideological principles, values and disciplinarily controlled problem perception (e.g. in terms of competition and cooperation, liberalization, decentralization, free choice and marketization, quality, efficiency and effectiveness, accountability). This guaranteed the logically consistent policy expertise and coherence of outcomes. The composition of expert group influences the process and generic elements chosen for problem definition, and their impacts on subsequent stages of policy-making (Pal, 1997).

The problem definition was absent from the first version of the so called “Joining the European Higher Education Area” (JEHEA) policy concept. The starting point is an attractive and considered future for Hungarian higher education, where the solution of problems is not an aim, but a device to the achievement of the desirable competitiveness. The slightly defined processes which characterize this objective are the globalization of knowledge market, and the integration to European Union, the changing social and economical demands for higher education, and the widening role of higher education supplying knowledge (JEHEA, 6 July 2003). In this original version the nationwide reform stayed on an idealist vision for Hungarian higher education with a market-oriented, strategical perspective. The argumentation for the reform mostly consisted from the reference to external, international pressures (European and global) and the previous failing reform attempts, rather than internal and national problems, what fits well
to the intergovernmental quality of Bologna, but even more to the supranational education policy of EU. In this approach the experts criticize the framing conditions of the national higher education system because of its lag behind to such normative constructs as the “modern trends”, “international standards”, or integration into the “community of developed countries” etc.. The first agenda-setting texts are moralizing and normative accounts. Summarily, in the first version the well-structured descriptive analyses of conditions or problems were absent.

The agenda-setting method has changed over time due to various critics of lacking an internalist, problem-centric view. The change can be observed in the subsequent versions of the expert text. The problem structuring appeared in the policy concept, however, the “lag behind” argumentation remain a governing element. The content and approach remained unchanged, whilst the structure is altered. The problems presented there seem to be drawn from the vision and international policy discourse.

The causal theories of this relative disadvantage consist from the next theses. The higher education system works with low efficiency and consequently beside a poor innovational ability. In binary structure the students are running in a predefined path and there is a lack of internal mobility between different institutional types (from colleges to universities). The public funding is inflexible and the governance is over-centralized. The content is not Europeanized and internationalized. The organization developed for elites is unable to tackle the claims of the mass education. The proliferation of specializations causes social damages. The professional management, the strategical planning and the market-oriented, entrepreneurial perspective is absent from the institutional culture. In sum, the claim-makers formalized problem definitions concerning the governance and financing, the institutional configuration of higher education, and internal organization and management of institutions.

From this complex picture the claim for comprehensive sectoral reform can be extrapolated. Simultaneously, several supplementary, competing and polemic problem-definitions appear in the policy discourse from reformist, skeptical and opposing actors. However, the homogenizing role of epistemic communities in interpretation and institutionalization of ideas can be observed (e.g. through media tematization).

The Bologna process agenda-setting function implies symbolic and strategic use of the process (Huisman et al., 2009). The Bologna constructions and interpretations for Central and Eastern European countries not differs primarily in its content from other parts of Europe, but in regard of in what context (post-socialist countries) is adapted, and this how influences the argumentation beside joining EHEA and imperative for reforms. In Central Europe the professional and social groups developed various reasoning for higher education reform, that can be divided into different Bologna-interpretations or frames. The research on Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe indicates there exist two main frame
The first is labeled “Joining the EHEA” or “Return to Europe”, and mainly governed by controversies in regard to national sovereignty and integration. The process is connected to the dynamics of transformation and transition from one ‘empire’ (Soviet) to another (EU). In this discourse the Bologna is the unfulfilled transformation of higher education in/after 1989/90 and the definite break from socialist traditions. Although there was various attempts to re-establish the higher education traditions expressing national identities in these countries after a time become obvious that nor with this arrangement and culture neither with socialist heritage cannot these countries enter the EHEA (or EU). The integration is the meaning of post-socialist transformation, and altogether the end of this process. In order to come to port (compatibility with EHEA countries) they should launch standardizing higher education reforms. As a result they become similar to and catch up with “Europe”. (Kozma, 2008) In the discourse these theses cannot be contested, since they are discussion starting points, rather than controversial questions. The terms describing the process (“Europe”, “Europeanism”, “West” or “European Higher Education Area”) peculiarly are distorted, ideological and monopolized. They are often used arbitrary and instrumentalized in discrediting competing viewpoints, thus paralyzing the debate. (Körösényi, 1996) In some critical perspective, the Bologna process as a political construct becomes the 21 century aftermath of Enlightenment, the enlightened absolutism and modernity (Schlett, 2004; Tomusk, 2008; Kozma, 2009).

The „Bologna process and globalization” is the second main construct. This interprets for the Hungarian higher education public the reform as a precondition of worldwide competition of higher education institutions. The Bologna process notifies a new wave of modernization pressed by the globalization where the European national higher education systems remain standing, if cooperate. The national aspects and isolation of small systems in this process are detrimental as a result urgently there is necessary to find allies and join an integrating structure. But the assimilation of external policies and educational arrangement and harmonizing the allying systems makes effective such cooperation. On the altar of such “protective tariff” it is required to sacrifice a number of value commitments (e.g. academic and institutional autonomy), but the members of this alliance will enjoy the advantage of regain the European influence in world market of education.(Kozma, 2008) In this political construction of Bologna process the “lag behind” and the economical competitive disadvantage against North America, and the instrumentalization of higher education are the most important structuring motives. One of the most significant obstacles in this discourse is the expressions of national identities (nation states, national languages) with their particular higher education cultures and systems. This makes difficult to build a common market of knowledge and labour in which the mobility are of central value. The “passport” for free moving are the “easily readable and comparable degrees” (Bologna Declaration, 1999), and reporting certificates. The students need to be prepared to succeed in international market where the national aspects are becoming marginal (for example in curriculum and content, with special negative consequence to national disciplines). With respect to policy programming these two Bologna-constructs

The policy formulation or programming process develops into a surface for higher education political and professional debates over public good, public interest, value commitments and norms, planning models, causal theories (“diagnosis”) and solutions (“therapies”), implementation choreographies, and even on polity issues (democracy models). As one can observe, the polity and politics of Bologna process and higher education reforms dominates the debates in this period. In the next section we will present how the key actors try to gain power over and influence the Bologna reform policies (content), and what kind of political strategies they were followed with what results.

The reform choreography is of particular importance not only in the case of Bologna-reforms, but regarding the Hungarian political thinking on macro-implementation arrangements inherited from the subsequent regimes, or as political scientists show from the 80s (G. Fodor and Kern, 2009). This falls into the top-down reform vision with some special aspects to post-communist countries. The previous political socialization influences the recent policy designs. However, the comparative public and higher education policy reveals that this is not typical to Hungary, since is practiced by most of modern democracies. More concretely these are linear and hierarchical change perspectives, with technocratic concepts and unequivocal or one-sided causal relationships elaborated behind closed doors, directed by central political-administrative level, giving way only for hidden and sporadic partial interest assertion. This design condemns the reform to the implementation deficits, failure and “stop-go” (Archer, 1979) operation mode. The institution of social debate has little or no influence over policy program since its main function was the communication of reform ideas toward the general public (Bajomi, 1996) rather than acknowledge the social partners and organized actors of any opinion as negotiating party, and as a result allow them afterwards to control the content. This privileged the expert working group of JEHEA project.

The main outcomes of the programming cycle are the working papers of JEHEA, which envisaged restructuring in four domains: system governance and funding, institutional management, and academic reform; where the first three are continuously on reform agenda from the 80s, whilst the latter one is drawn from Bologna engagements. This concept formed the basis of entirely new Higher Education Act from 2005. The academic reform elaborates the frames for the implementation of two-cycle system, the input and output for different levels, the program level functions, teacher training, qualification framework, credit system, quality assurance, rules of new program establishing and research in higher education.
The reform concept states that the planned academic restructuring only then may succeed if there will be reconsidered the operation of the entire system. With regard to this idea they advocate for the management reform which in one hand by modifying the institutional status from ‘budget institution’ to ‘non-profit company’ or ‘special budget institution’ increases the economic-financial autonomy, and realizes the ‘entrepreneurial university’-model (Clark, 1998), what trades with knowledge and competences (knowledge as market commodity). On the other hand they suggest the replacement of unitary governance with a dual structure (academic and professional/economic management). The massification entails enormous fiscal burdens for public budget which claims for the transformation of state roles in higher education mainly by introducing a hybrid concept of market and state-supervising steering model where the state from owner and maintainer becomes the customer of goods, the guardian of the order and efficiency of ‘service enterprises’. And with no surprise the funding reform envisioned a real normative and performance funding (e.g. with the removing of civil servant status of the staff) which according to the vision will promote the efficiency and quality, and labour market needs. As can be easily recognize, the two-thirds of restructuring ideas are directly concerned with economic-financial aspects, whilst only a small part with Bologna even if from the latter lent legitimacy to national reform ambitions.

The published reform visions induced a large scale protest of stakeholders in front with the academic community and the political opposition. The critique and rejection had considerable impact on (1) the reform choreography, (2) the role of actors in macro-implementation, and (3) the content of these policies. In a newly formed democracy, where political thinking of the professional and political elites is guided by a mix view of classic and modern democracy and pluralist decision making, the old-fashioned technocratic policy formulation in democratically unaccountable expert groups became provocative, since various actors and power branches would like to participate in the process from the start. At several times they claim for publicity and transparency of this working stage. One commentator from the academic community states: “seems that we live the days of a putsch, since those directly (university sector) and indirectly (Hungarian society, professional apparatus) affected, and the democratic decision making institutions (including the government, the political parties, the Parliament) would confront already with fait accompli.” (Schlett, 2003, 4) With regard to the power structure and institutional management reforms the “putsch” seems to be real. The critiques argue for large-scale democratism, political agreement and consensus search between interested parties that is nor hierarchical neither subsequent, but partner-centric with continuous consultations and cooperation from the very beginnings of policy-making. This involves the interpretation of the reform as a political and social issue (represented by various pressure groups) rather than as a narrow professional and technical problem (represented by experts and political-administrative level). Consequently, this would imply the (re)opening of the debate over reform ideas and principles, though in this period the political-administrative level was willing to discuss at worst the technical questions, rather than ideological and political issues. Therefore the debate was realized in two parallel dimensions without no or small interference.

The reformers instead of open, large-scale democratism in policy formulation are engaged to discuss posterior the plans only with corporative actors (e.g. HAC, HERC, Hungarian Rectors
Conference), keeping the reform in the area of professional competency. The actors involved in micro-implementation kept the role of execution without formal capabilities of influencing the content. This conflictual decision making style provokes the emergence of some civil movements between academics and the intervention of such control-institutions as the Constitutional Court, President(s) of the Republic, but also the parliamentary opposition. As a result each power branch from the legislation through execution to jurisdiction became involved in the political fight over higher education reform. In most of these branches the professoriate has significant representation and influence (e.g. the Constitutional Court and Presidents are formed by legal jurist academics). In this manner they could hinder the political-administrative level in their change ambitions through converting social and political conflicts into legal controversies hereby expanding their power and intervene in political life (Bihari, 2005). With regard to civil movements one initiative emerge from the most prestigious, comprehensive and traditional (Humboldtian) university. The academics of Eötvös Lóránd University in the front of reform visions established the Association for Higher Education and Research (AHER) as an advocacy forum for professoriate’s interest against the attacks of academic freedom, decision-making authorities and civil servant status. In interest articulation and mobilization the AHER used various instruments: critical articles, open letters, petitions, protest meetings and declarations, and ultimately lobbying against the passing of new Higher Education Act.

With regard to the content of reform policies we consider both important the general and partial critiques and how these are shifting under the pressure groups influences. In skeptics perspective the Bologna is a pretext used for realization of illegitimate national and Europeanization policies, rather than the degree system transformation (Bologna reform in a narrow sense). In re-nationalization process of Bologna the restructuring is connected to the radical rationalization of program specializations where they envision a very general preparation in Bachelor level with limited entry points (e.g. in an extreme version there could have been only one access point in humanities, however, as a result of indignation agree on above ten knowledge areas). The enthusiasts, in opposite, argue that the educational paradigm change means the transition from specialized degree programs and extensive curriculums that is appropriate only for a small part of labour market to open, general programs and intensive curriculums that is relevant to large market needs. In addition, the proliferation of programs and their slight professional relevance for the world of work (especially the humanities and social sciences) is also considered as a problem in Hungarian higher education that calls for central control and rationalization, in reformers viewpoint. The restrictive manpower arguments stay on over-qualification, the mismatch between higher education (qualifications) and the world of work (occupational structure), and the over supply of graduates and limited economic demand. However, empirical arguments for these vertical and horizontal mismatches were not presented, but the Bologna served as an important platform for the renewal of these pessimistic debates.

The controversies on the degree reform are interconnected with discussions over institutional patterns of Hungarian higher education (binary or linear). The academic community and structural reform skeptics from a more conservative view claim for the parallel operation of “old” and “new” arrangements
which render the decision of adoption to the departmental level (professional autonomy and free choice). The argumentation behind this perspective is grounded on the engagement for the sustaining of functional dualism and vertical differences between university and college sector rather than continuous blurring of boundaries giving way for the emergence of unified patterns. The academic drift of colleges is supported by the reform concept since they receive the rights to offer higher degree levels which once fulfilled the minimum quality criteria’s are considered equivalent to university programs. The arrangement suggested by traditionalists would not support this “unified market” for higher education institutions independently to their type. In reformers standpont this not only is a sabotage of European integration but hindering of flexibility and penetrability of structures with unacceptable preservation of elitist patterns and access, thus having direct consequences over expansion.

Obviously, the principles and particular element of macro-steering, state’s role in higher education and institutional management in a neoliberal fashion induced the largest waves of the criticisms and rejection. At the same time, in these issues were enforced the most visible withdrawal of reformers. This debate is structured by the conflict over power concerning institutional decision making between academics and reform economists promoting professional management in public services along the line of New Public Management ideas. The argumentation is placed again into the post-socialist context: significant state control, relatively high academic freedom and institutional autonomy with low external influence and performance are socialist “conditionings”. In this morailizing and normative view the most popular illustration between enthusiasts is drawn from the operational shortcomings of socialist economy. The universities are similar to the self-managing socialist companies which possess over public funds and have an elected - but „lay” - management by the workers (professoriate and academic steering). This lay management with their particular and even partial interests, is unable to function under (knowledge-) market conditions and to formulate long-term institutional strategies. In addition, this academic management is almost unaccountable to external stakeholders. Obviously, this problem definition is almost identical to the debates over the functions and organization of traditional universities in Western countries, in content is lacking any particularity to post-socialist countries. However, the reform-economists discuss the problem in a very particular perspective and context.

The remedy for this overwhelming situation are the professional leadership (is termed as Institutional Council - IC, or later Governing Board and Economic Council), whose members are trained in modern management and administration science. This suggests that the business management techniques are easily applicable in the higher education. The experts suggest that the IC is able to analyze the needs of external stakeholders (state, taxpayers, labour market and industry) and to represent their interests in institutions. Consequently, these arguments legitimate the realization of a new university ideal what can respond adequately to the global, national and local environment, and governs effectively the industry-state-higher education relationship. In addition to the rational and economic arguments with the operation of IC-s the higher education reforms and the organizational restructuring could be realized without to get stuck in “the marsh of local interests” (Barakonyi, 2009). The academic’s decision making authorities in this arrangement are radically cut down and limited to some substantive issues regarding
teaching and research, certainly with the constraining factor of how the strategic decision making frames it. The IC-s in the original reform initiative acquired the largest authority since having more or less degree of control over financial, organizational, staffing and even academic matters. The latter means the formulation of institutional strategy and academic profiling with direct consequences over the study programs (e.g. starting or ceasing). However, these authorities in several aspects are shared with academic management (senate).

The shortening of gradually recovered autonomy from the eighties is perceived as the power deprivation of academic community and a new attempt of re-centralization that characterized the higher education policy-making from the mid-1990s. The new steering mechanisms such as the steering through funding, academic standards, performance indicators, accreditation and quality assurance is identified as centralizing and bureaucratization attempts.

In the discourse of academics the value- and tradition-centered legitimating ideas referring to autonomy and self-governance are contrasted to the market interests and profit-orientation; namely, the university as “republic of scholars” versus the entrepreneurial organization. The free market terminology (e.g. knowledge as a market good, “knowledge market”, contractualized services etc.) and new identities (academics as entrepreneurs, students and state as consumers and customers) proved to be challenging. In this discourse the academics are the defenders of the university as cultural institution, whilst the reformers saw them as an “over-powered” interest group which rejects the transformations in order to protect the status quo. Whilst the reformers promotes power-sharing and criticize the academic elite due to neglecting the social interests, practically, they transfer the authority to other elite groups (economic and management), from which they expect the representation of the interests of various actors in and around academe.

The transformation of institutional status, the elimination of civil servant position, and performance-based funding of institutions and staff were attacked largely as the “paradox of marketization with state coercion means” (Schlett, 2003, 9). In JEHEA there was offered a number of alternatives for institutional status which beside promoting economical-financial flexibility makes possible the change of owner (from state to private ownership). The ownership changing initiative is the result of an effective lobbying of market-oriented economic and technical higher education institutions. However, the traditional (Humboldtian) universities approached this idea and the creating of dual governance structures as the privatization and marketization of higher education, whilst the removal of tenure, the introduction of performance-based wage-system and various accountability instruments as creating uncertainty in career prospects and empowerment of distrust both internally and externally in the system.

The ideological and political debates over the reform agenda have been finished with the disappointment of academic community in influencing the policy content motivated by the ambition of preserving the established organizational and power structures. However, the Ministry obtained the
agreement of some relevant corporate actors (respectively the HRC and College Rector’s Conference) which unanimously voted the concept. As the reform program receives green light may have begun the codification. The legislation process opened new doors for the skeptic’s trough which they could enter the policy arena: the political and professional debates are converted into legal and constitutional issues, and the experts loose control over the program, which allowed the academics to weaken and modify according to their own priorities the neoliberal, managerial agenda. Under these pressures the Ministry was compelled to withdraw from behind the radical governance reform in the course of the political bargainings.

At the time, the introduction of two-cycle degree structure also was transformed into political and legal conflict. In the academic year of 2004/05 may have started the experimentation on new degrees in engineering and informatics after a long power struggle between the Ministry and the Constitutional Court. This conflict established the precedent for opponent actors, since subsequently almost every reform initiative it was attacked constitutionally on the ground of a number individual submissions, and in some cases even transmitted to referendum (e.g. tuition fees). The Ministry would have tried to keep the regulation of linear programs in own jurisdiction therefore modified the prevailing law that provides legal basis for such an action (promulgation of implementation decree). But this act proved to be unconstitutional. Only after various legal maneuvers and dodging with the Court it was possible to launch the experimental BSc programs.

The new Higher Education Act adequately to universal reform ambitions turned into a monumental text (e.g. 227 pages and 174 articles). In the perspective of the interest groups and their advocates the parameters of reform law could be explained by the lack of professionalism and “old conditionings” (e.g. over-regulation and strong central control) in both ideological/strategical and operational/technical issues. The anti-reformists point out that the centralism, over-bureaucratization and power concentration favoring the Ministry and their institutional representatives (the IC) will counteract to the diversity and innovation in higher education.

The higher education institutions, the civil organizations of academic community and several professional corporations formulate more or less negative opinion on draft bill. More considerable turn occurs when evolves a debate in parliamentary political coalition around the concept, respectively between the Ministry (in the hand of free liberals) and the larger governing party (socialists). In one hand, the members of academic community and professional corporations close to the Socialists begun to publicly contest the draft bill and the underlying principles, and on the other hand starts lobbying among parliamentarians against the Act. The main target – again – was the governance and institutional management reforms. As a result, they obtained the support of Prime Minister, who has been asked the Ministry of Education to submit the bill to the parliament only with the agreement of seven relevant higher education organizations. The Ministry, therefore, is compelled to modify the law with these organizations, and was obliged to consider those proposals that were disregarded in the public debates.
The policies of new governance became the target of this and prior political pressures. For example the dual institutional governance policy experiences several content modifications, which is characterized by the gradual withdrawal of the Ministry from the reform plans. The Ministry in original versions would plan to delegate the majority IC-s membership, which could be only external members. Subsequently, may delegate only the minority, and next to the HRC critiques the Ministry compromised with one internal member (the rector). Additionally, the Constitutional Court declared that the relevant parts of the law infringe the internal democracy of institutions and fundamental freedoms established in the constitution. Thus the IC loses its decision making jurisdictions. Indeed, in practice gradually is repressed into a consultant position, but still keeps the veto over developmental, financial and economic issues. Finally, based on the objections of the President – who has been asked to intervene by the members of academic community – the veto it was removed and the IC may operate only with agreement right. The academic governance and control structures, as a result, it may have been got back the major role in institutional decision making, whilst the IC formally loses its power and influence over the institutional decisions.

4. Structural and Curricular Reform Debates

Under the power conflicts and debates of agenda-setting and policy formulation the two-cycle degree structure and its additional arrangements, as the original Bologna goal, kept little attention, which seems to be the condition of its “survival” in programming process. Seemingly, the actors of higher education in this period do not consider the degree reform as an ideologically and politically significant issue, which threatens the existing power structures. There were some sporadic attacks against the implementation (see the initiatives of the Constitutional Court), however, with limited effects exhausted in delaying the reform. As a result, the two-cycle structure was perceived mainly as a technical and administrative problem in the period of policy formulation, decision-making and micro-implementation. However, the policy debates over goals, preferences, problems, casual theories, solutions, implementation models were clearly apparent.

Two competing visions on the implementation. In Hungary two competing concept exists until now regarding the substitution of the binary structure, with the so called Bologna-model of Bachelor and Master programs, which interchangeably influences the governmental higher education policies. The two concepts have different intellectual roots: one has its source in progressivist and reformist members of the academic community, whilst the other in traditionalist, reform-skeptical views and its communities; in sum the most important conceptualizations of these structural preferences can be originated to different academic elite groups. I will call these academic cleavages in a simplistic categorization as traditionalist and modernist concepts.
The traditionalist concept dominates the scene at the beginning of the Bologna process (1999-2002), and rise again after the evaluation of implementation experiences (2008-2010), however, still with no concrete policy impact. The concept, through an official version (Javaslat a magyar felsőoktatás…, 2002) could be summarized as follows. The point of departure is the idea that the education is a national competence in the European Union, consequently every innovation (new degree structure) is welcomed, although must be implemented with the preservation of Hungarian higher education traditions and values. The sustainers of this perspective found the model of implementation worthy to imitate in Germany. This policy perspective pays special attention to the defense of academic programs and traditional university ideas. In fact, they are guided by the “elitist instincts” (Scott, 1995). The implementation of new degrees in college education is conceived through a simple step: the conversion of all college programs into Bachelor-cycle. Accordingly, this vision implicitly supports two study tracks: the tracing of clear boundaries between academic and professional, practice-oriented education. More concretely the old university-college distinction according to the institutional types survives as the academic and professional tracks adequately to the emphasis on program types. In addition, the vertical hierarchies according to institutional types would have been preserved through the restriction of advanced program levels (Master and PhD) to the universities. The reform perspective involved even some restrictions concerning the upward mobility ambitions and academic drift of non-university institutions. In Hungary the traditional university ideas dominates, as a result the university status was and remain hard to achieve, but the academic drift seemingly resists to the governmental interventions.

In this concept, the implementation of the new framework is a matter of institutional autonomy, where internal decision-making bodies consider the introduction of new degrees in individual programs. The vision enhance the position of academic programs: the old long-cycle (4-5 year) programs it would have been divided in two-cycles, but after 3 year of study they would get a Bachelor degree which qualifies mainly for further studies, since does not give any qualification. It is argued, that after 3 year of study in academic programs nobody is prepared adequately to get a qualification for an occupation. Consequently, in academic programs the Bachelors would get a preparatory and selective function to Masters. However, the private sphere as a potential market for these diplomas could respond positively, as a result the students obtain a certificate of acquired competences, with which may enter the labour market. The public services, as the major market for the degrees of academic programs require higher preparation. As a result, the students in order to get a full-value degree in the new framework must continue their studies in the Master level, thus study length would have been extended in the academic programs.

As one can observe, the followers are seeing in the different study tracks the continuation of the dual or binary configuration, which carried the potential to channel the students according to their preliminary educational achievements, talent and socio-biographical background. According to the assumptions the dual system makes possible to direct the masses toward the intellectually less demanding college sector, as a result the traditional universities and high prestige programs would remain the terrain of well-qualified elites. The different study tracks and the selection promised the survival of this
arrangement. In sum, the markers of this continuously renewed perspective are: (1) clear division of university-college, academic-professional, practice-oriented studies, (2) the voluntary implementation, (3) the defense of traditional universities privileging them with running of advanced level programs, (4) the protection of academic programs, with different tracks and internal selection.

The modernists were regarding this as the sabotage and distorting of Bologna vision. As a result the university- and professor-friendly attitudes was surpassed and were envisioned a paradigmatic structural and curricular change. There were elaborated new policies on the implementation of two-cycle degree structure, which marked the first decade of Bologna-reforms in Hungary. The model for this new policy (JEHEA, 2003) according to the political declarations was the Anglo-Saxon system. The policy agenda is evolved around the substitution of binary system with the stage structure, the increasing of permeability between institutions and program levels, and the strengthening competition and the differentiation between elit- and mass structures. The most important difference is in the function and curricular emphasis of Bachelor-cycle, where the experts aim to guarantee a higher relevance to the labour market. In this policy perspective the Bachelors (1) are designed uniformly, (2) have to fulfill equally the function for the entry to the labour market and advanced levels of education, and as a result (3) to provide a qualification after 3 years. With regard to the curricular emphasis this concept envisions an intensive, practice-oriented and generalist content for the most of Bachelor, instead of old extensive, theory-oriented and specialist programs. According to the concept, in academic and teacher training programs the concurrent curricular vision has to be substituted by the consecutive organization of studies, where the specialization takes place at Master level. Adequately to the initial plans the Bachelors would have been so general that in humanities has been suggested only one entry point for all programs. The expectation from such attempts was that the generalist Bachelors are providing enough, but not a deep specialization which could be supplemented at the future employment. In this way, the public monies would have not to be wasted for unnecessarily deep specializations. Opposite to the traditional view, where a degree fits for one or a few number of occupations, the generalists Bachelor offer a preparation for the large scale of occupations.

**Two-cycle system from technical-administrative perspective.** The government has implemented the second concept on Bologna-model. According to the Higher Education Act from 2005 the government defines the frameworks (the study areas, braches and specializations, the available number of credits for the various levels and main units, the procedure of the establishment of new programs, and organization of post-secondary training and doctoral/PhD education) for the new degree structure (BA/Bsc and MA/MSc). The most important structuring aspects were the study length and the credit points according to the program levels and disciplines. The government attempts to maintain a standard configuration regarding the study length (3 years of Bachelor + 2 years of Master). However, according to the requirements of different study areas has been set up a flexible framework where the Bachelor level may last from 3 years (6 semesters) to 4 years (8 semesters), whilst the Master level would manage itself in a structure from 1 through 1.5 to 2.5 years of study lengths. For example, in agriculture and engineering the organization is as follows 3.5+1.5, whilst in civil engineer programs the Bachelor takes 4 years.
Seemingly, the practice-oriented areas with high curricular emphasis on labour market relevance introduced an additional semester, which explains these organizational variances. Whilst others in the standard model of 3 years Bachelor in order to introduce practical and specializing contents directly employable in the labour market initiated internal divisions from the available credits. We have to note that these are the largely defined frameworks, where the great variety of the micro-implementations is not transparent. In effect, formally there could be observed a convergence both nationally and internationally, but essentially there exists various models in study areas and individual programs, especially if we consider the internal, curricular and organizational aspects of a program.

**Various expectations.** The structural reform was accompanied by various expectations, which were structured in one hand by the recurrently expressed hopes among the Bologna-countries and in other hand by the previously unresolved problems in Hungarian higher education. The actors would have seen a universal solution and possibility to heal under one roof various problems.

1. International competition: the reform enthusiasts believed that the structural and curricular reform will improve considerably the international and European position and attractiveness of Hungarian higher education, especially in terms of learning (incoming students, faculty staff and researchers) and labour mobility. In addition, the actors hoped the entry of some selected and strengthened universities to the global education market.

2. The status of short-cycle education: according to the expectations the Bologna-model will reduce the study length and will raise the status of short-cycle programs.

3. Over-diversification: the presumed proliferation of institutions and programs created a highly fragmented system and unequal distribution with regard to program types (academic versus professional, practice-oriented). According to the policy actors, the implementation of the new degree structure would be a great opportunity for the rationalization of the higher education system.

4. The elite and the mass higher education: the expansion of higher education generated considerable tensions in the system. Under the restructuring it was possible to rethink the function of different institutional types and program levels, where the non-university sector, the short-cycle programs and the Bachelor-level have been seen as the place for mass higher education. Whilst the university-sector was conceived as the place for intellectually demanding activities (academic programs, high emphasis on research, advanced levels), if possible for the elite groups in terms of students and faculty staff.

5. Relevance and employability: the curricular reform suggested more practice-orientation, directly employable knowledge and competences, and labour market relevance in all programs and levels, since the continuous academic drift of previously vocational and professional programs were regarded as a problem. In addition, there was expected the higher practice-orientation of academic programs, which were considered as an unwelcomed “vocationalisation” by the academic side.

As one can observe, these reform expectations except the internationalization are not novel, insofar as they are continuously on the higher education policy agenda already from the ‘50s (see Ladányi, 1992, 2000). For example, even under the moderate expansion of higher education the institutional and program structure were considered continuously detrimentally fragmented, which despite the recurrent reform
Uniform Bachelors and diversified Masters? A major conclusion of the institutional and disciplinary implementations of the two-cycle structure could be summarized as follows: the preservation of the old content and organization behind the front of a new structure. As we pointed out, Hungary have opted for uniform Bachelor programs which offer both a qualification for the entry to the labour market (practice-oriented curricular emphasis, developing of professional competences), and a preparation for further studies (theoretical and generalist curricular emphasis). As one could expect this created greater controversies in traditional long-cycle academic programs (university programs of arts and sciences), since the vocational and professional programs have been simply renamed to Bachelor or finished with compromises. Accordingly to the various functional expectations and existential pressures the curriculum developers in the academic programs maintained the extensive curricular philosophy, dissipated the credit points, declared the most subjects as compulsory and have crowded the 4 or 5 years curriculum into the 3 study years. As a result, there were constructed overcrowded and rigid academic programs, which limited the inter- and intra-institutional mobility, the selection of individual schedules and the creation of flexible learning paths.

The most important themes in policy debates concerning the implementation of second cycle related to the distribution of Master programs between different institutional types, the assurance of a consecutive structure, and especially the curricular content of this level. According, to the policy concept the diversification and specializations should be realized at Master level. Though, the implementation of Bachelor programs was realized without the further conceptualizations of the subsequent stage. In university studies according to the curricular thrust of long programs all the previous content were put into the Bachelor-cycle, not giving a thought what will remain for the Masters and with what curricular underlying (Pusztai, 2007). As a result of lack of synchronization of the two cycles emerged a considerable curricular overlap between the Bachelor and Master programs in the first period of implementation. In the following academic years with the unfolding of Masters this overlap were reduced. The policy actors were divided regarding the desirable diversification at the Master level: the policy experts call for “let 100 flowers bloom”, whilst others (HAC, Hungarian Rectors Conference) claim that there are too many and too specific programs with the lack of interdisciplinary focus. In addition, with regard to the permeability between institutions and programs there is little improvement.

The elites and the masses in higher education. In addition, in uniformly conceived academic programs the implementers had faced the problem of in what structure treat the different student groups in terms of socio-biographical background, talent, and prior educational achievement. How is it possible to organize (e.g. the place in the curriculum, the credit points, the different working load and tasks etc.) in the first years of Bachelors the closing up and talent care functions? This problem-construction served as an umbrella for raising such issues as the tensions between elite and mass education, the access and selection to different program levels and types, the potentials for preserving the boundaries between universities and colleges (the functional dualism, the supremacy of academic content over professional
and practical, the hierarchical relationship). Accordingly, the academic community formulated the claim for the separation of talents and the creation of elite programs and institutions, the formal recognition of existing differences in programs (both Master and Bachelor level) instead of uniform arrangements. This claim have been supported not only by traditionalists, but by reformists due to the potentials for the realization of the inter-institutional competition, the introduction of market mechanisms, the starting of a natural selection and differentiation of programs and institutions, and the creation of market-driven hierarchies in the system. According, to the expectations this process would produce those elite institutions, which with further strengthening will have the possibility to compete in the international market and serves the long-term interests of the country educating the “excellence”.

The university and non-university sector. What is the desirable institutional configuration for Hungary? This remains a recurrent theme in higher education policy debates after the transformation. The traditionalist claim-makers argue for a dual or in more generous attitude for the maintaining of existing (binary) configuration. The modernists claim for a system, where the main structuring power is the program level according to the Bologna-goals. According to the expectations, this emancipates the system from the boundaries rooted to institutional and program types. The controversial views concerns (1) if it is desirable to maintain the advanced higher education levels and research in universities or (2) to give the right for non-university institutions to establish Master and even doctoral programs. Clearly, some actors perceive the implementation of the Bologna-model as challenging these boundaries and existing monopolies.

The Higher Education Act from 2005 formally gave the right for colleges to establish programs in all levels if it meets the criteria’s set up by Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC). The discourse within universities mostly perceives this right as a threatening initiative, which open the way for undesirable institutional upgradings (colleges to universities). The Hungarian higher education is marked by strong traditional university values and weak vertical mobility of institutions. Even if there exist individual cases of institutional mobilities, they are implemented through merging of institutions, rather than upgrading. However, the most of them remain considered as second rank universities. In addition, we have to note that the accreditation of all of the new two-cycle programs is significant restricting power of possible upgradings as a result of the right conferred by the law. The main buffer organizations attained that all programs would have to be accredited by the HAC, as a result the governments power for authorizations remain limited and contested. Several actors stated that this resulted in criterias biased toward the universities and academic programs.

As one can observe, the relation between the two sectors could be characterized by competition for resources and students. The vertical differences are emphasized: the fight is for prestige, reputation and a better place in the hierarchy. In the competition for the students unambiguously the advantage of universities can be observed according to the student selections, admission experiences and composition of student body. The preference for universities and the so-called normative funding contributes to the deprivation of the local non-university institutions with narrow portfolio. The higher education policy
experts suggest the re-profiling and functional change of these institutions in an American-fashion (community college models). Accordingly, the local institutions have to concentrate mostly on teaching, Bachelor-programs, general education (the preparation for further studies in universities) and some short-cycle specializations for lower-level jobs in regional market. However, as other actors point out the universities are not willing to pursue such division of labour, since the concentration on Master and doctoral level (elite functions) would entail significant decreasing in student numbers, which means also power and funding loss.

The rationalization of the structure. According to the critical problem-constructions the Hungarian higher education system is extremely fragmented and over-dimensionalized (“the proliferation of programs and institutions”). The critics point out that in Hungary are too many programs and institutions, and the program-structure is too diversified. In the academic year of 2008/09 there existed 70 higher education institutions, which were formed by 45 colleges and 25 universities. In the university sector there was 3 traditional university, and several new and specialized universities or university-level institutions. However, it is not defined what is the desirable size and diversification. Barakonyi (2004) argues that the phenomenon of proliferation unfolded due to the expansion affecting mainly the universities and lack of adequate central and institutional planning. As a result, there emerged a top-heavy system: large university-sector with multi-campus, giant institutions and a non-university sector formed by small (mainly private) colleges. In addition, the status of post-secondary education remains uncertain, narrow in size and unpopular. The boundaries and the perceived fragmentation in the system restrict the horizontal and vertical permeability (mobility).

Consequently, the introduction of the Bologna-model served as a platform for the renegotiation of the program structure, despite the fact that the institutional integration in the turn of the millennium aimed the rationalization of the program structure and forming a more integrated national system. The actors claim for rationalization of the program and institutional structure, removal of parallel programs in the same region, stopping of wasting of public funds on programs with little or no relevance on the labour market, and resource concentration to highly valued institutions and programs. The rationalization especially in the most extensive study areas (human sciences and health) was raising significant tension. The problems of institutional and problem structure are emerging as quality policy and financial issue. According to the critics, the local colleges beside a weak staff and infrastructure is provided low performance, thus in a most radical view they must be closed, or from a generous perspective the harmonization of demand and supply have to be done (Pusztai and Szabó, 2008). However, the perspective of which actor (society in general, private and public labour market, students) from the demand-side is decisive is highly debated. The claim-makers argue both for market regulation and central planning of enrolment numbers to particular programs and institutions.

The curricular thrusts and the labour market. In the university discourse over two-cycle structure continually is claimed the implementation of two type of Bachelor programs with different admission criterias, study length, curriculum, and further prospects in higher education: the academic (theory- and
research-oriented, and prepares for further studies) and professional (practice-oriented and prepares for the labour market entry) Bachelor programs. With this is legitimated the already existing, but hidden divisions. The claim-makers suggest that these two types of Bachelors serves different labour markets, and the division will communicate more clearly the difference for the employers. Though, the formalization of two-type model exists only in the policy plans, than in reality.

The improvement of labour market relevance of programs and the employability of students was one of the most emphasized goals of the reform. According to the policy experts, in this process the employers would have a central role in decision-making, especially concerning the curricular and practical issues. However, as the critics point out the university studies were designed according to the “dreams of the faculty staff” or as they imagine the market needs, rather than the real requirements of the labour market (Barakonyi, 2008). Other actors suggested that the involvement of the employers in several programs lack any antecedents, for example opposite to informatics and engineering. The solution would be the partnership and intensive communication with the economic actors, but this in most cases is restricted to individual contacts and projects. Polónyi (2009) point out that the Bachelors must solve the problem of Hungarian higher education regarding the vocational education, but not in a very specialized curricular arrangement. He argues that the consequence of the expansion and lack of planning resulted in incongruent employments, since the existing occupational structure is not able to absorb the graduates. Consequently, the function of the Bachelor is to provide some kind of preliminary vocational training, where the graduates do not take a deep and narrow specialization, only general vocational knowledge and competences, which could be completed easily at the actual employment.

5. Final reflections

We can formulate reflections in two regard: the policy process and the content of the Bologna reform policies. The higher education debates over Bologna policies has several dimensions, but clearly this two categorization is the most differentiated.

1. The Hungarian Bologna-implementation shows that the two most important actors were the government and the academics, and their various policy networks and communities. With regard to the policy process there emerged two controversy. In one hand, who may have power and influence over the particular policies? And in other hand, which model of reform choreography is the most desirable for different actors? Clearly, these intractable controversies are embedded in different models of democracy and views on legitimated actors. The government and their experts claim for an apolitical, technocratic and professional policy-making throughout the policy process, which is accompanied by grand self-confidence over the ability to control the various policy levels, and the complex world of implementation and implementers, even if this trust were challenged by prior reform failures. In contrary, the policy
networks of the academic community and in general the local-institutional level of implementation argues that the reform policies are political and social issues, which calls for an open, participative policy-making. The government undertakes conflictual policy-making, whilst the contending actors argue for consensual policy-making: “…the dominant interest declares one perspective as mainstream, discredits the different views, then with the provision of laws (tries) to obtain validity for a model worked up without mutual consensus.” (A bolognai folyamat célkitűzéseinek..., 2008)

The government has been striving to maintain the power and influence over the content of Bologna-policies at the political-administrative level, especially in the process of policy agenda-setting, policy formulation and decision-making, which involves that it disregarded the subsequent phases, the various contending actor’s perspective and the characteristic of multi-level implementation setting. In the governments perspective the elected (politicians), their appointed (central administration) or invited (experts) actors at the political-administrative level are the legitimated to influence the policy. In contrary, the institutional actors argue that those must have impact on policies, which have everyday experience and overlook of problems from higher from local-institutional level. Obviously, the cleavages unfold in one hand according to the modern representative democracy, and in other hand the pluralist, participatory democracy model. Whilst regarding the reform choreography the two competing views are the top-down and bottom-up design.

2. The higher education policy debates over content are multi-dimensional and hardly can be synthesized. However, there clearly unfolds the next controversies between the actors: (1) What is the desirable level of change under Bologna-umbrella? In other words: the paradigmatic, large steps versus incremental, small steps, or comprehensive reforms versus small-scale adjustments. (2) What extent and intensity of change has been achieved in the everyday life of higher education (rather than political rhetoric!) under the reforms? To formulate otherwise: essential or formal transformations, the large scale re-interpretation of different aspects of higher education or the conversion of old arrangements behind the new front. (3) What kind of differentiation is in this regard between institutional and program types, level of study, curricular thrusts, and reform areas? To put differently: the reform mood and change level differs between traditional and second rank universities and colleges, or the academic, professional and vocational programs, or Bachelors and Masters, or theory- and practice-oriented studies. (4) What is the proper institutional configuration for the Hungarian higher education? As can be observed, the two alternatives are the binary and the mix of unified and stratified arrangement. (5) What is the desirable organizational model for the universities, as the most important and influential actors of higher education? The two alternative organizational preferences: the traditional, Humboldtian or the entrepreneurial, managerial.

The government and allied experts have tried to make one large step forward through a comprehensive reform vision, which were initiated under the legitimation of Bologna process and have affected all important areas of higher education. The destiny of this universalistic change approach shows considerable similarity with prior reforms: the step-by-step withdrawal from behind the most of
objectives still in the macro-implementation period and the quieting of the great enthusiasm into a small-steps program. The paradigmatic change it seems that work in political rhetoric and underlies the various concepts over the future of higher education in public discourse, but when is put the everyday life of institutions significant continuity can be observed. Even the content of the different government policies are two-faced, since despite the claims of radical turns, there is significant permanence of previous government’s policies due to the pressure of interest groups. In practice, the trajectory of change is restricted by existing arrangements, ideas, concepts and traditions in higher education. In various regards the old structures and ideas creatively re-born under the reformed higher education (for example, the differences according to the institutional types will be preserved under the canonization of different program types and selection criterias).

The diverse reform areas, institutional and program types responded differently to the policy aims of the political–administrative level. In one hand, the colleges and second-rank universities, and the practice- and profession-oriented programs responded quickly and several cases innovatively, with little or even without controversies. Whilst in other hand, the traditional universities and academic programs showed a great resistance, both in debates and micro-implementation. In their case clearly, the re-conversion of old structures and curricular trusts was apparent. The speed of change in these two settings differs markedly. In addition, in the reform areas strongly connected with the distribution of power and influence between the actors were the most passionate debates and resistance. Clearly, the system-governance and institutional management are the most prominent in this regard, with the most significant withdrawal of the government. Finally, it is important to emphasize that the methodological challenges in assessing the level and area of change, since the reform aims and their interpretation are changing from government-to-government, between actors and even in one individual policy cycle. Under such conditions is hard to achieve universally valid statements on reform performance.

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