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The Bologna Process in Italy: causes and outcomes

presentation for the International Workshop
The Bologna Process as a Challenge for the Students
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Introduction and motivation

- ❑ Italy is where the town of Bologna lays, and it is one of the first countries to have implemented the new HE curricula structure typical of the “Bologna process”.
- ❑ This reform was the most important ever for Italian HE, and also the most notable change in the curricula known by Italian education since 1962 (de-stratification of lower secondary).
- ❑ This presentation looks at this process and provides evidence to answer two questions about it:
 - ❑ how was such a reform possible, after decades of failed attempts?
 - ❑ which were it outcomes? did it actually change Italian HE? how did the reform affect students’ access to university and their university careers?

Content of the presentation

1. Before Bologna
2. The reform process
3. The outcomes

Because of lack of time and of other commitments, I cannot present my own evidence on point 3, as I would have liked to: work is still in progress. I apologize for this: however, I will rely on findings by other researchers.

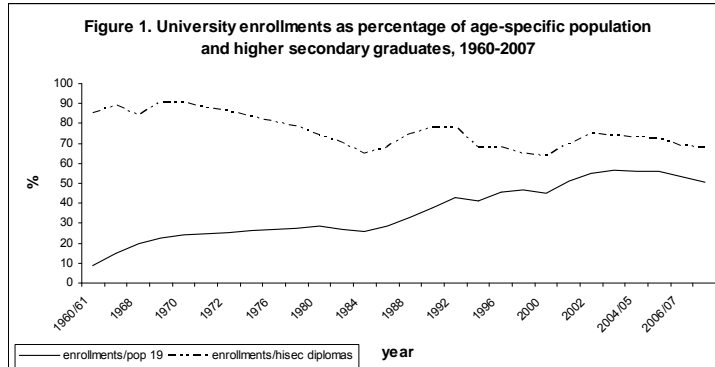
As for points 1 and 2, a paper of mine, co-authored with Loris Perotti, can be downloaded from the Unires website. It will be published in early 2012 in the *European Journal of Education*. A short version is available as the chapter on Italy in M. Regini, ed., *European Universities Meet the Market*, Edward Elgar, 2011.

Before Bologna: Three main features of Italian HE

1. A low level of participation, despite the expansion of the last decades
2. A low level of differentiation: the Italian system is still a unitary one, with almost all of the institutions belonging to the same institutional type, the traditional teaching+research university.
3. As in other Continental systems, but even more so, the government of the system is a diarchy of professors and ministry bureaucrats.

low participation rates

- Italian HE shows traditionally a low participation. The transition from an élite to a mass HE, in Trow's terms, took place as late as in the 60, later than in almost all European countries, even in the South.

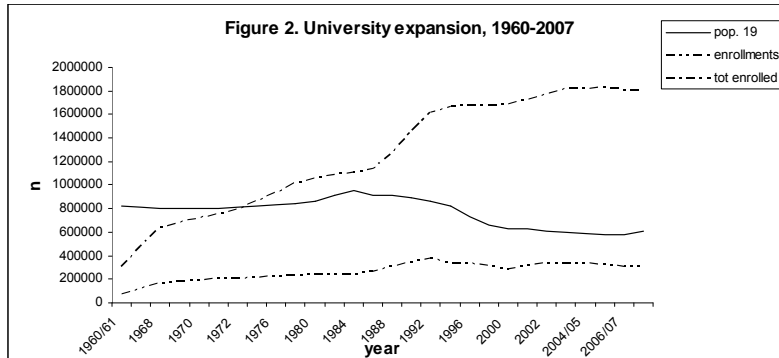


	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84
<i>Scandinavia</i>													
Denmark	M	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	U	U	M
Finland	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	U	U	U	U	U	U
Norway	E	M	M	M	M	M	U	U	U	U	U	U	U
Sweden	E	E	M	M	M	M	U	U	U	U	U	U	U
<i>British Islands</i>													
Ireland	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M
United Kingdom	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	U	U	U	U	U
<i>Central-Western Europe</i>													
Austria	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Belgium	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	U	U	U	U
France	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	U	U	U	U
Germany	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Luxembourg		E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
The Netherlands	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Switzerland	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
<i>Mediterraneum</i>													
Greece	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M
Italy	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M
Portugal	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M
Spain	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
<i>Central-Eastern Europe</i>													
Bulgaria		M	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M
Czech Republic	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Estonia	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Ungary	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Latvia		M	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	U	U	M
Poland	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	U
Romania		E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M
Slovakia	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	E	M	M	M
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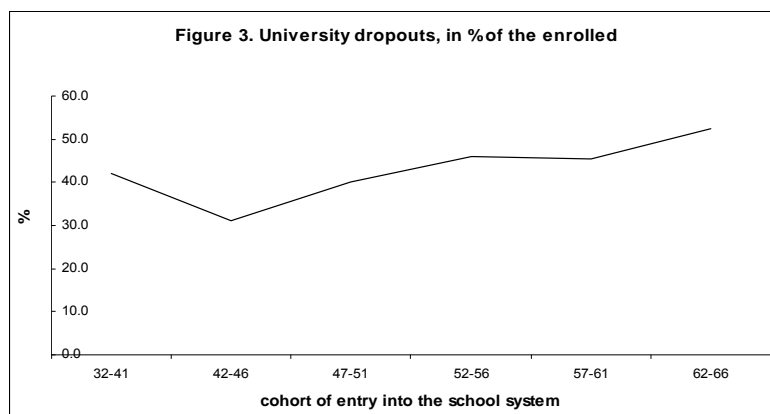
E=élite, <15% of the age group; M=mass, 15-35%; U=universal, >35%

low participation, and also low efficiency

- Although comparatively slow (also because of less numerous cohorts), the expansion of HE has worsened the efficiency of the system. This can be seen in the gap between enrollments and enrolled...



- ... and in the high rate of dropout (see Ballarino, Bison and Schadee 2011).



low differentiation

- ❑ a second feature of the system is its low level of differentiation. There is no tertiary vocational channel, and most of the universities offer the same programs. Private institutions are few and (with some notable exceptions) of low quality. Because of that (and of other features of Italian society), students' mobility is comparatively low.
- ❑ the very same law (595/1999) that introduced the new Bologna titles (bachelor and master) even lowered the degree of differentiation existing in the system, as the existing arts and music post-secondary schools were formally parified to universities.

all power to professors and bureaucracy

- ❑ a third feature is the comparatively high power of professors. B. Clark (1977; 1983), in fact, has built on the Italian case his ideal-type of academic oligarchy as the prevailing mechanism of coordination.
- ❑ this feature has to do with the origins: in 1860, the new national government built a centralized HE system, on the French model, but was not strong enough to gain full control of the local academic élites.
- ❑ thus, the power of the academic oligarchy has always been associated with a heavy central regulation of curricula and programs. Only recently, HE institutions received some degree of autonomy.

all power to professors and bureaucracy

- ❑ such a power structure did not favour the relations between universities and the economy, neither at the macro nor at the micro level.
- ❑ of course there are notable exceptions (the *Politecnici*, many economic faculties), but in general Italian universities did not think, until quite recently, that the employment of their graduates is a part of their business.

Before Bologna: a case of institutional drift?

- ❑ according to theories of institutional change (Streeck & Thelen 2004), we would describe institutional change in Italian HE since its beginnings up to the end of the 60s as a case of institutional drift.
- ❑ in fact, despite the external changing conditions (expansion) the institutional structure of the HES remained substantially unchanged, as have the power relations governing it.
- ❑ of course this put the system's activities under pressure. In fact, since the end of the 60s we observe a series of reforms trying to adequate HE to the societal change (NB: the presentation is very quick on such reforms, the details are to be found on the paper)

Before Bologna: a reform for each decade

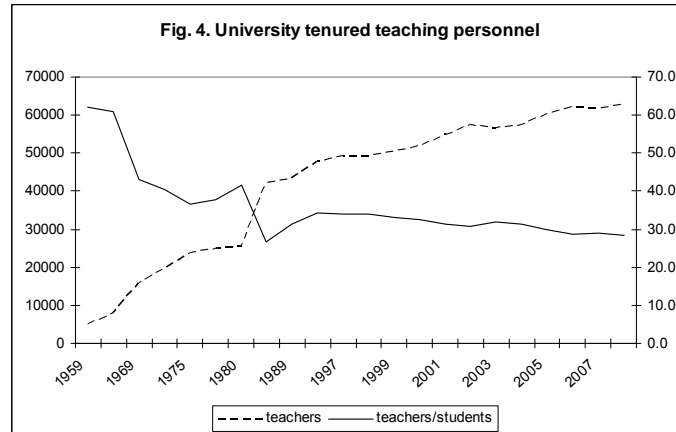
- ❑ in 1969, access to university was *de facto* liberalized: all students with a 5-years higher secondary diploma could access their preferred field of study.
- ❑ in 1980, some elements of the American model of HE were introduced, such as departments and the PhD title, and recruitment mechanisms were modified.
- ❑ in 1989, the ministry for HE was separated from the ministry for education, and universities were given larger degrees of autonomy.
- ❑ then we had the Bologna process in 1999-2001
- ❑ and about one year ago, 2010, we had a new reform, changing both the organization of institutions and the recruitment process. whose implementation is still on the way.

Before Bologna: a reform for each decade

- ❑ in Streeck and Thelen (2004) terms, we describe such reforms as attempts to *conversion*, ie to re-develop the existing institutions of the élite university to the new context.
- ❑ however, the power relations underlying the system's working were not touched by the reforms and the expansion of HE continued to be managed by the academic élite.
- ❑ in fact, the 1980 law also stabilized the employment of a number of researchers and professors recruited on a contingent basis during the 70s in order to cope with the increase of students. But this recruitment generally was based on the professors' networks, without a proper merit-based selection.

Before Bologna: a reform for each decade

- the graph below clearly shows this expansion in the number of professors.



The reform

- We shall now answer to our first question, by describing the conditions that made the reform possible.
- First, the political context changed deeply. In the period between 1992 and 1994 the two main parties that had governed the country since 1945 disappeared, and in 1996 for the first time ever the center-left opposition won a general election.
- The new prime minister, R. Prodi, was an academic himself, and his program was centered on reforming the country in order to “make it more European”.
- Second, the academic context also had changed: a new, more internationalized and reform-minded generation had entered the universities, as a consequence of the 70s and 80s expansion of the professorate.

The reform

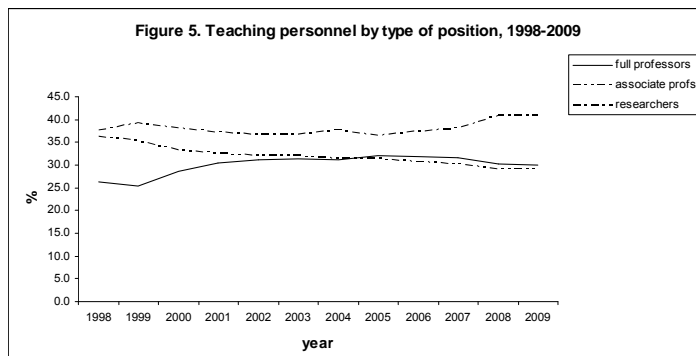
- ❑ The new minister (for both education and HE), L. Berlinguer, was a key figure in the reform-minded fraction of the academic community.
- ❑ While the 1989 reform was substantially slowed by the passive behavior of academics, he decided to involve them, but choose a criterion of expertise (as opposed to representation). He relied on HE experts, forming a commission that proposed a reform of the curricula based on the French three-level model.
- ❑ He tried to build consensus using the “social pact” strategy typical of the Prodi government, and involved both employers’ associations and unions in the process.

The reform

- ❑ However, universities did not mobilize to support the project, reproducing the passive behaviour that hindered previous reforms. But two key events made it possible.
- ❑ First, in May 1998 the Sorbonne declaration appeared, opening the European reform process later to be called the Bologna process.
- ❑ The two-level curricula structure proposed by the Sorbonne declaration derived from internal French and German reform designs, and was different from the one already under discussion in Italy. But Berlinguer rapidly changed it, conforming the Italian reform to the European one.
- ❑ In this way, he increased the legitimacy of the reform to the eyes of a very pro-European public opinion and media system.

The reform

- Second, in June 1998 a law was passed (210/1998) that changed the regulations concerning the recruitment and the careers of professors. In practice, this meant a massive career advancement without any real evaluation (on whichever basis). The proportion of full professors increased substantially, as the graph shows.



The reform

- The law was not purposefully related to the reform of the curricula, but *ex post* it eased it, because a) it generally improved the situation of the professors; b) it matched perfectly with the reform, as the new study programs were staffed by the newly-promoted professors.
- This is the main reason why the professors' organizations generally supported the reform in the following years, even when the center-right government that substituted the center-left one in 2001 tried to stop it and eliminate it.

The reform

- ❑ In the meantime, the enlargement of the European reform from Sorbonne to Bologna gave more legitimacy to the Italian model.
- ❑ However, the Prodi government had fallen at the end of 1998, and the new center-left government was less reform-inclined than the previous.
- ❑ The new minister for HE, O. Zecchino, was less reform-oriented than Berlinguer. He brought on the project, but strengthened the participation therein of academics, on a representative basis. This of course weakened the perspectives of a radical reform.

The reform

- ❑ At the end of 1999 the new two-tiered curricula structure (3-year bachelor and 2-year master, instead of the previous single-tiered 4-to-6 years *laurea*) was introduced (law decree 509/1999) as a compulsory one. With a few exceptions, all universities and *facoltà* had to comply with it by academic year 2000/01.
- ❑ In fact, the law had to be implemented before the 2001 election, where a defeat of the center-left was forecasted, in order to make it difficult for the center-right coalition to cancel it. The latter coalition, in fact, fiercely opposed the law, on behalf of the more conservative academics.
- ❑ Political contingencies, thus, also heavily influenced the reform's implementation.

The outcomes of the reform

We now look at the outcomes of the reform.

1. Did it intervene into the three main features of Italian HE system?
2. Did the efficiency of the system improve?
3. What about the occupational outcomes of the students?

The answers I will provide are provisional: this is a work in progress.

Did participation increase?

- Concerning low participation, in fact in the short time, enrollments increased notably.
- This was in part a statistical artifact, because many students from the old courses moved to the new Bologna courses in order to accelerate their studies (3 years instead of a minimum of 4 to get a degree).
- But in part it was a real phenomenon, stimulated by the reduction of the time required, which decreased the indirect costs of studies, and by the (apparently) stronger employability of the Bologna graduates (more about this later).

Did participation increase?

- ❑ However, after some years enrollments started decreasing, probably because the occupational outcomes were not as good as expected.
- ❑ According to some scholars (Bertola and Checchi 2010), we had a university bubble: as in the financial bubbles, people keeps investing because they expect high returns, and this expectation is contagious. But when the high returns do not materialize, the reduction of the expectations and of the investment is also contagious.
- ❑ This could explain the dramatic shift of HE italian policies and the heavy cuttings in HE that have been implemented by recent governments (from both parties).

The outcomes of the reform

Indicators of the functioning of the Italian HE system

	enrollments	degree courses	tached courses	professors
1998-99	274,194	2,306	na	na
1999-00	277,014	2,423	na	50,711
2000-01	281,142	2,444	97,959	51,191
2001-02	318,558	3,484	116,386	54,001
2002-03	330,188	4,175	145,293	56,385
2003-04	338,036	4,580	157,370	55,542
2004-05	330,812	5,482	168,241	56,251
2005-06	323,930	5,627	171,837	59,900
2006-07	308,185	5,773	180,001	61,741
2007-08	307,533	5,831	171,066	61,922
2008-09	295,261	5,720	159,500	62,762
2009-10	292,291	na	na	60,944

source: Bertola and Checchi 2010

The outcomes of the reform

Indicators of the output of the Italian university system, before and after the Bologna reform

	graduations	graduations*length of the course (human capital)	average years of graduation delay	average courses per professor
2000	159,438	680,209	2.89	1.91
2001	171,806	726,625	3.04	2.16
2002	201,118	825,227	2.84	2.58
2003	234,744	937,671	2.56	2.83
2004	268,789	1,037,413	2.25	2.99
2005	301,277	1,107,124	2.07	2.87
2006	300,386	1,034,186	2.01	2.92
2007	300,130	964,804	1.83	2.76
2008	293,000	904,623	1.69	

source: Bertola and Checchi 2010

Did efficiency increase?

- There are some signs of increased efficiency: delays decrease, and also the workload per professor has increased.
- But this could depend on a lowering of the general level of teaching, or on some measures in the students' interest (more incentives to regularly follow classes, introduction of mid-term examinations, groupwork) not necessary related to Bologna.
- Some Italian faculties in fact had already started this kind of innovation, and results had follow promptly (eg. the university of Trento).
- The number of students who work while studying has increased: is this evidence of a lowering level of studies?

The power of the professors

- ❑ The reform per se did not diminish the power of the professors: as seen before, the reform itself was possible after a “political exchange” between ministry and professors: the former gave the latter the possibility to expand itself, and the latter accepted the reform.
- ❑ But in fact this was a short-term strategy, who notably increased costs (increasing tenured personnel) immediately, immobilizing resources that could have employed differently. In fact, all the money was put into creating new positions, thus lowering the average level of the professors.
- ❑ But what about the occupational outcomes? If they improved, the investment would have provided good returns.

The occupational outcomes

- ❑ The necessity to “go fast” and the central constraints on the new courses (they were designed locally, but under general schemes decided centrally) did not stimulate innovation.
- ❑ Despite the requirements of both the European and Italian reform laws, not much work was done to design the new courses so to meet the needs of the labour market and, more generally, of the local territory and society (Ballarino and Regini 2005).
- ❑ More innovation emerged in the design of the new “master” courses, but the 3+2 “core” courses (*laurea* and *laurea magistrale*, the masters are additional 1-year courses after both kinds of laurea) did very much replicate the previous 4-to-6-years courses.

The occupational outcomes

- ❑ The Bologna process stated the first-tier degrees had to be oriented to the labour market and to the employability of graduates. But in the majority of the cases, mere lip service was paid to this request: courses were given fancier names, but the teaching did not really change.
- ❑ For instance, the faculties of *scienze politiche* before Bologna had just one 4-year degree, the *laurea in scienze politiche*, with common basic courses in the first 2 years and then 6 or 7 specialization tracks in the next 2 years (*indirizzi*), defined by academic specialties: sociology, economics, history and so on.

The occupational outcomes

- ❑ With the reform, the common 2 years disappeared and each *indirizzo* was transformed into a 3+2 structure, with additional *lauree magistrali* introduced.
- ❑ The new courses are named by labour market segments: *organizzazione e risorse umane*; *scienze del turismo*; *mediazione culturale* and so on, but the contents did not really change.
- ❑ Compulsory internates were introduced, but there are no resources in order to manage them properly. We have about 50.000 students, and our employment center has a staff of about 15.

The occupational outcomes

- ❑ Analyzing the occupational outcomes of Bologna graduates and comparing them to their previous colleagues is difficult, mainly for two reasons:
- ❑ the “hybrid” graduates (who started with the old system and moved to Bologna courses) are a confounding factor.
- ❑ more importantly, in the very same years of the Bologna process the Italian labour market was flexibilized, resulting in a general increase of employment but in a lowering quality of the jobs (more precarious and less stable jobs).
- ❑ the general picture (see Bosio and Leonardi 2011) shows an increase of employment probabilities, but also a lowering of wages and job quality. Probably Bologna did not change much, and those changes depend on the labour market flexibilization.

The equality outcomes

- ❑ Finally, what about inequality in access? The Italian implementation of the Bologna process gave great emphasis to the aim of a more inclusive university system.
- ❑ In fact, the expansion of access reduced the effect of family background on the probability to get a bachelor degree.
- ❑ However, the selection moved to the following level: the effect of family of origin on the probability to get a *laurea magistrale* has increased (Barone 2010).