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Standardising Europe: The Bologna Process and new modes of governing

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This article explores how the discourses of the Bologna Process have been accepted and adopted as the dominating ones in European higher education. It consists of a governmentality and discourse analysis inspired by Foucault and based on selected European and Swedish policy documents. The aims of the analysis are to illustrate how governing operates discursively and how it is legitimized, to identify what subjectivities are being shaped and fostered and to de-stabilise the taken-for-granted ideas of the present and so contribute to a space for reflection on how governing and power operate in higher education today.

Keywords: Bologna Process|Foucault|governmentality|discourse analysis|lifelong learning|standardisation|higher education in Europe

Introduction

One of the major changes in higher education in Europe today is the Bologna Process, a declaration signed by 47 nations, including members of the European Union (EU) and several other countries (London Communiqué 2007). It aims at harmonising the higher educational systems in Europe. In texts on this issue, ideas of comparability, mobility, transparency, harmonisation, flexibility, shared European values and diversity are put forward as the means to create a European educational space. However, this policy area was originally outside the decision-making competence of the EU. Consequently, each nation has to choose whether or not to sign up to the Bologna Process. Many states and universities have now taken the narratives about harmonisation for granted and see this process as inevitable (Nóvoa 2002; Ahola & Mesikämnen 2003). This can be seen in narratives created by universities in Sweden themselves, where adaptation to the process started before there were any political guidelines adopted by the Swedish government. This acceptance of European harmonisation can be contrasted with the 1970s when the European Community agreed on some frameworks for higher education policy, but they were not implemented by nation states (Fägerlind & Strömqvist 2004).

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In order to explore how the discourses of the Bologna Process have been accepted and adopted as the dominating ones, while previous more directive forms of harmonisation failed, in this article I will carry out a governmentality and discourse analysis inspired by Foucault. I will analyse policy documents concerning the Bologna Process as a way to illustrate how governing operates discursively and how it is legitimized. Further, the focus is on what subjectivity is being shaped and fostered as the desirable one. This is to de-stabilise the taken-for-granted ideas of the present and so contribute to a space for reflection on how governing and power operate in higher education today, that is, to show how the things that we take for granted are not the only ways to reason about governing. In this article, the Bologna Process will be seen as a discourse about higher education that is constructed in conjunction with other discourses and ideas about, for example, lifelong learning, competitiveness, mobility and auditing. These discourses are part of a process of restructuring higher education and a larger process of introducing a new form of governmentality in Europe. The governing of higher education no longer seems to be based on legislation. Instead governing is conducted through the 'free' and active choices of each subject – a neo-liberal governmentality.

In the next section, previous research on the Bologna Process will be introduced followed by an outline of the analytical strategy used. To illustrate how governing operates and is being legitimized, I will first focus on what kind of European citizen is constructed through discourses on lifelong learning. Such a construction will then be related to the Bologna Process and to ideas about standardisation and freedom in the second part of the analysis. Third, the focus is on how governing is conducted at a distance within the neo-liberal governmentality operating in the discourse on the Bologna Process. Lastly, the focus is more specifically on the 'how' question of governing, in this case how auditing operates as a technique for shaping desirable subjectivities.

Research on the Bologna Process

There is still much research to be done on the Bologna Process, especially in terms of more critical approaches. Themes discussed in the recent literature are, for example, social issues in the Bologna Process (Kladis, 2003; Nyborg, 2005), descriptive accounts of how the progress of implementation is proceeding in the participating countries (Reichert & Tauch 2004), what the positive and negative effects of the process might be (Amaral & Magalhães 2004), trend reports, analyses of factors that have paved the way for nations to accommodate to the convergence of higher education systems (Huisman & Van der Wende 2004) and personal reflections on the progress of the Bologna Process (Froment 2003; Wächter 2004). However, there is a number of more critical accounts of the Bologna Process. Ahola and Mesikämnen (2003) critically trace the emergence of the Bologna Process and ask how Finland could adapt to it. Corbett (2003) makes a critical analysis of EU documents and

interviews as a means of explaining how policymaking within the European Community before 1971 has had a major impact on subsequent policymaking, such as the Bologna declaration.

The above-mentioned research, to a large extent, lacks a problematisation of how power operates in governing of higher education in Europe. One way of turning to such a focus is by drawing on Foucault as is done in this article. We can see how others have used a Foucauldian analysis to study higher education specifically, for example, quality assurance systems in higher education (Luke 1997) and neo-liberal governance of higher education institutions (Marginson 1997). Nóvoa and Lawn in their edited book (2002), *Fabricating Europe*, bring together several critical and deconstructive approaches to European educational policy. Nóvoa (2002) himself draws on Foucault when he analyses educational policy documents produced by the European Union during the first two years of the 21st century. He relates the analysis to the Bologna Process and argues for more critical analyses of European educational policy.

Recently, there have been Foucault-inspired analyses of European approaches to higher education, lifelong learning and the governing of the subject (Fejes & Nicoll 2008; Fejes forthcoming). In a special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, the learning society is analysed by different authors drawing on Foucault and his concept of governmentality (Simons & Masschelein 2006). For example, Tuschling and Engemann (2006) analyse the discourse of lifelong learning in European higher education policy. They argue that lifelong learning is part of a form of governmentality, which tries to transform each individual into a self-organizing learner. Liesner (2006) argues in a similar way when she states that the harmonisation of higher education in Europe demonstrates a new mode of government called neo-liberal governmentality. She illustrates how the university is an environment that prompts teachers and students to conceive of themselves as entrepreneurial customers and providers. Simons (2006) uses the Foucauldian concepts of biopolitics and governmentality to analyse the European space of higher education. Another Foucault-inspired analysis of higher education in Europe is made by Johansson (2008). Her focus is on the official European Union discourses and how these shape the desirable European citizen. She defines three versions of European identity: cultural, civic and neo-liberal.

Whereas the above references indicate that there is an increasing interest in performing Foucauldian analyses of European higher education policy, there are still very few focusing on the Bologna Process itself. By conducting a governmentality and discourse analysis of European policy documents on the Bologna Process and higher education, my aim is to illustrate how the process is part of introducing a new governmentality that legitimizes certain kinds of reasoning. Further, the focus is on analysing what subjectivity is constructed as desirable, and how such a construct is related to neo-liberal governmentality.

A governmentality approach

Today, there is a growing focus on the idea of neo-liberalism as both an ideology and an economic theory, which was not the case 30 years ago. In relation to the emergence of neo-liberalism in Thatcher's Britain during the 1980s, some researchers (e.g. Rose 1999) started to find 'new' or different analytical tools to analyse such changes in governing practices. Rose turned to, among others, Foucault (e.g. 1980, 2003a) and his writings on governmentality, power and governing technologies. Taking such an approach, neo-liberalism is not seen as an ideology that can be related to a specific political party. Instead, neo-liberalism is a mode of governing, or ideas of how governing should be conducted. In his work on governmentality, Foucault focused on liberal mentalities of governing and how these have changed over time and between different cultural practices. In particular, he argued, government has turned into self-government.

The notion of governmentality is made possible through Foucault's (1980) view of power. There is no subject such as the nation-state, who has and uses power against someone else. Power is not a property or an object. Rather, power is relational. It circulates everywhere. Taking such a stance makes it possible to analyse government as something more complex than the government of the nation-state: it involves the government of ourselves, the government of others and the government of the state (Dean 1999). The focus is not on social, economic and political circumstances that shape thought. Instead, the focus is on how thoughts operate in the taken-for-granted ways in which we do things.

In such a perspective, freedom should not be seen as something outside of power relations. Freedom and power require each other. For example, today at a time of neo-liberal governmentality, we can see how governing is practiced through alliances between different authorities which seek to regulate the economy, social life and the life of the individual (Hultqvist & Petersson 1995) as a contrast to the natural and spontaneous order of Hayekian liberalism (Peters 2001). Thus, freedom has been reconceptualised. Now, people are defined as autonomous and active individuals who seek self-realisation in the name of freedom. Neo-liberalism thus constitutes a particular relationship between government and the governed. The governed are subjects of their own lives who practice freedom as a form of self-governance (Burchell 1996). One could say that neo-liberalism promotes a specific form of freedom as a way of integrating the self-conduct of the governed into the practices of government. Freedom has become a resource for government, where the citizens' expression of their freedom coincides with the political ambition to govern – freedom has become both the instrument and the effect of governing.

One of the strengths of governmentality is that it widens the commonly used concept of 'government'. It is not only concerned with governing through lawmaking, the police, and decision making in governmental organisations. Governmentality also concerns our everyday life; all the relations we are involved in, not least one's relation to oneself. Thus, governmentality helps us to understand the modern forms of the exercise of power and its different practices of governing. Questions one might pose, drawing on governmentality, are: in what ways are different discourses on lifelong learning, flexibility, education, working life, etc. part of the construction of different

rationalities of governing? What desirable subject is being constructed? What techniques are parts of educational practices that are shaping us into specific desirable subjects? In what ways do these techniques make us relate ourselves to ourselves and to others? In what ways are we being governed today, and what is the effect of such ways of reasoning about governing in terms of exclusion, that is, what is marginalised and excluded from discourse? Such questions might help us to combine analyses of power operating to govern populations with analyses of power operating to govern individuals.¹

In such an analysis subjects are not seen as *a priori* entities with specific characteristics and agency. Instead, in line with Foucault (2003b), the subject is decentred and analyzed as being shaped in specific ways in different historical practices. Thus, instead of studying subjects as agents (*a priori*), the focus is on studying the specific historical practices, the discourses (lifelong learning, for example) produced by and producing these practices and what different subject positions are constituted through them. In a decentring of the idea of the unified, coherent self, there is potential for a multiplicity of subjectivities, multiple and partial uptakes, constraints and elisions.

In this article, I will carry out a governmentality and discourse analysis inspired by Foucault when analysing policy documents concerning the Bologna Process as a way to illustrate how governing discursively operates and how it is legitimized. Further, the focus is on what subjectivity is being shaped and fostered as the desirable one. Foucault himself didn't provide any clear tools of how to carry out a discourse analysis. Instead, he argued that his writings should be seen as a toolbox that can be used in parts as a way to conduct an analysis.

All my books...are little tool boxes...if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged...so much the better (Foucault in Patton 1979: 115).

Thus, the analytical framework presented in this section can be seen as a way in which to approach the material analysed. Discourse is here defined as the rules and standards which regulate what is possible and not possible to say. The focus will therefore not be on 'what actually happens' in the 'real' world. Instead, the focus is on how the 'real' world is described (constructed) by policy texts. The following questions act as operationalised analytical tools in the analysis:

- what is the 'thing' to be governed (what subjectivity is fabricated as the desirable one)?
- How should governing be conducted (e.g. what governing techniques operate)?
- What rationality of governing is constructed by the the discourse about the Bologna Process?

The analysis is part of a broader educational policy analysis project where the governing of the adult learner in Swedish higher education and adult education is analysed (Fejes 2005, 2006a,λb; Andersson & Fejes 2005) and where the fabrication of the European citizen is in focus (Fejes 2007).

I have analysed documents concerning the Bologna Process and higher education in Europe produced by the two-yearly ministerial meetings, the European Union and the Swedish Ministry of

¹ For a more elaborated account on the analytical approach used in this article, see [Fejes & Nicoll](#)

Education in order to see how governing operates in two different discursive practices, one constructed through national policy documents and one constructed through European policy documents. As will be illustrated in the analysis, any clear distinctions between these discursive practices are not possible. Official documents are analysed as they are assigned a specific subject position in the discourse. All subject positions in a discourse are part of the construction of the discourse itself, but some positions are given more importance than others. Such positioning is specific to time and space. In Sweden, official documents are assigned an important role in the decision-making process (Olsson 1997) and, as will be argued, ideas from the European documents are inscribed into the Swedish documents, but in specific ways. Five European documents are analysed: the *Bologna Declaration* (1999), *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* (2001), the Berlin Communiqué (2003), *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2005) and the Bergen Communiqué (2005). The second and fourth of these documents are not about the Bologna Process *per se*. However, I have chosen to analyse them as they are two documents that are central to policymaking about education in Europe and they are closely related to the Bologna Process. Four official documents from the Swedish Ministry of Education are also analysed. One is a White Paper on the Bologna Process in Sweden (Ministry of Education 2004); another is a proposal made by the government to the Swedish parliament on this issue (Ministry of Education 2005); the two others are White Papers concerned with adult education in general (Ministry of Education 1998, 2001).

The employable, mobile lifelong learner

One idea repeated in the texts on higher education in Europe is the idea of the knowledge-based society. Society is constructed as building on knowledge. It is seen as essential that Europe becomes the most competitive and well-developed knowledge society in the world. The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 set the European Union the strategic goal, reaffirmed at the Stockholm European Council in March 2001, of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world (European Commission 2001: 7). In such reasoning there is an idea of threats from the surrounding world. Europe has to compete with other parts of the world, or even the entire world. Therefore, Europe has to become a 'Europe of Knowledge' (Berlin Communiqué 2003: 2). Such an idea is also inscribed into Swedish policy documents:

In the knowledge-based society, lifelong and lifewide learning is a reality and a prerequisite for our country to compete with good knowledge, technical ability and high competencies (Ministry of Education 2001: 147).²

Threats feature prominently in both European and Swedish documents. These threats are construed as risks that have to be dealt with to secure a desirable future. There is a risk that Europe and Sweden

(2008).

² All quotations from the Swedish documents have been translated by the author.

will lag behind the rest of the world. At first glance, this risk 'from the rest of the world' looks like an external risk. But, as Giddens (2000) argues, today, constructions of risk are based on the knowledge we create concerning ourselves and our world. Thus, the production of 'bad' visions of the future is something that comes from the inside, not the outside. This construction of risk is presented as a fact, which fosters individuals who have to address these risks; thus they are construed as active subjects. As Giddens (2000) argues, risks have not become more dangerous than before; they have just taken on new shapes and today we create our own risks. Such a way of reasoning about risk is part of the construction of a specific neo-liberal rationality of governing. It acts as an argument for why certain measures should be taken and it constructs specific subjects. In this case, the way to face the threats from the surrounding world is to create a knowledge-based society where citizens become lifelong learners.

We can also see how the construction of a lifelong learner is legitimized by the idea of employability. In a knowledge-based society, all citizens are said to have to become employable, and thereby help their country or Europe face the threats of the future. 'In economic terms, the employability and adaptability of citizens is vital for Europe to maintain its commitment to becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world' (European Commission 2001: 6). Not only should the citizen be employable, but she or he should also be adaptable. The idea expressed is that in a changing world we cannot know anything about the future except that it changes. Therefore, citizens need to be adaptable to changes; they must have the ability to move constantly between learning settings and different jobs as a way of facing the changing and uncertain future. We can see how similar ideas operate in the Swedish documents.

The aim of the adult education initiative was, besides giving access to courses on a secondary level, to give access to courses at upper secondary level which are needed by the individual to become employable and participatory in the societal development, directly or through further education (Ministry of Education 1998: 29).

By making the citizens into employable lifelong learners, Europe and its nations will be able to compete with the surrounding world. Such an argument is also related to an idea about empowerment in European texts; for example, in the memorandum on lifelong learning. According to this text, a Europe of lifelong learning will empower citizens to become more mobile and to make Europe more democratic, inclusive and tolerant.

This Communication contributes to the establishment of a European area of lifelong learning, the aims of which are both to empower citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries, making the most of their knowledge and competences, and to meet the goals and ambitions of the European Union and the candidate countries to be more prosperous, inclusive, tolerant and democratic (European Commission 2001: 3).

Here, mobility, knowledge, competencies and empowerment are all part of the discourse about lifelong learning. If people participate in lifelong learning they will, according to the texts, acquire

competencies and knowledge that they will be able to use in different parts of Europe, thereby making Europe prosperous. A prosperous Europe inhabited by competent, mobile lifelong learners is made into the telos of government (Dean 1999). The promise is not only for the creation of a prosperous Europe, it is also for the realisation of a desirable citizen – a constantly learning, mobile citizen who is empowered. Here, empowerment operates as a concept that promises positive effects if one becomes a desirable citizen. The message is that an empowered citizen is a free citizen with room to manoeuvre and to make choices. There is no legislative or repressive power that forces someone to take up such a subject position. Instead, citizens are encouraged to be free and make choices, and by making choices the citizens enact their freedom. It is in this enactment of freedom that governing operates. When a choice is made to study, or to acquire a job, or to move to another university, a desirable citizen is being shaped.

In this section, the analysis has illustrated how the creation of a knowledge-based society filled with lifelong learners is legitimised through certain risk scenarios. Further, each citizen is here encouraged to be responsible for their own work and learning careers. No legislative or coercive force is used to shape the desired mobile, lifelong learner. Instead, such subjectivity is shaped through the freedom of each citizen.

Standardisation of higher education

How then is the Bologna Process related to the construction of a mobile lifelong learner? In a similar way to that illustrated in the previous section, ideas such as employability and knowledge are central to the Bologna Process. According to the texts studied here, employability and mobility will be the result if higher education in Europe is standardised. If higher education is made more alike across Europe, there will be a greater degree of comparability and transparency, thus making it easier to move between educational systems and gain employment (Bologna Declaration 1999). Standardisation becomes the means to create a desirable future.

At the same time as standardisation is put forth as desirable, cultural differences should be respected.

We hereby undertake to attain these objectives – within the framework of our institutional competences and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy – to consolidate the European area of higher education (Bologna Declaration 1999: 4).

The idea of respect for cultural differences is repeated in several of the documents; for example, ‘The aim is to preserve Europe’s cultural richness and linguistic diversity, based on its heritage of diversified traditions’ (Berlin Communiqué 2003: 2). Here, instead of an idea of homogenisation (standardisation), there is an idea of heterogenisation. These two ideas are part of the same discourse. One could see heterogenisation as an idea that helps to legitimize the standardising process. These two ideas are not contradictory but are possible to combine. The argument is that, at the same time as there

should be as much similarity as possible in higher education across Europe so as to be able to compare different educational diplomas and programs, there should also be a respect for difference. These ideas are part of a narrative that promises a prosperous future through comparability, at the same time as it promises specificity for the different nations to keep their cultural differences. In this way, a participating nation is promised both the benefits of participation at the same time as it is promised that it can keep its originality.

We can see how the same ideas operate in the Swedish texts so as to standardise Swedish higher education. On the one hand, the texts argue that the universities are to decide for themselves how to organise their study programmes (heterogeneity). On the other, the implementation of the Bologna Process is seen as bringing changes to universities that have effects on the specificity of their different ways of organising study programmes (homogeneity).

It hasn't been the intention of the group to restrict the universities' freedom of action to decide about the organisation of studying and it hasn't been the intention of the group to recommend that education for master degrees should be organised in programs. This is decided upon by the universities themselves. But the group is aware that its proposal will have consequences for the organisation of studying (Ministry of Education 2004: 50).

Here, the ideas of heterogeneity and homogeneity operate in a similar way as in the European texts, producing certain positions that it is possible to take up. Through the promise of local decision-making, the standardising of educational programs is legitimized. In this way, each university is promised both the benefits of the Bologna Process, while they still can keep their own specificity. We can see a similar line of reasoning in the following quotation where the idea of local decision-making (heterogeneity) and standardisation (homogeneity) are paralleled.

The Project group is of the opinion that the freedom of the universities to set their own goals should continue, but these goals should not be allowed to prevent the mobility of the students to move between universities (Ministry of Education 2004: 96).

Thus, there is a promise of difference and specificity for nations and universities in the European and Swedish documents. Further, participation is put forth as voluntary. With such a reading one might say that this illustrates a free choice. No one decides who should participate or not. Some would probably also say that there is no profound governing taking place in such a situation. But, drawing on the perspective used in this analysis, governing is very present in this example. First, the discourse regulates what it is possible to say, even if the discourse is constantly under construction and revision. Second, freedom of choice is a basic idea in a system of neo-liberal governmentality where freedom is both the starting point and the effect of governing. Third, in the enactment of freedom of choice, the choice is based on the information and knowledge available through the dominating discourses. In this case, the information distributed through the analysed texts is that, if individual countries and the European Union as a whole do not become knowledge-based societies with mobile lifelong learners, they will lag behind the rest of the world. The Bologna Process is a solution proposed to these threats.

Thus, through making the choice to participate in the Bologna Process, there is a neo-liberal governmentality operating. In the next section, I will further illustrate how freedom is a prerequisite for such governing.

Freedom and travelling discourse

The Bologna declaration is not something different nations *have* to sign and comply with. Still 47 nations have ratified the declaration and several of them have complied with the statements made. This way of restructuring higher education in Europe is putting in motion different ideas of how governing should be practiced. There is no central ‘power’ that decides how things should be. Instead, the declaration creates an idea that the nations and universities are to realise by themselves the gains to be made through this reform. They have a choice, either to participate or not. This is stressed in the following paragraph:

We hereby undertake to attain these objectives – within the framework of our institutional competences and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy – to consolidate the European area of higher education. To that end, we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non-governmental European organisations with competence on higher education. We expect Universities again to respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of our endeavour (Bologna Declaration 1999: 4).

As can be seen, no demands are made; instead, a hand is stretched out to the universities: ‘you have heard us before, now listen to us again!’ There will be co-operation between nations that is mutual and respectful. Differences are to be taken into account and respected. This is further emphasised in the Berlin Communiqué:

Ministers welcome the commitment of Higher Education Institutions and students to the Bologna Process and recognise that it is ultimately the active participation of all partners in the Process that will ensure its long-term success (Berlin Communiqué 2003: 5).

All participants are to be mobilised and active in the process of creating the European Area of Higher Education. Thus, there is a certain kind of active subject to be created. This can be seen as an expression of a specific rationality of governing, where governing is to be carried out through the subjects (nations, universities and students) themselves. As some researchers have suggested, we can see ‘steering at a distance’ (Lindblad & Popkewitz 2004), where the ‘state’ still governs, but through the subjects instead of through laws. The desires of the governed coincide with the political ambition to govern.

The Swedish documents also illustrate such a ‘freedom’ of choice. There is no one (outside of the Swedish governmental system) who decides if Sweden should participate in the Bologna Process or not. In the texts from Sweden, we can see how there is a favourable response to the Bologna Process

(Ministry of Education 2004). One argument for participation is that there is said to be a need for Swedish students to be able to compete with students from other countries for jobs etc. Another argument is that degrees from Sweden will be undervalued if they are not brought into line with the Bologna Process.

As a means to achieve clarity and international comparability the group made the judgment that it was a high priority to define different levels of degrees, and thereby avoid undervaluation of certain Swedish university degrees (Ministry of Education 2004: 43).

Such arguments provide motivation for the adoption of certain measures, which entail participation in the Bologna Process. The argument for participation in the Bologna Process positions Sweden as an active 'free' subject whose 'desires' coincide with the political ambition to govern as constituted in the European documents. At the same time, the Swedish documents participate in the construction of what is desirable and not in terms of governing. Universities and citizens are constituted as 'free' subjects who are encouraged to become active and mobile within the frames of the Bologna Process. For example, it is stated that students in Sweden will not have the same opportunities as students from other countries if the universities in Sweden choose not to participate.

Swedish students who apply for a job or continuing education in other countries might have an unfavourable placing in selection processes as the Swedish grading scale has too few grading steps to give sufficient information on earlier efforts and merits (Ministry of Education 2004: 114).

This leads to the construction of the Bologna Process as something a country and its universities have to adapt to if they do not want their students and their population to fall behind the rest of the Europeans. Here, we can see how the current power relations in the discourse define what is and what is not desirable. However, such constructs are not only repressive in character they are also productive (Foucault 1980). Through power, different subjectivities are produced and nations can take up different subject positions in the discourse. You have the freedom to choose and the only choice you can't make is not to choose. However, some positions are constructed as more desirable than others. As illustrated, the Swedish documents produce a position that resembles the desirable one produced in the European documents. Thus, Sweden is constituted as an active free subject, both in the European documents and the Swedish ones. In the same way, the Swedish documents produce Swedish universities and citizens as active subjects. What we see is how the discourse travels across different settings and is inscribed in specific ways. But in this case, despite the different inscriptions, the effects of the discourse are almost the same.

In this section, I have illustrated how freedom is a prerequisite for governing and how the same discourse, but in a different way, is inscribed in and constructed by documents produced in Europe and in Sweden. However, the discursive effects of the discourse on the Bologna Process are almost the same in the discourse produced by European and the Swedish documents. A free, autonomous subjectivity is shaped. In the next section, audit will be analysed as a technique of governing which operates to foster such subjectivity in the discourse on the Bologna Process.

Auditing as a technique for governing

Governing is conducted through different techniques that seek to foster desired subjectivities. One of the prominent governing techniques constructed in the texts is auditing. Such an idea is part of the political ambition to create standardisation. Audit can be related to accountability and quality assurance, which one might normally relate to business. But accountability, where financial and human performances are combined, emerged in the educational practices of writing, grading and examination (Hoskin 1996). Such an idea has entered the business world and its practices of accountancy from where it has travelled back to the education and higher education practices. Strathern (1997) calls it a cultural replication where values from one cultural domain travel to another.

In the discourse on the Bologna Process, audit is used with the aim of making different educational systems comparable and as a way of guaranteeing quality in the European area of higher education. For example, member states are encouraged to describe qualifications in terms of workload and learning outcomes (Berlin Communiqué 2003). In this process, shared criteria for quality are supposed to be developed, through which each institution can be compared. The teachers' everyday work will also be evaluated (ENQA 2005). Further, it is argued that quality should be evaluated, both by means of self-monitoring processes (internal) and by external parties, as illustrated below:

Furthermore, we urge higher education institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance.... We commit ourselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria. We welcome the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review (Bergen Communiqué 2005: 2–3).

It is not only internal and external quality assurance that should be created, but also a peer review system in which the external quality assurance agencies will be evaluated. In a way, the idea of quality assurance is a totalising one. It spreads into each and every subject, and constructs these as always being under surveillance and always being part of exercising surveillance over themselves and others. The different nations and their universities are created as active subjects that are supposed to monitor their quality as a way of reaching the Bologna standards and becoming a highly qualitative university. This could also be seen as a way of managing and minimising risk. Such a proposition sets up a logic for calculating performance where each subject calculates how best to reach the required standards.

Quality assurance is also a central part of the Swedish texts. Without it, it is stated, there will be no mobility. Consequently, efforts need to be made to create good systems in each country. In the Swedish texts it is argued that the

...foundation for recognition of studies, degrees and mobility is a mutual trust in each other's quality assurance systems. Therefore, it is important to promote the idea that all countries have a well-functioning quality assurance system (Ministry of Education 2005: 66).

Through the ideas of quality assurance and auditing, higher education in Europe is made into a visible, calculable and governable space (Dunn 2005). This will be governed through the actions of the individuals themselves as they are made into calculating, governable and self-regulating selves who have to take responsibility for reaching certain goals. The quality assurance process makes visible the inner work of the individual university. It can be evaluated according to goals and standards. Further, the higher education system in each country is made visible in relation to the goals set up in the texts on the Bologna Process. In addition, agencies created in each country to evaluate the quality of the universities are made visible through the system of peer reviewing. The 'visibility' of these different spaces produces a process of internalising discipline. Thus, the subjectivity of the universities, their employees and the students will become self-monitoring. Each needs constantly to check their standards and quality in order to ensure that they meet the Bologna standards and have a good educational quality. Otherwise they will be marginalised in relation to other countries and other universities. The system of auditing permits the subjects to transform themselves into self-regulating subjects who conduct their own conduct, which Foucault (2003b) calls a technology of the self. This is a subjectification process in which the subjects conduct themselves according to the norm laid down (Shore and Wright 2000). Thus, auditing is a central technique in the governing of higher education in the area of participating nations and their citizens.

Concluding remarks

This article has illustrated how the discourse about the Bologna Process introduces a neo-liberal governmentality. Such a statement in itself might not be a major finding. However, the discourse analysis carried out drawing on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality and its associated questions, shows how power operates in its extreme point of exercise, that is, in the relations constructed between different subjectivities (Foucault 1980), and what the discursive effects are. For example, the analysis illustrates how the discourse constructs responsible, free and autonomous subjectivities. Each nation, university and individual is encouraged to take responsibility for becoming mobile and for participating in the Bologna Process as a way to compete with the surrounding world. Such a discursive construct is made up of several ideas that operate in the discourse of the Bologna Process so as to make such subjectivity appear to be a 'reality'. For example, ideas about homogenisation and heterogenisation, which commonly might be seen as opposite concepts, are turned into parallel concepts that encourage nations, universities and individuals to participate in the standardisation of higher education.

The analysis has also illustrated how discourses travel around the world and are inscribed differently in different cultural practices, but with similar discursive effects. We can see how the European and Swedish documents draw on similar ideas, although they operate in slightly different ways where, for example, the idea of heterogeneity is related to cultural differences in the European documents, and

related to issues about the tradition of grading systems in the Swedish documents. However, the argument pursued here is that the discursive effects in terms of governing are similar. I have also illustrated how audit operates as a governing technology which fosters calculating, governable and self-regulating selves who have to take responsibility of reaching the goals outlined in the Bologna Process.

A central concept used in the analysis, and an important one in relation to the concept of governmentality, has been freedom. I have argued that freedom is a prerequisite for governing. Through discourse analysis, voluntary participation in the Bologna Process has been problematised as a self-regulating activity. No one is forcing a nation to participate in the process. Therefore, some might draw the conclusion that there is little or no governing taking place in such a practice. Thus, as governing is conducted at a distance through the freedom of each subject, there is a risk of losing sight of the operation of power. The aim of the discourse and governmentality analysis performed in this article has been to show how the very freedom that today is often taken for granted as a natural order of life, plays an important part in the conduct of government. This does not mean that I view such governing as good or bad. Instead, I take my starting point in the idea that everything is dangerous: As Foucault argued:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism (Foucault 1983: 231–232).

The analysis hopefully makes possible a space for reflection about the Bologna Process and what kind of governmentality it constructs. Such reflection raises the possibility of deciding if the changes and forms of governmentality introduced via the Bologna Process are good or bad, and whether one wants to do anything about it. But these kinds of normative assumptions are outside of the scope of the theoretical starting point used in this article. Through my theoretical perspective, instead of prescription and foundational critique, which are so often part of, for example, critical theory, I give ‘exemplary’ criticism. That is, the analysis is one of critique by examples where the discourses are analysed and described. I do not prescribe what the results of such an analysis should be or how freedom should be practised (Dean 1999). Thus, exemplary criticism has made it possible to destabilise the things we take for granted about the Bologna Process and to show how power operates in ways which govern, even if such governing is not always made visible.

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