



This is a peer-reviewed, final published version of the following document and is licensed under All Rights Reserved license:

**Ryding, Daniella and Stokes, Peter (2009) Convergence and Divergence of Educational Experience in European Contexts A European Union Comparative Country Study of the Status of the Marketing Discipline. International Journal of Management Cases, 11 (2). pp. 455-461. doi:10.5848/APBJ.2009.00060**

Official URL: [http://www.ijmc.org/ijmc/Vol\\_11.2.html](http://www.ijmc.org/ijmc/Vol_11.2.html)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5848/APBJ.2009.00060>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/2227>

#### **Disclaimer**

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

# International Journal of Management Cases

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

**CIRCLE  
Conference  
2009**

**Dornbirn, Austria**

**Volume 11 Issue 2**

# CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN EUROPEAN CONTEXTS – A EUROPEAN UNION COMPARATIVE COUNTRY STUDY OF THE STATUS OF THE MARKETING DISCIPLINE.

DANIELLA RYDING  
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE, UK

PETER STOKES  
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE, UK

## Introduction

This paper constitutes an installation work for a project, which has the aim of considering and comparing the nature, form and direction of marketing teaching in a number of European country contexts.

As a broad principle, European Union (EU) policy has, for several decades, sought to develop harmonization and standardisation across a range of social, political and economic spheres. European Union processes are naturally interconnected with a wider global context of internationalisation and globalisation and their attendant inherent propensity to encourage standardization and pan-generic strategic approaches, responses and systems.

Higher education is no exception to these effects of converging standards and patterns. According to Thoben (2008), the Europeanisation or internationalisation of higher education, is a necessary imperative to encourage Europe to grow holistically, or in other words, converge, politically, culturally and economically, resulting in a stronger Europe aware of its shared heritage. For European higher education, this trend towards convergence at the national macro-level has been driven by a number of important initiatives built around, primarily, the Bologna Process (Reichert and Tauch, 2003, 2005).

The Bologna Process has led many universities within Europe to promote the internationalisation of the university system, with a focus on the standardisation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (King and Verbik, 2007). The underlying aim of the EHEA is to develop graduates that are able to succeed in any industry or profession, regardless of the European place of study. The process was launched in 1999 by various national government ministers within Europe rather than the European Union. Twenty-nine countries signed a joint declaration to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 and to promote a European system of higher education. The workings of this declaration encompass a span of elements, including: common degree structures; quality assurance cooperation; and, schemes for increased transparency and comparability of qualifications. Throughout the literature on the EHEA, there is a large debate surrounding the extent to which convergence is taking place at the national level within European educational systems and the degree to which differences or similarities may exist.

Whilst there is a considerable discussion surrounding the degree of convergence at both the macro and national context of European higher education systems, there are considerably fewer studies on the extent to which convergence or divergence are prevalent in particular disciplinary areas. The present paper identifies this as a gap in

the literature and the argument herein utilises the discipline of marketing in an attempt to investigate the issues that emerge in relation to this gap. The project initiates a comparative study of marketing courses to determine the extent they share, or do not share, generic or varied pedagogic characteristics and practices across a number of European settings.

The study examines this issue by focussing on a range of sample national contexts, namely, France, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom. However, at this preliminary stage only a pilot study has been conducted in France and the United Kingdom. The construction of the country sample is also planned to assemble a number of representative European generic themes encompassing, for example: northern – southern axes as and East-West axes, Romance cultures in the meridional part of Europe and Norse-Germanic cultures in the northern regions. Therefore, it is possible that following the trial period, the sample initially envisaged for the research may be expanded to embrace data from additional European Union Countries.

Within the sample national settings 'the unit of analysis' for the study will be the 'institution'. A number of institutions will be identified and data collected from them. As such they will form case-studies or vignettes. In addition, a number of variables have been identified for the purposes of the study. These are drawn from a reading of the pedagogic literature combined with observations drawn from empirical practice. Given the discussion nature of the present paper, these are still in formation and process of consolidation but they are likely to include, for example: structure of marketing programmes, the type of delivery methods adopted, teaching styles and the nature of professional relationships held between academic staff and students

From this analysis, the intention is to identify and evaluate a number of variables with the aim of understanding the degree to which there is, or not, a move towards disciplinary convergence in teaching approaches to marketing across the sample set against a background of European policy harmonisation. This provides the opportunity to generate *a priori* comments on the potential interaction and interplay between the macro-contexts of European and national HE policy and micro-level contexts within the area of the marketing discipline.

### Conceptual and Practical Convergence and Divergence in Business Schools within the European Union

As a preliminary step to a EU cross-country study of teaching and learning within the status of the marketing discipline, it is perhaps important to highlight some key educational variations that exist on a national macro-level.

The notion of comparative pedagogic analysis across different countries is not novel *per se*. In the case of the European Union it has been undertaken in relation to a wide range of domains including, for example quality assessment and economics, academic freedom and so on and so forth (Brendan, 1992; Karran, 2007).

Modernization theory states that the economy, social conditions and cultural values of a society are to a large extent structurally and functionally linked and change in relatively predictable ways. According to Kragh & Djursaa (2006) all societies eventually pass through the same stages of development, moving from traditional agrarian to modern industrial society and from there to post-industrial or postmodern forms. This implies that social evolution displays a high degree of homogeneity. However, according to Kragh & Djursaa (*ibid.*), this does not necessarily imply that societies converge rather than similarities may occur.

Previous wide-ranging studies on organisations, such as those conducted by Hofstede (2001), suggest significant differences in management styles which are symptomatic of the more macro-cultural differences between national societies and cultures. On the other hand, it should be noted that surveys such as Hofstede's have been subjected to strong critique and problematisation (McSweeney, 2002). Nevertheless, such literature addressing international dimensions frequently point towards authority, trust, communication, interaction and overall complexity, varying from organisation to organisation and from country to country.

As a discipline, marketing is typically located in business schools (rather than, for example, alternative social science faculties). There is therefore scope and indeed a need to reflect on the character and energies shaping business school cultures which act as an over-arching influence on the disciplines taught and researched therein. Existing research suggests that business school

teaching and management within organisations tend to enact similar socio-cultural values and thus it seems logical that if such differences have been found within organisations, then differences are also likely to play out within business schools across Europe. While there is little doubt that ongoing efforts of the Bologna Process have encouraged many universities within European higher education systems to promote the internationalisation model of the university system the extent to which this has been operationalised in a homogeneous manner is less clear (Brown and Lauder 1992; Reichert and Tauch, 2005).

In order to identify differences in approaches to teaching and learning that apply to business schools across countries, surveys were conducted by Kragh & Bislev (2003) as cited in Kragh & Djursaa (2006), at Copenhagen Business School, using a sample of foreign exchange students. Themes examined within their survey, which was developed based on twenty-five in-depth interviews, related to firstly, authority and equality. For example the relationship held between professors and students and the degree of control exercised by professors. Secondly, the degree of complexity and democratic participation in teaching. This question mainly addressed issues such as how often business cases were used in class, how often students worked in groups or conversely, the regurgitation of facts and textbook knowledge or critical discussion and individual perspectives. Further factors included, degree of communication flows and epistemology, level of interaction involved with teaching and finally the amount of group work adopted.

According to Kragh and Bislev's (2003) research, there is evidence of clear differences at business schools in a wide range of countries with regards to teaching styles, particularly with regards to the amount of authority and participation exercised. Results from their research indicated that countries such as Sweden, Finland, Great Britain, the USA, amongst others, adopt teaching styles of high empowerment. These countries have the most egalitarian relationships between students and professors and the highest degree of complexity in teaching, including and emphasis on critical discussion and exchange of opinions. Countries such as France, Spain, Germany, Poland and Italy adopt teaching styles which are reflective of low empowerment. These nations adopt more autocratic approaches to teaching at their business schools, with an emphasis on facts and textbook knowledge

(*ibid.*). A further example of a nation which follows a more autocratic approach to teaching and learning is China. When Chinese students arrive in the UK to study, many are surprised at what they perceive as a lack of discipline in United Kingdom university lecture theatres. Chinese students are exposed to much longer hours and contact time and more supervision and control within the classroom. According to Wu (2002), there appears to be two poles of pedagogy and most teachers fall at some point between them. At one pole there is the classical pedagogue, familiar to the Chinese. Wu (2002) states "the teacher is remote, strict, highly respected, parental, unforgiving, meticulous, punitive." At the other pole, there is the liberal pedagogue, familiar to the English. Wu (2000) states "the teacher is empathetic, one of the boys/girls, informal..."

In summary, the above consideration of marketing set within a business school context serves to provide a platform for a more focused examination of marketing as a specific discipline and it is now to that task that the discussion turns.

### A Focus on Marketing Pedagogy.

The discussion hitherto underlines the existence of a comparative literature on higher education in various global and European contexts. While there exists this generic literature in which one higher education system is compared to another higher education system, work focusing on international comparisons between specific disciplinary domains are more sporadic.

Indeed, there exists a substantial literature on pedagogic studies in relation to particular disciplines and marketing has generated many pedagogically oriented studies.

There is, in particular a large body of writing on pedagogy available in relation to different disciplines in various national contexts. For example, the United Kingdom has witnessed a substantial body of writing focused directly on marketing pedagogy (see Centeno, Harker, Ibrahim, Wang, 2008). And, indeed, much of this material may well be valuable to transport into internationally comparative domains. For example, Hackley (2001) offers a somewhat light-hearted marketing pedagogy matrix which produces a typology of a range of teaching styles: the unreconstructed anecdotalist, the intellectual rebel, the scientific managerialist



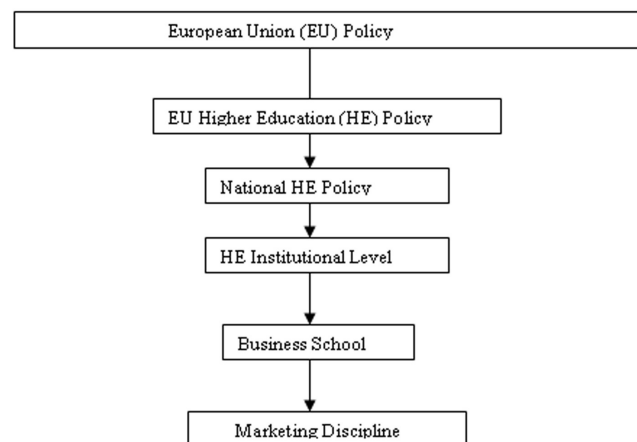
and the ontologically unstable assimilator. This is offered in a United Kingdom context but it is possible to see how it might be rolled out to an alternative setting.

However, to reiterate, many studies in marketing pedagogy writing tend to be set in a given national, rather than internationally comparative, setting even though a number of studies may involve international authorship (see, for example, Little, Brookes and Palmer, 2008). Equally beyond the European Union, there is evidence of a number

of international comparative studies on marketing pedagogy. An illustration is offered by, for example, Kuster and Vila's (2006) comparison of marketing teaching methods in North American and European Universities.

Nevertheless, in direct relation to focus of the present project, there seems to be an important paucity of comparative studies on marketing pedagogy between European Union member countries. It is in order to address this lacuna that the present research turns itself.

#### Construction of Marketing Pedagogy in Relation to European Union Influences



#### Methodological Approach

The methodological approach is structured in two phases, a secondary research phase followed by a field research phase.

The secondary phase examines a number of macro-literature aspects: European Union higher education environment; national business and management teaching settings against which marketing will be considered. This is then developed into a focal literature identifying extant commentary on pedagogy of marketing in general and consequently discussing this in relation to the selected national contexts.

Given the lack of secondary data on specific national marketing pedagogies, and in particular comparative national marketing pedagogies, it is clear that there is a need for primary research. The primary research adopts an interpretive methodological stance. This will systematically review the data in order to identify emergent themes and patterns (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 593-5; Crix, 2004; Waddington 2004: 156-7; Weick 1995). Within this broad methodological framework, the research methods include participant observation of teaching sessions accompanied by targeted semi-structured interviews of staff and student samples within the sample institutional settings.

The institutional case studies are not produced with the intention of generalising across entire

national contexts. This is indeed the peril of much international work. However, it is a reasonable assumption that any given group of sample institutions will exhibit characteristics, structures, cultures and processes resonant of the given national context. While adopting this approach it is recognised that cultures, whether, national, organizational or individual are prone to displaying a wide span of variety. The notion of 'institution' in the research is also one that is evolving and will need to be further refined as the study progresses from the pilot phase.

#### Vignettes of Two Pilot Sample Organizations.

##### United Kingdom

The United Kingdom institution is located in the English higher education sector and is a post-92 university. This is a large university (greater than 20,000 students) created from the old polytechnic system and as such contrasts with, for example, the grouping of older research-intensive universities founded on Royal Charter collectively known as the Russell Group.

The programmes examined were undergraduate and contained approximately twenty students in each of the three years of the BA in Marketing style programme. The observations have taken place over a three-year period.

##### France

The French sample consists of two higher education institutions. Firstly, a private higher education university level institution located in the south of France however it has satellite schools located in several other major French cities. Observations were made on two cohorts of approximately 30 students.

Secondly, an Ecole Supérieure de Commerce situated in the north of the country with approximately 50 people in each year group.

Students undertake diplomas which last three year degrees.

Two observations took place at the northern institution and one observation took place at the southern institution. In the United Kingdom setting repeated observations were possible with considerable empirical data being gathered.

#### Limitations

The pilot studies have started a process of discussing and refining the variables that will be relevant to be studied in the work.

Equally, there is a need to generate sufficiently detailed cameos of the contextual settings of institutions in their national settings within the overall European environment. These must be adequate enough to allow the particular factors and character to be drawn out and at the same time there is a limit of space and time to how much detail can be portrayed with a paper.

Moreover, there is a need to better refine the concept of the unit of assessment as the 'institution' in order to recognise and take account of the independent nature of individual organizational cultures.

The work is operating within a number of 'macro' settings including: European Union, Higher Education, national cultures and the concept of the business school. The paper and project will need to develop research instruments and arguments that can demonstrate a respect for nuance in these broad generalised concepts.

#### Emergent Trends from Data

It is particularly early in the research project to be able to draw conclusions that are advanced or developed. Nevertheless, a number of themes are beginning to emerge. It is important to stress that these are tentative and that the progressing and evolving research may indicate adjustments to them.

Illustrative table of findings

	<b><i>United Kingdom Institution</i></b>	<b><i>French Institution</i></b>
<b>Style of Delivery</b>	Blended Learning, extensive use of seminars	Traditional Learning, lectures to large groups, many hours of contact
<b>Course Content</b>	Standard Models but varied to include sustainability, green issues etc	Standard Models
<b>Epistemological Orientation</b>	Primarily representationalist and managerialist but with some critical management themes and approaches	Completely representationalist and managerialist

### Work-in-Progress and Discussion on the Emergent Findings

As announced at the beginning of this paper, the purpose of the presentation is to share in a conference framework the tentative framework for the work and the identification and early description of the problematic.

It seems the case that while the degree, masters, doctorate (or what the French, for example, call the LMD model – licence, maitrise, doctorat) is rolling out and becoming standardised across many European countries there still exist within teaching and learning practice and especially at disciplinary level, such as marketing, significant disparities. The initial indication from the pilot studies is that institutions are responding to the macro forces shaping course structure and length. However, in the micro-context of course content

Perhaps one future direction of the work will be to consider the role and opportunity that emerging literature domains such as critical marketing literature or neuro-marketing may have on the development and convergence or divergence of the marketing discipline across Europe.

### Conclusion

This installation paper for the purpose of conference discussion and ideas has a modest ambition to solicit views and feedback. However, the overall and longer term ambition involve and point at

significant and extensive projects. The mapping of European marketing practice is no small task and no insignificant matter. The value of such a task completed would be multifarious. For example, a broad understanding of pedagogic practice across a range of countries would allow research and practice-oriented academic and consultancy consortia to undertake multilateral interventions across a range of institutions. With advance knowledge of pedagogic practice and patterns in given national and regional contexts this would facilitate such interventions significantly.

In contrast, for pan-European policy makers, a map of a given discipline such as marketing, would be very helpful in better sensitising policy to the needs of the point of implementation.

Perhaps, most importantly such a mapping would not attempt to suggest that the situation was static. Regular charting and observation would be able to determine the ebb and flow of processes of divergence and convergence in effect within the European Union.

### References

Brendan et al (1992) Towards a Methodology for Comparative quality Assessment in European Higher education. A Pilot Study on Economics in Germany, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, Milton Keynes, Open University.

Bryman, A and Bell, E. (2007) Business Research Methods, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Centano, E Harker, M. Ibrahim, E and Wang, LW (2008) 'What is postgraduate marketing education for? Observations from the UK', European Business Review, 20 (6), pp.547-566.

Crix, J. (2004) The Foundations of Research, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Hackley, C. (2001) 'Towards a post-structuralist marketing pedagogy – or from irony to despair (a two by two matrix approach)', European Journal of Marketing, Vol.35(11) pp.1184-1196)

Hofstede (2001) Culture's Consequences, California, Sage Publications.

Karran, T. (2007) 'Academic Freedom in Europe: a Preliminary Comparative Analysis', Higher Education Policy, 20: 289-313.

Kragh, S & Bislev, S. (2003) 'Universities and Student Values across Nations' in Intercultural Communication at Work: Papers from the 10th Nordic Symposium on Intercultural Communication. Gothenberg cited in Kragh & Djursaa (2006) 'Modernization and management – business school teaching across countries, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, Vol. 6(1).

Little, V., Brookes, R and Palmer, R. (2008) 'Research-informed teaching and teaching-informed research: the Contemporary Marketing Practices (CMP) living case study approach to understanding marketing practice', Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing, 23 (2), pp.124-134.

McSweeney, B. (2002) 'Hofstede's Model of National Cultural Differences and Their Consequences: A Triumph of Faith: A Failure of Analysis' Human Relations 55:89-118.

Reichert, S and Tauch, C. (2003) Trends 2003 Progress Towards the European Higher Education Area: Bologna Four Years After: steps Toward Sustainable Reform of higher Education in Europe, Brussels, European University Association.

Reichert, S and Tauch, C. (2005) Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna, Brussels, European University Association.

Waddington, D. (2004) 'Participant Observation' in Cassell, C and Symon, G. (eds.) Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research, London, Sage, 154-164.

Weick, K. (1995) Sense-Making in Organizations, London, Sage.