

Comment to the article 'Setting policy agenda for the social dimension of the Bologna Process' by Yasemin Yagci (2014)

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Reply

Comment to the Article ‘Setting Policy Agenda for the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process’ by Yasemin Yagci (2014)

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Reply to: Setting Policy Agenda for the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process, by Yasemin Yagci doi:10.1057/hep.2013.38; published online 7 Jan 2014

On 7 January 2014, the article ‘Setting Policy Agenda for the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process’ by Yasemin Yagci was published as an advance online publication in *Higher Education Policy*. The article contains the following statement:

Relevant indicators for the social dimension started to be developed at the European level rather late. The EUROStudent (sic!) was assigned to develop indicators and collect data on socio-economic backgrounds and living and study conditions of students only in 2007. However, the data set so far has suffered difficulties of international data collection and could not inform policymaking at the European level comprehensively (Yagci, 2014, p. 11).

This statement contains assertions that are erroneous or incomplete:

- (1) It is stated that ‘[r]elevant indicators for the social dimension started to be developed at the European level rather late’. However, initiatives at European level to define indicators for the social dimension started at least as early as 1999, when the EUROSTUDENT project was initiated (Schnitzer and Middendorff, 2005, p. 17). EUROSTUDENT is a network of researchers, representatives of national ministries and stakeholders who have joined forces to examine the social and economic conditions of student life in European higher education. In the context



of EUROSTUDENT, internationally comparable indicators are generated based on data from national student surveys. In case the EUROSTUDENT indicators are not deemed relevant here, it would be appropriate to state this more clearly.

- (2) Since the beginning of the project, four main internationally comparative reports were published — besides several accompanying publications on specific topics, the last one being Orr *et al.* (2011). Considering that the EUROSTUDENT project is criticised, it would seem appropriate to reference at least one of the main EUROSTUDENT publications in the text.
- (3) It is stated that ‘the data set so far has suffered difficulties of international data collection’. This statement is not further substantiated in the article and we believe it is an incorrect assertion. Where the comparability of the data collected is limited, this is indicated transparently in the EUROSTUDENT publications. In general, the EUROSTUDENT data conventions, which have been developed over the years in a series of international seminars, workshops and conferences, ensure the comparability and quality of the EUROSTUDENT data (for detailed information see Orr *et al.*, 2011, 16). Besides formulating strict initial conditions for participation in the project, the EUROSTUDENT coordination team performs a number of plausibility checks to reduce remaining inconsistencies in the data.
- (4) It is stated that ‘the data set ... could not inform policymaking at the European level comprehensively’. However, EUROSTUDENT is an official data collector for the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) since 2007. This is even mentioned in the major European-level ministerial communiqués (see London Communiqué, 2007; Leuven Communiqué, 2009; and Bucharest Communiqué, 2012). The results of EUROSTUDENT are regularly presented in the BFUG working groups ‘Social Dimension’, ‘Mobility’ and ‘Reporting’. In the fourth round of the project, internationally comparative data for 81 thematic issues were collected for 25 countries. Many of these indicators are available, for instance, for students from different social backgrounds, sexes, ages, their prior educational experiences etc. We therefore consider it wrong to state that EUROSTUDENT cannot comprehensively inform higher education policy.

Clearly, EUROSTUDENT is not at the centre of the article, which examines the status of the social dimension on the European policy agenda by performing a document analysis against the background of the multiple streams framework. However, the subordinate role of EUROSTUDENT in the article does not justify that the project is criticised based on erroneous or incomplete information.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that critical analyses of the EUROSTUDENT analyses are always very welcome, as they guarantee the continuous progress of the project. In order to allow such progress, however, critical analyses have to be substantiated through a comprehensive argumentation that is based on correct facts.



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