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## Student participation in EHEA: main developments and challenges

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# Setting the scene

- **Defined** as students' formal and actual ability to influence decisions made in the context of a higher education institution or public authority.



# Justifying student participation

- Enriches deliberation and **improves decision-making** at every level.
  - Students as transient members, as junior members, not able to challenge default positions, hold adversary positions...
- Is intrinsic to democratic governance model and students as **key constituency/stakeholders**.
- Complies with public ethos of education and students as custodians of the public interest.
- Is part of **democratic citizenship education**.
  - Problems with acceptance in principle.



# Qualifying student participation in terms of

- The degrees of intensity.
- The extent/domains.
- Multilevel nature and the differentiated higher education systems.



# The degrees of intensity of student participation

1. **Access to information**
2. **Consultation**
3. **(Structured) Dialogue**
4. **Partnership** implies shared responsibilities in each step of the institutional decision-making process: agenda setting, drafting, decision-taking, implementation and monitoring of institutional decisions.



# The domains of student participation

- Whether students are represented in consultative and decision-making bodies;
- Whether student representatives have full voting rights on all issues, or some issues.



# The multilevel nature and the different types of institutions

- Multilevel HE governance -> multilevel student participation: European, intergovernmental regional cooperation, national, regional, institutional, sub-institutional.
- Diversified HE system: university vs. non-university, public vs. private, for profit.



# The EHEA developments

- The Bologna Process
- The modernisation agenda for universities





# Student participation as an EHEA principle

– a **‘procedural principle’** .

*‘the involvement of universities and other higher education institutions and of students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area is needed and welcomed’ (BP 2001).*

– a **‘substantial value’** .

*‘fully support staff and student participation in decision-making structures at European, national and institutional levels’ (BP 2010) and students are ‘full partners in higher education governance’ (BP 2003).*

– a **‘policy objective’** .

*‘to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in higher education governance’ (BP 2003).* Explicit on participation in QA and student-centred learning.



# Impact?

- Historical achievement for **European Students' Union** and its involvement and influence in European higher education policy-making.
- Especially strong involvement in the domains of **QA and student-centred-learning**.

BUT

- Ambiguity of the Bologna documents as to **the extent and degree of student participation**.
- The 'Bologna effect' on student participation **varies** across countries and institutions.



# Modernisation agenda and the higher education reforms across EHEA

- New Public Management and the reform of:
  - Internal organisation and governance
  - Funding of HE
  - QA and accountability measures.
- Underlying tensions:
  - Which HE purposes to prioritise?
  - Is HE a public good or a service?



# Impact ?

- Plurality of stakeholders:
  - weakening students' relative influence.
- Right to free tertiary education challenged.
- Emergence of corporate university model.
- Conceiving students as consumers:
  - less interest in the representativeness, more in professionalisation;
  - focus on students' consultative rather than decision making function.
  - transparency tools to give student a choice.



# The trends

- Weakening *formal student participation*.
- Strengthening *informal student participation*: in QA, student-centred learning, student experience.
- HE governance: negotiations between different actors on the key priorities: differences in interests, power, coalitional patterns.
- Emerging conception of students as costumers... added to OR overriding the conception of students as partners?



# How these processes affect the enabling environment for student participation?

- institution's adherence to **fundamental democratic principles**,
- **clear and extensive formal provisions defining the terms of student participation** for all levels and domains of institutional governance,
- full and continuous recognition of student representation **as free and independent with respect to aims, decisions and activities**,
- long-term **institutional support and resources** for a sustainable student representation,
- **political will** for actual (not only formalistic) continuous student involvement.



# How do these trends affect student unions?

- More professionalisation? More detachment from the student body?
- Whose servants? Those of the institutional leadership or the student body?
- Adherence to principles of good governance of student representation: How to retain autonomy of student unions from interferences from institutional leadership, public authorities?



# Thank you

Background articles to this presentation:

- Klemenčič, M. (forthcoming in 2012) **The changing conceptions of student participation in HE governance in the EHEA**. In Proceedings from the Future of European Higher Education – Bologna Researchers Conference. Springer Verlag.
- Klemenčič, M. (forthcoming in 2011) **Student participation in HE governance in Europe: improving or weakening?** *International Higher Education*. Winter 2011.
- Klemenčič M. (2011) **Student representation in European higher education governance: principles and practice, roles and benefits**. In: Eva Egron-Polak, Jürgen Kohler, Sjur Bergan and Lewis Purser (eds.)(2011) Handbook on Leadership and Governance in Higher Education. Leadership and Good governance of HEIs. Structures, actors and roles. Berlin: RAABE Academic Publishers, pp. 1-26.
- Klemenčič M. (2011) **The public role of higher education and student participation in higher education governance**. In: BRENNAN, J., and SHAH, T. (2011) Higher education and society in changing times: looking back and looking forward. London: Center for Higher Education Research and Information, CHERI, pp. 74-83.

