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**Transferring the Bologna Process Ideas into National
Higher Education Practices: The Case of Belarus**

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the Bologna process ideas' transfer and implementation into the higher education practices of Belarus. As an illustrative example of the general trend of higher education internationalization, the Bologna process was also discussed in this study as an object of policy borrowing in higher education.

The combination of the ideas and models of policy transfer and policy borrowing elaborated by Dolowitz and Marshs (2000) and Phillips and Ochs (2004) were used as a theoretical framework for this research and guided the mode of the analysis. Document analysis and expert interviews were used as data-gathering techniques and the choice of Belarus higher education transformation as a case study aimed at presenting a particular context implementation and development of the Bologna process policies and ideas.

Keywords: Bologna process, internationalization, higher education, policy transfer, policy borrowing, Belarus, education reform.

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List of Abbreviations

BFUG – Bologna Follow-Up Group

BIBC – Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee

BP – Bologna process

DS – Diploma Supplement

ECTS – European Credit Transfer System

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

EU – European Union

EUA – European University Association

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

HDI – Human Development Index

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WB – World Bank

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem

Education is seen as one of the fundamental components and powerful driver for development. According to UNESCO (2014), it is “*a basic human right and the foundation for more sustainable, inclusive and just development*” (p.9), while the World bank (2015) defines it as “*one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equality, peace, and stability*” (p. 1). Its contribution to economic growth as well as social change is widely discussed in the development literature and depending on theoretical perspective and respective discourse (e.g. neoliberal perspective or capabilities approach) different aspects of education development are highlighted.

The recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹ have shifted their focus from quantity to quality of education and placed among the targets of the new goal in education “*equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university*” (UN, 2015). This perspective expands the focus of nation-states from merely primary level of education, which has long been advocated to promote development, to other levels essential for real change.

The need to promote all educational stages for development is also discussed by Vandebussche et al. (2006), who state that “*education is important both as an investment in human capital and in facilitating research and development and the diffusion of technologies, with initial phases of education more important for imitation and higher education for innovation*” (as cited in Hanushek and Woessmann, 2007, p. 24). According to UNESCO Education Strategy 2014-2021 (2014), the world is moving towards a new “*knowledge-based economy*”, which is

¹ SDGs – a set of 17 "Global Goals", which call for action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy prosperity and peace. The goals were adopted in 2015 by the UN member states as part of a new sustainable development agenda to be achieved over the next 15 years (UN, 2015).

characterized by a growing importance of the role of education as a determinant of economic growth (p. 15). In this respect, development of higher education institutions as one of the main actors in knowledge and technology production is seen crucial for innovative capacity of any country.

Higher education has historically been a state domain and one of the key areas of national identity. But with the modern trends of globalization, which also influence higher education, states have to adapt to the new tendencies and plan their policies with assent to the globalized world. From this perspective the Bologna Process represents an interesting and vital process of internationalization of higher education and questions the sole role of a state in education development.

Aimed at establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and focusing primarily on the European Union states, the Bologna process has soon spread over other countries in the European region and got significant influence on higher education development. While adoption of a common vision in sphere of higher education has been enthusiastically met by the majority of member-states, there are still a number of drawbacks and difficulties that each particular country faces while joining the Bologna process.

As a former soviet country and presently defined by the World Bank as a developing country² Belarus represents an interesting case of higher education transformation in the new realities. While still preserving a number of features from the Soviet past, the Belarusian system of higher education has to adapt to modern challenges of the globalized world. And the country's accession to the Bologna process outlines an important step towards this process of adaptation.

Discussion of the effects produced by internationally developed ideas over nations in transition and transfer of experience of the developed countries (in this case the European Union countries) to the developing country (Belarus) is seen particularly

² Developed and developing countries – the classification, which most commonly uses the degree of economic development for evaluating a country's capacity. In this respect developing countries have less developed industrial base and a low Human Development Index relative to developed countries (Desai and Potter, 2014).

interesting and important. The Bologna process accession as an issue of policy borrowing in education is examined in this study.

1.2. Relevance of the Study

This study is seen relevant as there is a lack of scientific research on the higher education in Belarus, especially in the English language. Moreover, it is difficult to find a valid analysis of the Bologna process development and implementation in the Belarusian context and the way the reform provisions are supposed to be embedded as national higher education policies and practices.

Although significant research has been done on the Bologna process implementation and development in the European Union countries, the study on the non EU states, which have become new members of the Bologna process (e.g. Ukraine, Belarus), is seen to be not sufficient. Therefore, this research will be an important contribution to the knowledge about the higher education system of Belarus and Bologna-related reforms implementation in a broad European context.

It is also seen valuable that the accession of Belarus to the European Higher Education Area is a process that is currently taking place and all the events and reforms are vivid and actively discussed. Analysis of the context that either promotes or challenges the Bologna-related reforms' implementation can be valuable for future research on the improvement and adjustment of the Bologna process to the existing and new realities of the current and potential member-states.

1.3. Research Aims and Questions

This Master thesis aims to examine the process of adoption and implementation of the ideas and developments of international character in the sphere of higher education into a particular national context. Therefore, the research is presented as a case study with the higher education system of the Republic of Belarus being the *object of the study*. The *purpose* of the present research is the analysis of the

Bologna process ideas' transfer and implementation into the higher education practices of Belarus.

The following *research questions* were defined in order to guide the analysis:

1. Why has Belarus decided to access the Bologna process (external and internal factors)?
2. What are the policies and ideas that are supposed to be transferred into the Belarusian higher education practices?
3. Who are the main actors in the process of mediation and implementation of the Bologna requirements into the Belarusian higher education practices?
4. How are the Bologna policies being implemented and adopted into the Belarusian context and what are the outcomes of this transformation?

In order to perform the analysis, a respective theoretical framework was developed based on the concepts, which have a strong influence in the field of Education and Development Studies. The ideas and models of policy transfer and policy borrowing elaborated by Dolowitz and Marshs (2000) and Phillips and Ochs (2004) were combined and guided the mode of the analysis to achieve a more comprehensive view on the research problem.

This thesis is based on qualitative research and combines two methods: document analysis and interviewing (expert interviews). The combination of these two data-collection methods are aimed at presentation of more reliable and valid findings of the research.

1.4. Overview of the Study

The structure of this study consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 presents the research problem and relevance of the study as well as the research aims and questions. Chapter 2 presents study background and discusses previous research in the modern trends of higher education development (primarily internationalization)

and the Bologna process as an educational and political phenomenon. In Chapter 3, the country's (Belarus) background and higher education system are overviewed with respect to the Bologna process accession. Chapter 4 discusses theoretical framework of the study, focusing on the combination of Phillips and Ochs's (2004) circular model and Dolowitz and Marshs (2000) framework to analyze the process of policy transfer. Chapter 5 describes the research methodology and the choice of respective data-collection techniques. Chapter 6 presents the analysis of the gathered data based on the framework elaborated from the theoretical concepts. Chapter 7 outlines the overall conclusion, which sums up the achievements and limitations of the present research and discusses the areas of the further research that may be attributed to this study.

2. Background

2.1. General Debate about Internationalization of Higher Education

The international perspective of higher education is being extensively discussed nowadays. And such terms as ‘internationalization’ and ‘globalization’ are being frequently related to this dimension. Jane Knight (2008), Hans de Wit (2011), Ulrich Teichler (2004), Peter Scott (2005), Felix Maringe and Nick Foskett (2010) and other scholars have researched extensively on the complex relations between globalization and internationalization of higher education.

These processes are seen to be different but interrelated. While globalization can be defined as *“the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas across borders... which affects each country in a different way due to a nation’s individual history, traditions, culture and priorities”* (Knight and Wit, 1997, p. 6). Internationalization, according to one of the most widely used definition by Knight (2008), is *“the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education”* (p. 21). In this respect, globalization is presented as a process, which poses new challenges and opportunities and impacts internationalization of higher education.

Knight (2008) argues that internationalization is changing the world of education and globalization is changing the world of internationalization and promotes the use of term *“internationalization of education”* instead of *“globalization of education”* (p.3). Figure 1 represents the respective theory by the author.

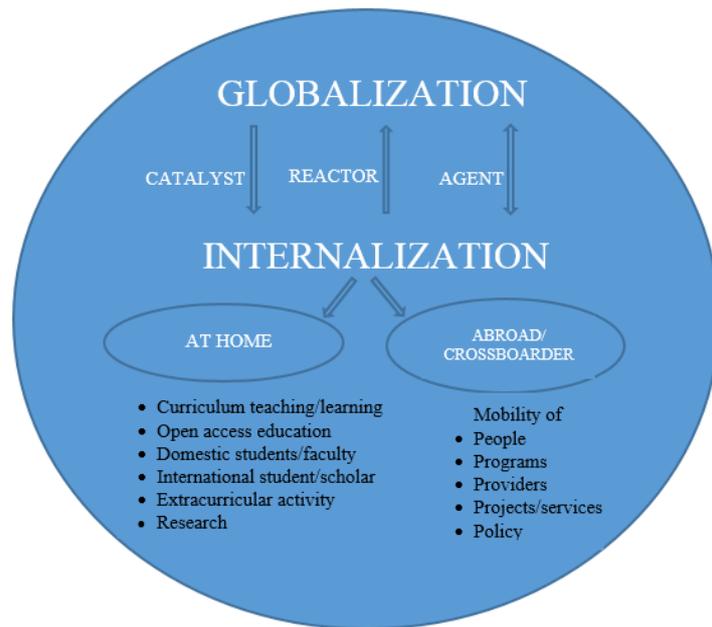


Figure 1: Higher Education Internationalization (Source: Knight, 2008)

Internationalization is seen as major force impacting higher education to meet the challenges of the new reality. Various political, economic, social and cultural notions of globalization have dramatically changed the development of higher education. According to Knight (2008) the key drivers of change are domination of the market economy and liberalization of trade, development of advanced technological and communication services, increased labour mobility, focus on the knowledge economy and lifelong learning, increased levels of private investment and decreased public support of education.

These factors have impacted the institutions of higher education in both developed and developing countries and challenged nation-state's role to act independently in this new reality. Olmos and Torres (2009) outline "ideological packaging" of globalization, which put more emphasis on economic goals of an education system rather than contribution to national cohesion and the growing importance of international institutions in educational change (as cited in Cowen & Kazamias, 2009, p. 110).

Such rhetoric brings to the light neo-liberal perspective that underpins globalization tendencies nowadays. According to Harvey (2007), neoliberalism is "a theory of

political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade”(p. 2). From this perspective the world is seen as a market place, where everything (including higher education) can be turned into a commodity and traded. The growing value of human capital and competitiveness of higher education system, in this view, promotes economic and social progress of any country and meets the requirements of the time.

Still, while studying internationalization of higher education at the national level, it is seen important to explore and explain essential mechanisms that underpin the process in each particular case. Knight and Wit (1997) defined four different rationales driving internationalization: political, economic, cultural, and academic. While economic rationales are considered to be more dominant than the other ones, Knight (2008) argues for the need to place greater priority on cultural rationale, aimed at development of intercultural communication and promotion of “*local, national and international citizenship*” (p.14). Such approach is supposed to help internationalization to proceed in a more harmonious and peaceful way and guide the main actors of higher education development to act cohesively (ibid.).

As a phenomenon, internationalization brings different countries and higher education institutions together by importing and exporting learning and teaching practices, establishing partnerships and mobility programs, generating new opportunities for the exchange of information and resources (Scott, 2005). In this respect one of the most successful and profound reforms in higher education in the last decades was the Bologna process, which is defined as a “*systemic sustained effort aimed at making [higher education] more responsive to requirements and challenges of global societies, economy and the labour market; a way of taking control of globalization and responding to its challenges*” (Jowi, 2009, p. 267). The Bologna process has promoted a major change in the structure, design and content of university education in Europe and become an illustrative example of the general trend of higher education internationalization.

2.2. The Bologna Process: General Information

The Bologna process (BP) has started in 1999, when 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration in order to establish common European area of higher education (EHEA, 1999). Nowadays 48 states have already implemented the BP reforms, which were designed according to the following “action lines” (Table 1):

Table 1: Bologna Process Action Lines

Action line	Established in the Bologna Declaration (1999)
1	Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
2	Adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles (extended to three – Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate)
3	Establishment of a system of credits (ECTS – European Credit Transfer System)
4	Promotion of mobility
5	Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance
6	Promotion of the European dimension in higher education
Action line	Added after the Prague Ministerial summit (2001)
7	Focus on lifelong learning
8	Inclusion of higher education institutions and students
9	Promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area
Action line	Added after the Berlin Ministerial summit (2003)
10	Doctoral studies and the synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area

Based on the official webpage of EHEA (2017)

Although the BP is a voluntary reform process, which does not impose any legal obligations to the member states, all the signatory countries have implemented its major reforms after the first decade of realization, which made it to be called “*the most profound revolution in European higher education*” (McMurrie, 2006, p. 39).

Among the guiding principles of the process are compatibility and comparability of the higher education systems aimed at greater mobility and promotion of free

movement of students, researchers and staff (EHEA, 1999). Still it is constantly repeated in the BP documents that this development should be combined with maintenance of cultural diversity and respect to autonomy. Such approach, from the author's perspective, builds a rather positive image of the BP both among the signatory countries and potential members.

The assessment of progress, approval of new countries to join the BP as well as new goals and measures to be implemented in the common EHEA are performed every 2-3 years during the ministerial meetings. And although the BP is seen as an overall inter-governmental cooperation, according to Werner (2008), institutions of higher education play a crucial role as "grass-roots actors" of implementation and respondents to the rising challenges (p. 9).

2.3. Different Perspectives on the Nature and Success of the BP

Despite its rather short history the BP has quickly become a topic of heated discussions and quite popular scientific enquiry. There are both those, who promote its positive image and successful future and those, who outline a number of drawbacks that the BP faces during its development and implementation in different countries.

First of all, there is an ongoing debate about the nature of the BP as either a top-down process with a particular political motives (Tomusk, 2006) or a bottom-up unconstrained initiative undertaken by the national governments (Wende, 2003). The first perspective is supported by the examples of several Central and Eastern European countries (e.g. Lithuania, Moldova) that use the BP as prerequisite and "*legitimization for accession to the EU*" (Leisyte, 2008, p. 15). While Witte (2006) argues that the majority of members is following the BP selectively and trying to avoid dramatic changes in their education systems.

The later perspective also brings to the light an issue with the Bologna process implementation and differences of the joining countries at the initial stage.

Tomusk (2006) states that the BP is not a completely new initiative, but rather an attempt to systematize already existing developments in the majority of Western countries, which unfairly divides countries into those, which have already prospered in the BP developments and those, which are at a much earlier stage of the reforms' implementation (e.g. post-Soviet countries). Doh (2008), Telegina and Schwengel (2012) also discuss uneven development of the BP in its member states and criticize it as an attempt for "unification" and "neo-liberalization" of higher education. Neave and Amaral (2008) argue that more focus in the BP implementation should be put to the extent, to which the higher education systems of different countries are able to absorb these new reforms.

Another concern reflects an increasing membership of the BP beyond the European Union countries. Tomusk (2006) refers to the extreme diversity of the BP countries "*from Scandinavia, through Great Britain, continental Europe, Albania and Russia*" and questions the possibility to create a common European system of higher education in such different environment with lots of controversial interests and challenges (p. 228).

This situation is being complicated by the lack of supranational legitimate power of the BP documents. According to Witte (2006) hardly any document in the BP can be considered as a policy in a classical sense and be legally binding. Tomusk (2006) also highlights the absence of a firm institutional framework to establish relevant implementation and monitoring procedures of the BP. Still it is seen important to mention here that recently the European commission has been performing as a legitimate authority of the BP mainly due to its funding functions of the BP activities (EHEA, 2015).

In the context of the discussed above positions, it can be stated that the BP is quite a complicated issue, which has its drawbacks and difficulties in implementation. Nevertheless, there are a number of supporters that outline pros of the BP to the cons of its opponents.

According to Scott (2003) the single fact that the BP is open and not restricted only to the EU members is a positive factor for cooperation, promotion of common way of thinking, economic and mental unity of the countries in the European continent.

Werner (2008) argues that this common European area of higher education shall increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education institutions in Europe, enhance mobility of teaching staff and students as well as employability of graduates. Wende (2003) is also optimistic about the implementation of the BP reforms as they represent already existing processes and developments in the majority of European Universities and such compliance is supposed to make the process of reforms smooth and successful.

The majority of criticism is concentrated though around the differences of countries' higher education institutions at their entry-level to the BP. Reichert and Tauch (2005) point out that Universities enter the BP with different level of autonomy and financial independence from their state, which influence the speed and success of the BP implementation.

Some researchers are also skeptic about the duration of a two-tier system (the Bachelor and Master Degree) and its ability to provide sufficient preparation of graduates (Johnes, 2003). Fransson (2005) brings out an issue of the academic year difference among member countries, which brings difficulties to student and staff mobility and smooth cooperation between Universities.

It can be concluded that there are different perspectives on the nature and success of the Bologna process. While the higher education sector in Europe has been influenced by the growing economic, political, social changes due to the process of globalization, the BP has become a response to the new challenges of the time and helped European universities to become more competitive and compatible. And although during its relatively short history there might be defined certain challenges in its implementation and development, it is seen incorrect to perform the final evaluation of its success or failure at the present stage.

3. Country Background

Belarus (officially the Republic of Belarus) is situated in Eastern Europe and bordered by Russia to the northeast, Ukraine to the south, Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest and Poland to the west. The population amounts to 9.4 million of whom 83.7 percent are Belarusians (Belstat, 2016). For centuries the country has had very close cultural, economic and political ties with both Western and Eastern European countries, absorbed and adopted the main trends and values from the both sides.

Belarus was a part of the Soviet Union and after its collapse in 1991 faced substantial economic and social crises. The country was technologically and strategically unprepared for the market system of relations. As an independent state, it continued to conduct rather conservative economic policy with the state's ownership of large sections of economy and interference in market relations. Large dependency on the Russian natural resources and external financial support has resulted in recent recession of 2015 and revealed structural problems in the Belarusian economy. The Government has worked out together with the World Bank the Action Plan 2016–2020 for aimed at reduction of vulnerability to external shocks, recovery of economic growth and competitiveness (World Bank, 2016).

Belarus is often labeled as "Europe's last dictatorship" due to the 22-year presidency of Alexander Lukashenko (Rankin, 2016, para. 2). Almost all the elections conducted under Lukashenko's rule as well as restriction of the right to freedom of expression and association, suppression of political opposition have been widely criticized by the international community as unfair (Amnesty International, 2017; Human rights watch, 2017). Since 2004 Belarus was subject to sanctions imposed by the European Union and the USA for human rights violations (Shraibman, 2016). The majority of sanctions against Belarus have been lifted by the EU in February, 2016 despite the concerns about political repressions and human rights abuse. According to Shraibman (2016), this decision is seen geopolitical in the

lights of unstable situation in the region due to Russia-Ukraine crises and Belarus' loyalty to 'the West'.

3.1. Higher Education in Belarus: New challenges and Old Legacies

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the new phase of Belarus development as an independent state have brought new challenges to the country's educational system. On the one hand, it was supposed to deal with the structural, political, social and economic changes within the state. And on the other hand, respond to global changes of the new century. This situation has provoked conceptual disputes between political establishment, civil society and academic community on the future of the higher education in Belarus.

According to Silova (2009), Belarus as one of the former Soviet countries shares common features in educational development and "*struggle with the slow pace of reforms, which have been seriously complicated and delayed by the legacies of the socialist past*" (p. 305). Among the positive socialist legacies, the author names solid educational infrastructure, high rates of literacy and general enrollment, fee-free education. While rigid bureaucracy, overloaded and centrally mandated curricula, authoritarian and teacher-centered learning practices are seen as a drawbacks of the Soviet past (ibid.). Still Silova (2009) outlines a general move from socialist education practices to more "Western-oriented" ones (p. 296).

Belarus is seen as a country with advanced education and highly developed science and according to the UN Human Development Report (2014) has a high primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (98.7 %) and the adult literacy rate (99.7%). The number of university students amounts to 355 per 10,000 people and represents one of the highest student-to-population ratios in Europe (ibid.). Belarus is also ranked 26th among 182 countries in UN Education Index (a part of Human Development Index (HDI), which reflects relatively high achievements of the country in the sphere of enhancement of literacy among adult population and number of those entered higher educational institutions (UN, 2014).

The presented figures are rather promising, but may shadow structural and quality problems of education development in Belarus. According to Shraibman (2016), entering a university since the Soviet times has become “*not an opportunity, but a social tradition*” and those who lack higher education are mistakenly understood by the society (para 8). The university diploma is seen as a “*certificate of one’s normality instead of showing some degree of professionalism*” (ibid, para 6). Such perspective is seen rather provocative, but reveals, from the authors point of view and personal experience, quite common motivation of the Belarusian students to enter higher education institutions and the position of Universities on quality assurance, promotion of science and further education.

It is also seen interesting that, although Belarus appears among the world’s leaders in education development, the country is lagging behind under such important economic indicators as GDP per capita (84th place), the balance in trade and payments, which are constantly negative (World Bank, 2016). While the contribution of higher education to economic growth is not always easy to calculate, human capital theory outlines rather strong correlation between these parameters and promotes investment in higher education as one of the strongest component of economic development (Desai and Potter, 2014). The latest OECD report (2014), which estimated social and individual as well as monetary and non-monetary efficiency from investments into education, has also reaffirmed this correlation in the majority of developed countries.

While there have not been sufficient studies to estimate the contribution of the higher education development to economic growth in Belarus, a number of researchers outline that Belarus, like the majority of the former Soviet countries, represents a typical case of human capital economic inefficiency related to “*the anachronous education system unable to respond the challenges of modern time*” (Dounaev, 2016, p.8). The recent report of the World Bank (2016) has shown a growing rate of employers’ dissatisfaction with the quality of specialists’ training in Belarus and portrayed the skills of employees to be quite a significant factor of economic development.

These perspectives reveal the issues of higher education quality, which relates not only to the growth of education availability, but also to the development of relevant architecture, which is able to respond to the current challenges. According to the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee (2011), the higher education system in Belarus has long been a victim of unbalanced state educational strategy, as the authorities have set impossible task to assure the quality of higher education, by increasing its availability and reducing the costs on higher education. Such strategy contradicts the common trend in many developing and developed countries, where mass higher education is based on a stable growth of costs on it (OECD, 2014).

The presented background of Belarusian higher education has revealed some particular features of the development and challenges that the sector faces nowadays. Mass availability of higher education has not resulted in restructuring of the educational architecture and quality that are able to face the internal and external challenges. A closer look at the higher education structure is supposed to help the reader understand the prerequisites for Belarus to enter the Bologna process.

3.2. Higher Education Structure

There are four main types of higher education institutions in Belarus: Classical university; Profile university or Academy; Institute; Higher college. In total, there are 55 higher education institutions (45 state and 10 private institutions), the most common form is full-time education (2/3 of students) while there are also part-time and distant studies (Belstat, 2016).

Legislative framework of the higher education in Belarus is based on the Constitution of 1994, Education Code of 2011 as well as decrees and regulations of the President and the Parliament of the Republic of Belarus. Based on these documents the Ministry of Education has primarily responsibility for education planning, development and finance (UNESCO 2011). The information presented below is based on this higher education legislative framework.

All higher education institutions regardless of their ownership type and affiliation are accountable to the Ministry of Education and subject to the state accreditation. The model curriculum is defined and confirmed by the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions define their individual curricula on the basis of the model one. The state certifies the compliance of the content and quality of education, provided by the institutions of higher education, which reflects rather state-centralized approach to higher education planning and management.

The academic year is divided into two semesters and runs from 1 September till the end of June. The main language of instruction is Russian and Belarusian, while there is a small number of Universities that offer instruction in English. This fact, although reveals positive shift to internationalization of higher education in the country, still represents rather closed nature of the Belarusian higher education.

In order to enter the higher education institutions in Belarus an enrollee must pass three centralized test exams arranged by the state. Each particular field or program requires defined combination of subjects with an obligatory state language (Belarusian or Russian) exam. The sum of a general average of the secondary education leaving certificate and the test exams' results allows to compete either for a public- or private- funded place. Although the number of state-funded places has reduced substantially in the recent decades, the Soviet-time tradition of two-year obligatory work placements for public-funded graduates still remains. This tradition has been in the center of debates between the state, civil society and student representatives and escalated structural problems of Belarus higher education. Aimed at effective distribution of labor force and economic development, mandatory placement in the modern situation reveals the problems of forced labor and inefficient preparation of graduates (Preiherman, 2015).

Tertiary education in Belarus includes two levels: first provides 4 to 6-year training (depending on the field) of “Certified Specialist” that has recently been equated to the European Bachelor’s degree; and second - 1 to 2-year training of the Master’s degree. Higher education institutions’ graduates have the possibility to receive

Postgraduate education: the degree of “Candidate of Science” is comparable to a PhD and requires at least 3 years of studies.

This brief overview of the higher education structure in Belarus reveals its special features and differences from the European higher education area. Although there are some common terms and approaches such as two-level system of Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree, their duration and content are seen difficult to compare. The following chapter will present a more detailed look at the prerequisites and challenges of Belarus accession to the European higher education area.

3.3. Accession to the Bologna Process

In the context of globalization and internationalization of higher education, Belarus accession to the Bologna process is seen essential. And until recently Belarus was the only country in the European region that was not a part of the EHEA. Still a number of structural problems hinder smooth transition of the country into the Bologna process architecture and make the Belarusian case truly a special one.

Belarus referred to the idea of joining the Bologna Process shortly after its launch. In 2002 it ratified the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region aimed at fostering the legal framework in the European area. And in 2012 the country made its first attempt to enter the EHEA, which ended with a failure. The official reply of the Bologna Secretariat to the country’s application stated, that the Belarusian higher education system did not meet the requirements to join the EHEA. Particularly, the conflict between the Belarusian and European academic values, such as level of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and students’ participation in higher education management was mentioned as the main obstacle. It was suggested to return to ‘Belarus question’ at the next summit of EHEA Ministers of Education in 2015 (EHEA, 2012).

The first attempt revealed serious structural problems of Belarus higher education system, which were supposed to be addressed not solely by the government. This

attempt also marked the creation of the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee, which united civil society activists and experts in the field of education, aimed at structural reforms of the higher education system in Belarus (BIBC, 2013).

In May, 2015 after its second attempt Belarus has joined the Bologna process at the conference in Yerevan. And it was the first time in the Bologna process history, when a country was admitted conditionally with a view to implement structural reforms in its higher education before the next Bologna Summit in 2018. The vital reforms were structured in a roadmap, which was supposed to be implemented by the Belarusian authorities and stakeholders in cooperation with the Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat (EHEA, 2015).

Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform (2015) calls for:

- modernization of the *qualifications framework* compatible with the EHEA architecture;
- establishment of an independent *quality assurance* agency in conformity with the European Standards and Guidelines;
- review of *legislation and practices* and identify any needed *modifications* for conformity with the obligations undertaken by Belarus to enter EHEA;
- implementation of the Bologna *transparency instruments* needed for recognition of learning outcomes (ECTS, Diploma Supplement);
- diversification of the *international students and staff mobility*;
- development of *lifelong learning* and *social dimension* of higher education;
- implementation of the EHEA *fundamental academic values*.

The roadmap envisages that the essential reforms will be conducted in three year-term. Although it doesn't have any binding force like any other document in the Bologna process, it is supposed to encourage and guide the country to meet the standards of the EHEA. Deeper analysis of the roadmap function and content will be presented in Chapter 6.

4. Theoretical Framework

The empirical analysis of this thesis has been shaped by a number of theoretical perspectives, which have a strong influence in the field of Education and Development studies nowadays.

Due to the modern tendencies of globalization and internationalization it is difficult to imagine that any process taking place in a particular country may occur in total isolation from external influences and developments of other countries. This reality is seen especially relevant for developing countries, which heavily rely on the experience and knowledge of developed countries and tend to adopt ‘Western’ lessons and models into their contexts.

According to one of the classical theories in the field of development, modernization theory, a country can ‘achieve development’ as long as it follows the example of developed countries. Modernization theorists argue, that developing countries can borrow policies and prosper from the successful experience of developed world in various aspects of social and economic life (Desai and Potter, 2014). While post-development authors, in their turn, criticize blind lessons learning and state, that focus should be made on specific context rather than attempts to import ready models and policies (ibid.).

In this respect the idea that policy or practice might be transferred or borrowed from other locations is not new and provides fertile soil for discussion and heated debates. The mechanism and nature of the policy transfer phenomenon will be discussed further in this chapter.

4.1. Policy Transfer

The concept of policy transfer is rather controversial and many scholars refer to it as an umbrella term for all the variety of policy movement processes (Kushnir, 2014; Bissell and Freeman, 2011). Along with the term transfer such notions as borrowing, import, lesson-drawing, copying, diffusion and translation are used.

Stone (2011) refers to the term transfer as a component of some bigger process of policy change or movement, e.g. a possible consequence of policy learning.

The most commonly accepted definition of policy transfer is elaborated by Dolowitz and Marsch (2000) and describe policy transfer as a “*process, by which knowledge and policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system*” (p. 5). In order to analyze the process of policy transfer Dolowitz and Marshs (2000) have developed a framework, which includes the following question-based components:

- **What** is transferred? (**object** of transfer);
- **Why** the policy is transferred? (**reasons** of transfer);
- **How** the policy is transferred? (**degree** of transfer);
- **Who** transfers the policy? (**actors** of transfer).

This framework is seen extremely useful for the present analysis of the Bologna ideas transfer into the Belarusian higher education practices as it highlights the essential components of the policy transfer phenomenon. It is also seen valuable, that the authors of this framework relate the process of policy transfer to policy outcomes and argue that policy transfer does not inevitably lead to the successful policy implementation (ibid.). Such approach brings a researcher’s attention to the contextual factors that may actualize during the process of policy transfer.

Nevertheless, this model does not provide substantial tools for further analysis of implementation, progress and outcomes of a policy transfer initiative, which made the author of this thesis search for additional framework that can expand this one.

4.2. A Circular Model of Policy Borrowing in Education

In the field of Education ideas of policy transfer are often associated with David Phillips and Kimberly Ochs (2004). The researchers widely discuss the motives and

contexts of educational policy transfer and have elaborated a number of models and tools for deep analysis of educational practices transfer.

According to Phillips and Ochs (2004) the transfer of policy may occur in a range of ways such as imposition (e.g. totalitarian decision-making), required under constraint (via colonial power on the subordinate lands), negotiation under constraint (e.g. loan terms under bilateral/multilateral agreements), a purposeful borrowing as an intentional copying, or voluntary process due to general influence (see Figure 2).

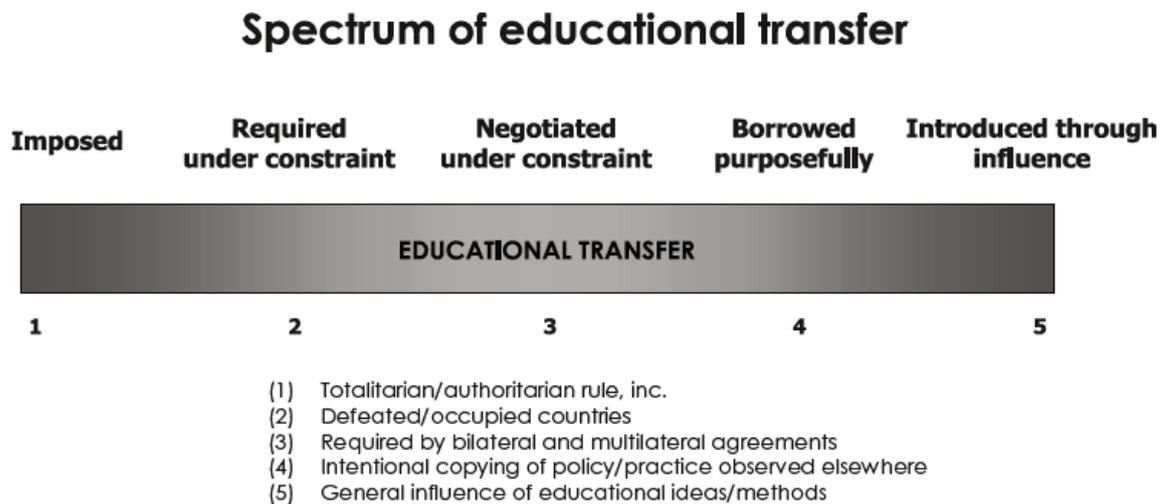


Figure 2: Spectrum of educational transfer (Source: Phillips & Ochs, 2004, p. 9)

Within this spectrum the accession of Belarus into the Bologna process may be defined as purposeful policy borrowing as it represents intentional copying of the EHEA policies and practices into the country's context. Phillips and Ochs (2004) describe borrowing as a part of educational transfer and see it as a deliberate, purposive phenomenon in educational policy development.

In order to analyze the policy borrowing practices in the field of education Phillips and Ochs (2004) have developed a framework, which is represented in a circular model (see Figure 3 in black). This model was developed on the example of the German influence on the English education system and represents a four stage

circular model that describes the processes that a country (or any other unit) proceeds while borrowing a policy.

The *first stage* of the model describes internal and external impulses that motivated the interest and attraction for a policy to be borrowed. For example, is there internal dissatisfaction or external processes that influence the decision? What are the potentials of policy borrowing and why is there a need to change status quo? This stage may help a researcher to trace the underlining mechanisms of policy borrowing in a particular case.

The *second stage* portrays the nature of the decision to change: whether it is a theoretical, realistic, ‘quick fix’ or ‘phoney’ decision. According to Phillips and Ochs (2004) it is recommended that transparency, experience and credibility guide this phase as, for example, over-theoretical or a quick fix choice may have problematic implications at further stages of the borrowing process (p. 780).

The *third stage* represents implementation phase of a policy borrowing and discusses possible scenarios of either support or resistance to change. It is also seen necessary to address a particular context of the policy implementation, which influences the speed of change and adaptation as well as actors’ role in the process.

The *fourth final stage* of the model is internalization/indigenization of a policy, which helps to assess the success and effect of a policy after its implementation. This phase is seen essential for a researcher to evaluate and assess the policy synthesis into the overall system or strategy. And according to Phillips and Ochs (2004) the results of evaluation might start the whole process again, which brings the model to a “full circle” (p. 785)

The model presents a very useful tool for the analysis and understanding of policy borrowing process and includes aspects related to the policy attraction and motives, decision-making process, factors influencing planning and implementation of a policy and mechanisms of its monitoring and evaluation. The authors argue, that contextual factors influence policy borrowing decisions and affect the policy development and implementation process (ibid.).

While the whole process of borrowing is presented as a circular one, it is supposed to establish a “*new status quo, which in turn will be susceptible to impulse for further change*” (ibid. p.781).

The idea to combine two different approaches (Dolowitz and Marshs; Phillips and Ochs) to the policy transfer phenomenon is aimed, on the one hand, at expansion of the researcher’s tools to perform the analysis and, on the other hand, at addressing the process nature (Phillips and Ochs model) as well as underlining components (Dolowitz and Marshs framework) of the policy transfer phenomenon. The created model is presented below.

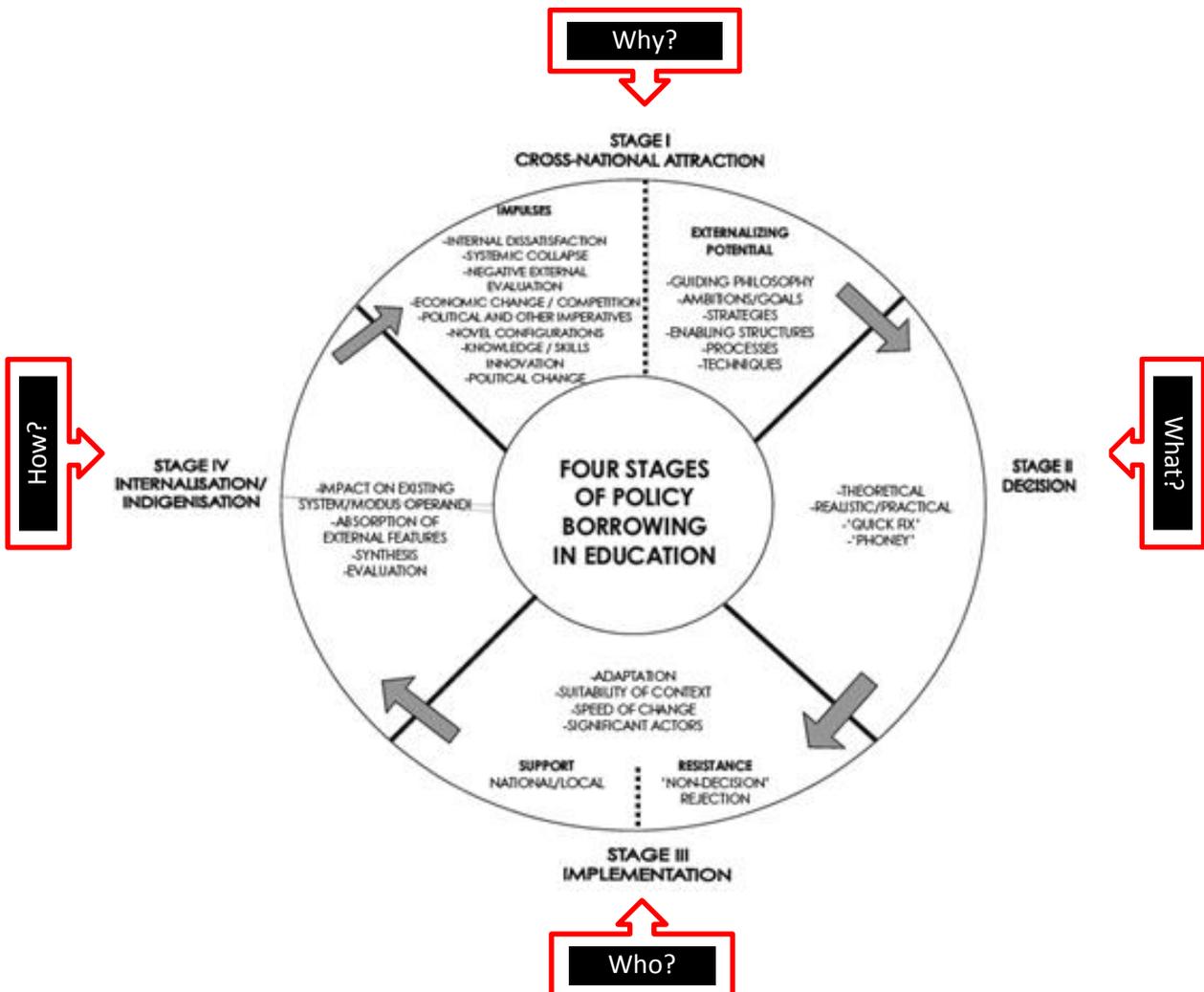


Figure 3: Phillips and Ochs’ (2004) four-stage model of policy borrowing in education, combined with the question-based components of Dolowitz and Marshs (2000) in red.

4.3. Limitations of the Model

Although the model attempts to explain and analyze different aspects of the policy borrowing in education and highlights the importance of a particular context in this process, it is still seen problematic to address all the factors that may or may not actualize in each particular context and present them as essential components in one model.

It may be also criticized for standardization of the policy borrowing process as all countries are supposed to undergo the stages and include the components, described in the model. Such focus may withdraw the researcher's attention from other inevitable aspects of a policy transfer initiative.

Nevertheless, the created model expands the analytical potential of the original two models and is seen to be a helpful tool to perform the analysis of this thesis, address its purpose and the research questions.

5. Methodology

According to Jackson (2011), it is essential for a researcher to be aware of the underlying assumptions he or she makes about the nature of reality and knowledge, selection of tools while conducting a research. In this respect, it is seen important to outline, that this thesis applies the philosophy of critical realism.

The critical realism perspective takes a middle position between positivism and social constructivism. It acknowledges the existence of an independent external reality, that can be studied by a researcher through observation. But at the same time critical realism believes that knowledge about this reality is socially constructed as each person's perception of the world is subjective (Sayer, 2000).

From the authors perspective, critical realism takes rather constructive position in understanding of complex social reality. While acknowledging a researcher's subjectivity, it does not deny common laws in political, social and economic development that may share different countries or other units of the analysis. Still Brante (2001) argues, that different factors and mechanisms may or may not actualize, depending on a particular context. That is why it is seen impossible to establish the single truth and eliminate individual biases and beliefs.

Nevertheless, according to Trochim and Donnelly (2008) pursuit of objectivity is important and can be achieved through particular methodology, application and combination of multiple data sources and theories that are supposed to improve the validity of any research (p. 19). Therefore, although this research has only qualitative nature, it combines two data-collection techniques: document analysis and interviewing (expert interviews). Combination of these methods is supposed to improve the research validity and the choice of Belarus higher education transformation as a case study is aimed at presenting a particular context implementation and development of the Bologna process policies and practices.

In order to perform the analysis of the collected material the theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter was used. The data was structured and presented

in accordance with the four-stages circular model and accompanied by the question-based components, elaborated to address the purpose of this research.

5.1. Case Study

A case study can be defined as either a research method or research strategy and paradigm (Gomm et al., 2000). As Stake (1995) argues, case study is not supposed to be defined through its research methods, but rather in respect to its theoretical orientation and interest to a particular case. In this thesis case study is presented as a research strategy, which aims at investigation of a single country's case – Belarus accession to the Bologna process as a policy borrowing example, using qualitative methods of data collection.

Gomm et al. (2000) outline distinctive features of case study while comparing it with survey and experimental approaches. They conclude, that cases are “naturally occurring” as they are not manipulated as in an experiment and studied in their real-life context, which is often of central interest to a researcher (p. 4). Data are collected and analyzed about a large number of features of a case and quantification of data is not prioritized, while qualitative research is seen as superior (ibid.).

Case studies are widely used in social sciences and according to Yin (2003) this popularity arises out of the desire to understand complex social reality and case study is seen as a preferred strategy when a researcher has little control over events and aims at answering questions "why" and "how" (p. 13). Case studies are also seen as an important tool in theories testing and hypotheses building, while offering the possibility of causal mechanisms and the specific context investigation (ibid.).

However, case studies are usually criticized for providing little basis for scientific generalization. It is also seen difficult to conduct comparative analysis with a single case study. Nevertheless, Yin (2003) argues, that even a single case is critical in its way (e.g. in theory building) and it may be either unique or typical, which also makes it valuable for further research as unit of comparison with other cases or its own analysis at different points in time.

The decision to choose Belarus as a country case of accession to the Bologna process has several reasons. Firstly, it represents a unique case of the last country to join the EHEA on the European continent. The investigation of this phenomenon is seen valuable and interesting. Secondly, Belarus is a typical case of a post-Soviet country, which has to overcome the process of transformation and adjustment to the new reality after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this respect, it shares common features with other former Soviet countries and the results of this research may be compared with similar studies conducted in these countries. And finally, being Belarusian gives the author of these study greater possibilities to access information and experts in the field due to absence of the language barrier, need for additional travel arrangements and in general 'closed nature' of the country.

5.2. Qualitative Research

There is an ongoing debate on the different methods' and approaches' appropriateness in social sciences. The adherents of quantitative research promote the logic of experiment and survey inquiries as they supposed to present more reliable and generalizable findings. While qualitative researchers stress socially constructed nature of reality and search for meanings and contexts of each particular object of study (Marvasti, 2004).

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue, there are a number of reasons to choose qualitative research such as philosophical orientation, the studied discipline and the nature of the problem researched. In case of this thesis, qualitative methods were chosen to answer the research questions as they are supposed to present a detailed context based data and address the research problem considering particular discourse and perspective that underpin Belarus accession to the Bologna process. Qualitative research has also gained popularity in the field education and development studies recently (see Cowen and Kazamias, 2009; Sumner and Tribe, 2008), which makes this research relevant and topical.

Based on the scope of the research, document analysis has been selected as a primary data collection technique. While expert interviews were chosen as a second research method, aimed at expanding reliability and validity of the research.

5.2.1. Document Analysis

As Stake (1995) argues, document analysis as a research method is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies, that aim at producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon. While documents may serve a variety of purposes in the research, Bowen (2009) outlines their particular importance in provision of background information as well as data on the context and historical perspective. Information and insights derived from documents can be also valuable for tracking change and development of a research object, verification of findings or supplement of other data sources and research (ibid.).

Documents can be also referred as “social facts” which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways (Marvasti, 2004, p. 47). In this respect, when studying documents, a researcher should understand them as an expression of a specific context. According to Prior (2003) without understanding of a context and the way words and concepts are connected to each other a mere counting of words will be performed.

According to Bowen (2009), there are a number of advantages that document analysis offers in relation to other research methods. They are *availability* as many documents are in the public domain now; *cost and time efficiency*, while it is primarily based on data selection rather than data collection; *exactness and broad coverage* as they may cover many settings and present credible and accurate information prepared by professionals (especially official documents) (ibid.).

Nevertheless, the majority of documents are usually produced for purposes other than conducted research and selection of particular documents for analysis may have a biased nature, for example, due to a researcher’s affiliation with a particular organization (Bowen, 2009). It is also seen important to be familiar with data

collection techniques, purposes of previous research and use of documents, authors' background etc.

This research is mainly focused on primary official sources of information such as national higher education policy documents, declarations, official reports on the Bologna process implementation, the European Union and Belarus working papers, published official documents of the Bologna process working groups and relevant statistical data. The analysis of secondary data sources such as reports and surveys of non-governmental organization and national studies was also performed in this thesis.

The majority of the documents used in the analysis can be assigned to one of the three groups:

- The official documents of the EHEA, which comprise the legislative framework for development and implementation of the Bologna Process;
- The legislation and official documents on the higher education sector of Belarus;
- The research and analytical reports of the Independent Bologna Committee, which reflect alternative position on the Bologna Process implementation in Belarus.

Such approach, from the authors perspective, gives the chance to perform a comprehensive analysis of the main stakeholders' position on the Bologna reform implementation in the Belarusian context. These documents provide unique and relevant information on the research topic, which is based on long-term research and is prepared by qualified professionals. Most of the analyzed documents available through official web-pages of the respective parties.

5.2.2. Expert Interviews

Marvasti (2004) defines interviews as a form of conversation with a purpose. As a data gathering technique, interview can take different forms and shapes, depending

on the degree of formality and structure. According to Marvasti (2004), interviewing methodology can greatly broaden and expand a research as it provides the tool for a researcher to understand the meaning and significance of a particular phenomenon for an interviewee/group of people.

The use of expert interviews is a specific form of interviews has long been popular in social research (Bogner et al., 2009). The capacity of an interviewee to be an expert in a certain field presents the main interest for a researcher. Such form of interview is also seen as highly efficient and concentrated method of data gathering in comparison with participatory observation or quantitative surveys as it gives access to practical insider knowledge and shortens the time to collect valuable data (ibid.). In this respect, it was decided to conduct several expert interviews in order to enrich data collected from document analysis and get insider view on the Bologna process implementation in the Belarusian context.

In general, there are three main forms of interviews depending on their structure: structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. For this research the form of semi-structured interview was considered to be the most appropriate as it offers a greater flexibility, comparing to the structured interviews, to adjust to a particular situation of an interview, but due to the existence of a particular set of questions, prepared beforehand, the interviewer may stay focused on the research questions and topic (Marvasti,2004). Such strategy is also seen relevant, while conducting expert interviews, as interesting perspectives of an interviewee may pop up and it could be difficult for a researcher to predict and prepare for all the topics in a conversation.

Originally, it was planned to conduct at least three expert interviews with the representatives of:

- *academic community* (academic staff of one of the main country's higher education institutions – Belarusian State University);

- *non-profit state organizations*, responsible for the information support of the Bologna process implementation in Belarus (National Institute for Higher Education and International Center of Collaboration in Education);
- *civil society organizations*, which are involved in the discussion and promotion of the Bologna ideas in Belarus (Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee, Agency of Humanitarian Technologies).

Such approach to the selection of the respondents was supposed to present different insider perspectives on the Bologna reform process in Belarus. But as a result, only two experts were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide during the fieldwork to Belarus in March, 2017.

The interviewees were selected based on their availability, competence and information awareness on the Bologna-related reforms in the Belarusian higher education. Both experts represent civil society organizations: Agency of Humanitarian Technologies (interviewee A) and Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee (interviewee B), and for the sake of anonymity their real names are not disclosed in this research. This decision was motivated by “political reasons”, which both experts outline as a precondition to stay anonymous. The average time of an interview was 30 minutes and with the permission of the respondents their answers were recorded.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

Besides the limitations of the research methods presented above, the author of this thesis has faced several technical limitations, which have unfavorably affected the possibilities and process of the present research.

First of all, the initial plan to conduct a greater number of expert interviews faced with inability to reach some experts, mainly involved in governmental and academia activities. Some of them were impossible to contact as they did not reply

to e-mails and telephone calls, others refused to be interviewed due to lack of time and interest.

Such situation, from the authors perspective, reveals the political context of the country and the problem researched, as people are very conscious of what they say and how the information they give may be further used. Even the fact, that these research is conducted in the European University and in the country (Sweden), which has unstable diplomatic relations with Belarus, can make a person working for a state organization think twice before giving an interview.

Secondly, the amount of publicly available and transparent sources on the political developments in higher education in Belarus is rather scarce. For example, there is no official web-resources that monitor and publish information on the Bologna process implementation in Belarus as well as government actions in the process. The discussed factors may limit the comprehensiveness of the study.

6. Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis and discusses the way the main ideas, practices and policies of the Bologna process are being transferred to the Belarusian context. Based on the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 4, the analysis is divided into four parts, which represent the essential stages of the education policy borrowing model and are aimed at addressing the research questions of this study.

6.1. Cross-National Attraction

According to Phillips and Ochs' model (2004), the first stage of a policy borrowing process represents cross-national attraction and impulses (internal and external) that initiate any change in the education sector. In the case of Belarus, the impulses to join the Bologna process have both external and internal nature while representing a complex relation of different interests and tendencies.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus had to face the new challenge of defining its place and path in the new reality and the education sector had to change its face as well. As interviewee A pointed out, higher education during the Soviet times was primarily aimed at ideological upbringing and preparation of the specialists needed for particular needs of the planned economy. While with the independence of the Belarusian state, education strategy and aims were supposed to be changed. As the expert further argues, with the fall of the Iron Curtain³ the tendencies of globalization and internationalization of higher education have become not only distant words and dreams, but also inevitable processes that Belarus needed to be included in.

According to Heyneman and Skinner (2014), each post-Soviet country in transition to market economy has had to restructure its higher education system as labor markets became free of the state control and required new labor force with different

³ Iron Curtain refers to the political and ideological barrier erected after World War II by the Soviet Union to shut out itself and its allies from open contact with the West and other noncommunist areas (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2015).

qualifications and skills. And although formal indicators of the Belarusian higher education were rather high, both external experts and the Belarusian high-level officials acknowledged the growing gap between employees' qualifications and market requirements (Heyneman and Skinner, 2014; Matskevich, 2013)

During the first decade of the country's independence, the Belarusian authorities have repeatedly declared the intention to "modernize" and "transform" higher education (Matskevich, 2013, p. 2). And in the early 1990s the National Institute for Higher Education was established in order to develop the main directions of higher education reform, the goals and objectives of the Belarusian higher education in general. Compatibility of Belarusian universities at European and international labor market was defined among the priorities for future higher education development (ibid.).

The State Program of Higher Education Development in Belarus for 2011-2015 envisaged the increase of quality of education training in accordance with the strategy of social and economic development of the country as a part of European educational system. In this respect, the Program highlights the intention of the country to access the Bologna process:

“The planned accession of the Republic of Belarus to the Bologna Process will ensure the quality of training of specialists with higher education, development of the national system of higher education based on the international trends and best practices; will strengthen international cooperation with educational and scientific institutions of foreign countries” (The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 2010, p.9, “My translation”)

International cooperation is mentioned among seven main goals of the higher education development of the country mainly through the *"increase of international prestige of the Belarusian higher school and tripling the volume of export of educational services"* (ibid., p. 4, “My translation”).

These statements highlight interest and acknowledgement of the importance of international dimension in higher education by the state leadership. In these respect

the Bologna process is seen as a successful example of reforms in higher education that promotes competitiveness and attractiveness of European universities to the rest of the world as well as support the modernization of education and training systems in order to meet the needs of the changing labour market (EHEA, 2015).

It is also seen interesting, that export of educational services is discussed in the State Program as a priority of international cooperation, while such important aspects of the Bologna process as students' and staff mobility are not mentioned. This means that the country strategy is mainly aimed at attracting international students and not expanding opportunities for the Belarusian students and staff to participate in international exchange programs although both processes are seen as an integral part of the EHEA development (EHEA, 1999).

According to the official statistics (Belstat, 2016), more than 30 000 of Belarusians are attaining their higher education abroad while the number of international students in the country's universities amounts to 14 594. The majority of the international students comprise former Soviet countries (Turkmenistan – 56,1%, Russia – 10,6%, China – 4,9%, Azerbaijan – 2,8%). These statistics reflects low attractiveness of the Belarusian universities at international level and, according to Heyneman and Skinner (2014), the primary interest of the post-Soviet states in the Belarusian higher education reveals existing cultural, language and political ties among the countries.

In order to attract international students, the Belarusian universities need to adapt their education process to the modern trends and needs of higher education practices. And accession to the Bologna process in this respect can foster competitiveness of the country's tertiary education as well as its future attractiveness to the students of the EHEA. Since interconnectedness of educational structures and their comparability are central to the Bologna framework, the failure to adapt to its provisions and regulations may leave the country out of the whole European higher education context.

Why has Belarus decided to accessed the Bologna process?

It can be concluded that primary impulses that triggered cross-national attraction of the Bologna framework for Belarus were “internal dissatisfaction” with the higher education policies that resulted from the “systemic collapse” and “political change” that faced the country after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The need to address “economic change and competition” as a newly independent state in market economy made the Belarusian government search for ways to adapt its higher education system to the new needs of the time in order to tackle “negative external evaluation” from international community regarding competitiveness and quality of its higher education (Phillips and Ochs, 2004, p. 778).

6.2. Making a Decision to Change

The second stage of Phillips and Ochs’ (2004) circular model represents the government’s decision to change and discuss such types of decision making processes as theoretical, realistic/practical, ‘quick fix’, and ‘phoney’. As the authors argue, the majority of the post-Soviet countries used ‘quick fix’ decision-making method in order to change their education systems to the new reality. A ‘quick fix’ solution is discussed as the most dangerous as it does not envisage a proper evaluation of the outcomes and often is made for particular political gains (ibid.).

In the case of Belarus accession to the Bologna process the government’s decision can also be defined as a ‘quick fix’. The idea to transfer the successful experience of the European countries into the national context seems to be taken rather optimistic and was not supported by substantial preparations from the government. According to the opinion of interviewee B, the decision of the authorities to join the EHEA could be considered as an important step to modernize higher education in the country if it would have been accompanied by a firm commitment to change old architecture of the higher education, its objectives and values. The ambiguity of the government’s “*intentions to modernize without readiness for real modernization*” is reflected in the failure of Belarus to access the Bologna process from the first attempt, states expert B (“My translation”).

In 2011 the Belarusian Ministry of Education sent the first application and national report on readiness of the higher education of Belarus to join the Bologna process. But at the summit of EHEA Ministers of Education in 2012 the application was rejected as Belarus' policies in the field of higher education failed to respect the Bologna process values, such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy and students' participation in higher education governance (EHEA, 2012). Such conclusion was made based on the alternative report presented to the Bologna Secretariat by the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee, a civil initiative of independent experts in the field of education and a number of public organizations (BIBC, 2013). This report revealed serious structural problems of the Belarusian higher education system and stated that legislation of the country does not correspond to the ideas and principles of the Bologna process:

“The evaluation of Belarusian higher education policies, existing legal framework, institutional autonomy and academic freedom conditions allows us to conclude that without complex higher education reforms Belarus full membership in EHEA won't be effective” (BIBC, 2013, p. 23).

Still in 2015 the Belarusian government made the second attempt to join the EHEA which was successful. But it was the first time in the Bologna process history, when a country was admitted conditionally with a view to implement structural reforms in its higher education system. The vital reforms were structured in a Roadmap, which provided three years' timeline for the country's higher education modernization in terms of legislations and educational practices (EHEA, 2015).

Some experts and representatives from the civil society skeptically assessed the decision to accept Belarus to the EHEA as the Belarusian authorities are seen to have done little to fulfill the requirements for joining the Bologna process between the two attempts in 2012 and 2015 (Astapenia, 2016; Kulakevich, 2015; Preiherman, 2015). Nevertheless, the Roadmap for higher education reform elaborated for the country is considered as a “unique political achievement” as it provides a mechanism for international monitoring and verification of the

fulfillment of obligations until the next EHEA summit in 2018 and provides concrete program to reform the higher education system of the country (Dounaev, 2016, p. 5).

It can be concluded that although the decision of the Belarusian government to join the Bologna process was a ‘quick fix’ one, it faced resistance from both international community and civil society. The need to implement profound reform in the higher education sector was reflected in adoption of the Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform.

What are the policies and ideas that are supposed to be transferred in Belarusian higher education practices?

The Bologna Declaration (1999) envisages, that each country of the Bologna process shall adopt a system essentially based on the three cycle (Bachelor/ Master/ Doctorate) with easily readable and comparable degrees through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement and system of credits (ECTS). Mobility for students, teachers and researchers as well as European co-operation with regard to quality assurance and European dimension into higher education should be promoted (EHEA, 1999, p. 2). The full list of respective reforms is presented in Table 1 (p. 9). Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform (2015) calls for implementation of these policies and ideas as well as fundamental academic values of the EHEA (academic freedom, institutional autonomy and students’ participation in higher education government) into Belarusian higher education practices. Like any other document in the Bologna process it doesn’t have any binding force, but it is supposed to guide and encourage the country’s management to meet the EHEA standards.

6.3. Implementation

The third stage of the policy borrowing model is implementation. According to Phillips and Ochs (2004,) it includes adaptation process, reveals suitability of the context, speed of change and support or resistance from various policy actors.

Who are the main actors in the process of mediation and implementation of the Bologna requirements into Belarusian higher education practices?

Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform (2015) states that the Belarusian authorities (*“the Government, the National Parliament, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders”*) and the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) should work together on development and implementation of the roadmap provisions (p. 1). The BFUG is responsible for appointment of a coordination group of members and consultative members that will *“facilitate cooperation, seek to identify possible partners for developing specific policy areas, and advice the BFUG on progress in the implementation of this road map”* (ibid, p. 3). The Belarusian authorities is responsible for facilitation of the work of this group and shall provide a contact person or contact group for this work. The coordination group and the Belarusian side are supposed to meet at least two times a year to discuss the developments, which will be reported to the BFUG.

Despite the skepticism regarding the ability and willingness of the Belarusian authorities to perform modernization of the country’s higher education, the Ministry of Education undertook first steps in 2015 to implement the Roadmap provisions in the national legislation. On 30 July 2015 it issued Order No. 628 *“On measures to incorporate EHEA principals in the national education system in 2015–2018”* and on 15 September 2015 Guidance No. 08-17/2077 *“On educational process organization in higher education institutions in 2015/2016 academic year”*.

These documents set targets to fulfil the obligations related to the Roadmap implementation including the development of the national qualifications framework, establishing multilevel higher education system and independent quality assurance system, development of student and staff academic mobility. The respective legislation framework for these provisions should be presented by the end of 2017 and incorporated into the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (EHEA, 2015).

However, according to the Independent Bologna Committee analytical report (2016), the terminology and targets of the government limit themselves to “*organizational and instrumental implementation leaving aside the more sensitive issues of fundamental academic values implementation*” (p. 2). The Belarusian authorities are also being criticized for the lack of transparency and openness in the EHEA elements implementation as amendments to the legislation and innovations’ implementation into higher education practices are not publicly discussed or published at the official resources of the Belarusian government (ibid.).

The Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee, in its turn, performs regular monitoring (every 4 month) of the Roadmap implementation and analysis the prospects of Belarus accession to the EHEA based on the published legislation and statements made by the government representatives (BIBC, 2016). Based on the methodology elaborated from the Roadmap’s provisions, three main directions of the implementation process are analyzed: compliance with the EHEA principles, compliance with the Roadmap time line and transparency of the process.

The latest report (October-January, 2017) has shown that although the process of implementation of Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform has entered its final stage and the government is supposed to introduce all required legislative and structural amendments by the end of 2017, little progress can be acknowledged (BIBC, 2017). This makes the authors to question the success of the Roadmap implementation:

“... the government continuously postpones the submission of the draft legislative amendments to the Education Code...there is no significant progress in the Roadmap implementation especially in terms of the social dimension of higher education, academic values, establishment of independent quality assurance agency and others. This demonstrates a high risk that the Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform will not be implemented on time and to the extent that was initially envisaged” (BIBC, 2017, p.7) .

According to the opinion of interviewee B, it is unlikely, that substantial reforms based on European values will be introduced to the higher education system of Belarus in the coming years as long as they conflict the “*authorities’ main goal to preserve control in education sector*” (“My translation”). Such perspective is seen as rather pessimistic but it also reveals lack of the government efforts to perform structural changes in the sector of higher education.

Still in February 2017 the Ministry of Education presented a new version of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus which is supposed to be approved by the Belarusian Parliament in July, 2017. The new Code envisages inclusion to Belarusian legislation a number of the Bologna process and the Roadmap provisions, such as three-cycle system of higher education and transparency instruments needed for recognition of learning outcomes (ECTS, Diploma Supplement); establishment of an independent quality assurance agency and increased autonomy of institutions of higher education to participate in the election of its management and representatives (Education code, 2017).

These amendments are made in line with the Roadmap provisions although they do not represent all the aspects of the transformation the higher education system of Belarus needs to perform. The new version of the Education code does not cover sphere of academic values. It does not discuss academic freedoms and students’ rights to participate in higher education institutions’ governance.

It can be concluded that the Roadmap implementation process faces a significant resistance from the government, which slows down the speed of change and questions fulfillment of Belarus’ obligations with respect to the Roadmap time line. Nontransparent regulatory and legal framework makes it difficult to trace the changes in line with the EHEA provisions. According to Phillips and Ochs (2004) implementation and adaptation of a borrowed policy in a country with decentralized systems or less direct political control will be performed more easily and effectively. The case of Belarus seems to justify this argument as the centralized and politicized nature of decision-making and implementation processes complicates quick and smooth transfer of the policies into the national context.

6.4. Internalization/Indigenization

The final stage of the circular model is internalisation and indigenisation. It includes assessment of the impact of a policy on existing system by re-assessing the original motives and objectives of policy makers, examination how and to what extent features from another system have been adopted to the national context and evaluation of whether expectations of the borrowing have been realistic (Phillips and Ochs, 2004). As the authors argue, the degree of policy adaptation depends on a large number of contextual factors and require careful analysis of local conditions (ibid.).

Although accession of Belarus to the Bologna process has not finished yet (implementation of the Roadmap provisions are supposed to be performed by 2018) it is seen valuable to perform preliminary evaluation of this education policy borrowing initiative as the previous part of this chapter has shown significant difficulties in the policy adjustment to the Belarusian context.

According to the opinion of respondent B, the decision to accept Belarus to the Bologna club was determined by a "*special geopolitical situation*" rather than interest in higher education reformation. The role of Belarus in trying to somehow resolve the crisis in Ukraine⁴ has been positively assessed by the European side and provided space for renewal of a comprehensive dialog. This position is also shared by a number of independent scholars (Astapenia, 2016; Kulakevich, 2015; Preiherman, 2015,) who describe admission of Belarus to the EHEA as a 'goodwill gesture' and rather neutral space for renewal of dialog with the Belarusian authorities after the period of confrontation.

The recent statements made by the state leader Alexander Lukashenko regarding reforms in higher education also reveal cautious attitude of the Belarusian side with respect to substantial transformation of the sector:

⁴ Ukrainian crises - prolonged political crisis in Ukraine and Russian military intervention in the country's territories, which led to the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and war in Donbass (the Guardian, 2014).

"...Of course, it is important that we are joining a pan-European education space, but we should not mindlessly copy Western system of education. We can do much harm, and then it will be difficult to come back. Think about some issues of education, do you want our best specialist to run to the UK?" (Ria news, 20166 "My translation")

Such position can further postpone and even challenge implementation of the Bologna reforms in Belarus. As long as the Ministry of Education is guided by political will of the head of the state, legislation and structural changes may be performed only with the president's approval. According to the Independent Bologna Committee (2017), the Roadmap implementation is currently in serious danger as the President has recently appointed the new Minister of Education, the Chairman of the Communist Party of Belarus. The previous minister of education was considered in political and academic circles as a moderate reformer, while the newly appointed minister is known for *"his extreme conservatism and support for the Soviet ideological model"* (p.2).

As long as the EHEA has no mechanisms to exclude the country and all the Bologna process documents including the Roadmap does not have any binding force, the Belarusian side does not *"feel pressured or obliged"* to fulfil any recommendations, states expert B ("My translation"). The situation is deteriorating by the fact, that other higher education stakeholders (civil society and academic community) participate limitedly and play insignificant role in the country's higher education development.

Expert A outlines the general problem of the society's low involvement in discussions and understanding of the need to perform any reforms in the country's higher education: *"Our society is not ready for new reforms, the majority of people do not understand the essence of the reforms proposed by the EHEA... and if you don't understand anything, you will not be able to support it"* ("My translation"). Probably, if a broader public involvement and debate on the higher education reform took place, the implementation and indigenisation of the Bologna process

ideas would have another effect, argues the expert A, “*the dominant state’s role leaves very little space for initiatives and creativity without which any changes are impossible*” (“My translation”).

According to the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee (2016), “*the whole legislative-regulatory basis of higher education is saturated with distrust to students, academic personnel and employers... it is oriented at the use of only the tools of external higher school management.*” (p. 12). The results of the recent research on Belarusian universities’ institutional autonomy level, conducted by the organization using the method adopted by European University Association (EUA), have shown a very low level (the parameters did not exceed 25% of the norm) of organizational, financial, personnel and especially academic autonomy (BIBC, 2016). This record is seen to be the worst in the EHEA (ibid.).

Similar situation is depicted with students’ participation in higher education institutions management: it is seen limited due to the need of approval by the university administration of all the decisions made by student organizations, and their representatives, for example, are not involved in the process of the programs content determination (BIBL, 2016). Other stakeholders such as employers are almost non-represented in university councils, although formally such possibility exists (ibid.).

Despite the amendments to the Education Code presented by the Ministry of Education in February, 2017 aimed at expansion of the higher education institutions autonomy in terms of curriculum design and election of rectors, the reforms are most likely to take a “*nominal form*” and will not implicate progressive involvement of all higher education stakeholders in the decision-making process, argues expert B. “*But how it will be evaluated by the international community and the Bologna secretariat next year is another interesting question*”, says the expert (“My translation”).

The whole issue of the Roadmap provisions fulfillment raises an interesting perspective of the country’s prestige on the international/European arena. If Belarus

does not meet the roadmap timeline and provisions, whether it will be treated as an outsider of the Bologna process and lose credibility from the member states. Or will it be the first country to be excluded from the Bologna process? *“There might be different scenarios, even that the authorities will catch the last train and implement all the needed reforms. But I question primacy of Bologna reforms to political reforms in the country, without which we cannot fully become the member of the EHEA”*, states the expert A (“My translation”).

How are the Bologna policies being implemented and adopted to the Belarusian context and what are the outcomes of this transformation?

It can be concluded that the Bologna reforms face significant difficulties in the Belarusian context implementation. Although the final transformation of the higher education system is not supposed to be performed by the present time, the conducted reforms are seen as insufficient in terms of the Roadmap content and timeline. The main obstacle in the reforms internalization in the national context is seen the government’s unpreparedness to decentralize higher education system. The higher education stakeholders participate limitedly and play insignificant role in higher education management and decision-making process. It seems that Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform has not become a strategic plan for transformation of the higher education system and the original motives and objectives of Belarusian policy makers are rather detached from the Bologna ideas and principles. Although the final evaluation of the outcomes might be performed after the next summit of EHEA in 2018.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has presented the analysis of transfer and implementation process of the Bologna ideas into the higher education practices of Belarus. As an illustrative example of the general trend of higher education internationalization, the Bologna process was also discussed in this study as an object of policy borrowing in higher education. The significance of the context in the educational policy transfer and implementation was highlighted during the research and revealed particular features of Belarus' accession to the Bologna process.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Belarus has faced the need to restructure its higher education architecture and quality to be able to face the internal and external challenges of the new times. The decision to join the Bologna process can be considered as an important step to modernize the higher education system of the country and acknowledgement of the importance of international dimension in higher education by the government.

Nevertheless, accession to the EHEA and implementation of the Bologna process principles have revealed serious structural problems of the Belarusian higher education system and significant resistance from the government to implement substantial reforms into the sector. According to the data analyzed in this research, the main obstacle in the Bologna ideas and principles implementation and indigenisation in the national context is seen the government's unpreparedness to decentralize higher education system. This position is mainly reflected through the focus on the Bologna ideas organizational and instrumental implementation to the detriment of the fundamental academic and political principles.

The situation is deteriorating by the fact, that other higher education stakeholders such as academic staff, students and civil society participate limitedly and play insignificant role in higher education management and decision-making process. While nontransparent regulatory and legal framework makes it difficult to trace the changes in line with the Bologna process provisions.

The case of Belarus accession to the EHEA has revealed the significance of political context in the Bologna process ideas transfer to the national practices. As long as there are no mechanisms to exclude the country from the EHEA and all the Bologna process documents do not have a binding force, the country had an opportunity to selectively follow the Bologna principles and regulations in line with the government's priorities and needs. This perspective reveals complexity and ambiguity of education policy borrowing phenomena in general and the Bologna ideas transfer in particular.

7.1. Discussion

The combination of the ideas and models of policy transfer and policy borrowing elaborated by Dolowitz and Marshs (2000) and Phillips and Ochs (2004) as a tool for the analysis is seen as successful and productive in terms of addressing the research problem and answering the research questions. The main purpose of the study to analyze the Bologna process ideas' transfer and implementation into the higher education practices of Belarus is achieved. And due to the combination of two theoretical approaches the process nature as well as underlining components of the policy transfer phenomenon are analyzed in the case of Belarus accession to the EHEA.

The created model can be further used in analysis of policy transfer cases in education and it is seen valuable due to attention and identification of contextual factors and local conditions that either promote or challenge success of a policy transfer initiative. Such approach provides a critical perspective to 'blind' lessons learning and unconditional success of borrowed policy implementation in a national context, which is widely discussed in development studies nowadays. In line with the modern tendencies of globalization and internationalization, this perspective can help to analyze appropriateness and success of external influences and developments of other countries on a particular local context.

The performed analysis, from the authors perspective, also reveals an interesting feature of the Bologna process ideas discourse. While analyzing the Bologna

process implementation, the researchers and policy-makers usually focus on the standards and technical indicators that EHEA requires. While the system of values and principles of higher education development are either briefly discussed or perceived as a universal and commonly accepted. This approach could be partly justified due to the fact that the Bologna process has initially united the European Union countries, which mostly share the same principles and values of higher education development.

But as long as the Bologna process has become a broader initiative, which include other countries than EU members, this approach should be revised. The case of Belarus accession to the Bologna process reveals the importance of value and ideological components that underpin education system in general. The values conflict has a serious influence on policy implementation process and should be addressed with no less attention than technical side of a policy borrowing initiative.

The case of the Bologna process ideas transfer into Belarusian reality does not only reveal importance of the context and ideological component in its implementation, but also the time factor and the reforms' appropriateness in a particular period of time. This idea attributes to all other policy borrowing initiatives that developing countries undertake in order to follow successful experience of developed countries.

It should be acknowledged, that the Bologna process has become a popular and quite successful initiative for its first EU members in line with a general trend of higher education internationalization and economic challenges, that the countries faced at the beginning of the XXI century. While for the later members, including Belarus, accession to the EHEA might have different impulses and in general represent the need to catch up with the latest trends in the sector.

While the accession of Belarus to the Bologna process is often considered as a geopolitical decision, how does it reveal the country's readiness for the reforms and higher education sector modernization? Do the reforms happen when it is time for them to happen or weather someone chooses 'the right time' for the reforms? How

to evaluate readiness of a country/sector to implement a new policy borrowed from elsewhere?

These are probably the questions that should be also addressed in this or similar study analyzing any policy borrowing initiative. It can be also relevant to discuss a 'life span' of a policy/reform that are supposed to be implemented after a particular time from its emergence. It is seen valuable to perform reevaluation of the Bologna ideas' relevance and ability to address the pressing needs of the modern time after 18 years from the process launch.

7.2. Areas for Further Research

The present study can serve a good base for further research in the areas of the Bologna process implementation as well as higher education modernization in Belarus.

The final evaluation of Belarus accession to the Bologna process may be performed after the next summit of EHEA in 2018, when the country is supposed to implement all the provisions of the Roadmap for Higher Education Reform. This study can be either a follow-up of the present research or an independent inquiry, which can highlight important aspects of the Bologna ideas implementation and indigenization in the Belarusian context.

It might be interesting to conduct a comparative study of how the Bologna ideas are being transferred to Belarus and other, for example, post-Soviet countries. Such comparison might be useful for further understanding of the context relevance of policy borrowing initiative as well as defining common features that these countries may share.

The model elaborated in this research to analyze policy transfer phenomenon may be used in further studies to discuss the Bologna process development in present and future member states as well as other education borrowing initiatives in different countries. Further development of the model might be performed by adding time related characteristics discussed in the previous section to it.

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