

# The Bologna process and its effects in the field of Sciences of Physical Activity and Sport in Spain<sup>1</sup>

*Ana Márcia Silva\**

*Susanna Soler\*\**

*Núria Puig\*\*\**

*Maria Prat\*\*\*\**

**Abstract:** This article examines the process of incorporation of the Spanish university system into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), better known as “Bologna process”, focusing on the implementation of graduate studies in Science of Physical Activity and Sport (SPAS). To this end, it draws on Bourdieu’s theory of scientific field, from whose perspective the process is analyzed. Content analysis was conducted on documents related to the EHEA and semi-structured interviews with eleven key people were analyzed with NVivo 9.2®. Results indicate two particularly relevant aspects: on the one hand, a positive outlook on the Bologna process – although the gap between the traditional Spanish model and the new model proposed as well as the scarcity of resources gave rise to a Spanish model and the impossibility of applying EHEA regulations as would be desirable; on the other hand, the need for the SPAS to assert itself in the university system, which leads the process to be started very hastily and strictly by developing the White Paper, for fear that the graduate degree might not be recognized.

**Keywords:** Higher Education. European Union. Physical Education. Sports. Treaties.

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<sup>1</sup>Sciences of Physical Activity and Sport has been the new name of the field since 1992, when it ceased to be called Physical Education (PE) under Royal Decree 1423.

\*School of Physical Education. Federal University of Goiás. Goiânia, GO. Brazil. E-mail: anamarcia@pq.cnpq.br

\*\*National Institute of Physical Education of Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain. Email: ssoler@gencat.cat

\*\*\*National Institute of Physical Education of Catalonia. Barcelona, Spain. Email: npuig@gencat.cat

\*\*\*\*Autonomous University of Barcelona. Barcelona, Spain. Email: maria.prat@uab.cat

## 1 INTRODUCTION

More than a fragile young woman like Europa – the nymph of Greco-Roman mythology who seems to be the origin of continent's name (BACALARI, 2011) – the European Union (EU) is now quite a lady. Over 50 years old, the then European Economic Community (EEC) has been established as a political and economic bloc since its birth in Rome in 1957. Even though Lady EU appears to be going through a delicate economic moment, there is no doubt about her great strength and global influence from a cultural, educational and scientific perspective.

Born in Italy as well, the Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999 by European Ministers of Education, triggered a process of major changes, most notably the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

It was signed by 29 countries, although only 24 of them were in the Eurozone, which had been created that same year and involved the monetary union. In 2012, 47 countries had already joined the Bologna process, being part of the EHEA and implementing the same educational policies in different national contexts (EURYDICE, 2012). As a result, all higher education institutions in signatory countries should review their university courses and adapt to a new common philosophy.

In Spain, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) established three consecutive calls so that each specialty could develop new guidelines for the now called title of Bachelor's degree. In the specific area, the Spanish Conference of Deans of SPAS Schools and Higher Institutes of Physical Education presented itself to the second call for the development of so-called *White Paper*. Thus, between January and June 2004, the SPAS White Paper was written under coordination of the Faculty of Sports Sciences of Extremadura.

The White Paper was the reference for the several SPAS centers to develop their curricula adapted to Bologna guidelines. Among them, the National Institute of Physical Education of Catalonia (INEFC) – the second oldest in the country with its two centers affiliated to the universities of Barcelona and Lleida and operating respectively in those two cities – set up its curricula for Bachelor's and Master's Degrees between 2007 and 2008. Given its historical experience, its diversity in terms of university links, its international visibility and the important political and academic role played by some of its professors on the national scene, the Institute has been taken as an object of research for the study reported in this article.

The core aim of this research is to examine the system of relations between institutions and agents established in the field of SPAS and how it influenced the new configuration of the Bachelor's Degree after the Bologna guidelines. Therefore, it examines how those guidelines were perceived by agents in the field and how those agents adapted them to the institutional circumstances and the relations among protagonists of change.

To accomplish our task, we started from the concept of scientific field proposed by Bourdieu (1990, 1998, 2003, 2005, 2007). The concept is useful for understanding the process by allowing was to go beyond an account of events, as it helps to understand conflicts, alliances and the scope of measures developed, giving meaning to the process.

According to Bourdieu (2003), analyzing a field means starting from a relational approach, since it studies interactions between institutions and agents. Those interactions have to do with power relations and the exercise of power, friendships and enmities. Since this research approaches implementation of a new Higher Education model, we must talk about the academic/university field where science plays an increasingly important role and therefore is the axis around which the field is shaped. A scientific field can be understood

[...] as a system of objective relations between positions acquired (in previous struggles). It is the place (i. e., the game space) of a competitive struggle whose specific bet is monopoly of scientific authority, inseparably defined as technical capacity and social power or, if preferred, monopoly of scientific competence understood as the ability to speak and act legitimately (i. e. authoritatively and with authority) in science. (BOURDIEU, 2005, p. 76)

In summary, our investigation analyzed the scientific field of SPAS at the time of the implementation of the Bologna plan as a network of objective relations acting as a force field whose boundaries are involved with other fields, more or less consolidated, more or less extensive, and at which different institutions and agents play, each one with its specific symbolic capitals. Interviews with those agents allowed to know what these specific capitals are and how they have influenced the process. This text emphasizes how the documents, especially the Bologna White Paper and regulations, conform to the environment and are “experienced” by protagonists. In short, the idea is that “the system of relations between institutions and agents” is what allows us to understand the current point; therefore, agents’ subjectivity is very relevant.

The results of this study are divided into two major sections. First, we present an analysis of how the Bologna process was conducted, including peculiarities of its development in Spain and its limits and possibilities of implementation. Then it discusses how this process took place specifically in the field of SPAS, reflecting firstly on the strategic role played by the White Paper on the field and then approaching the context of professional threat in the labor market and the need for academic legitimacy warranted by agents in the field. In each of the sections, documents and interviews “converse” with the theory of scientific field, combining analysis and attempts at interpretation. The findings are a synthesis of the results obtained while they illustrate the scope and limits of this research.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology selected for this research is qualitative, combining content analysis of documents and analysis of eleven semi-structured interviews conducted between May and July 2012, identified here with the letter “P” followed by numbers 1 to 11. Respondents were intentionally selected according to their contribution to the Bologna process and, in particular, as a result of their key position in preparing the SPAS White Paper and in ANECA, including contributions by people who held the positions, among others, of ANECA program director, INEFC director, head of the Barcelona center of that institution, as well as those responsible for the process of creation and the process of implementation of the new study plan and curriculum changes. Interviews were recorded under consent by the people involved and their anonymity was guaranteed, including their positions, because those who know the case could identify informants, breaking our commitment. Subsequently, interviews were fully transcribed to perform content analysis.

Moreover, the documents analyzed included: Royal Decree (RD) 1423/1992, the Bologna Declaration (Ministros Europeos de Educación, 1999), the Organic Law of Universities (LOU) 06/2001; the Framework Document “Integration of the Spanish university system into European Higher Education” by MECD (2003), RD 1125/2003; RD 55/2005; Organic Law 4/2007 for amending the LOU 6/2001; RD 1892/2008 and the White Paper (WP) of SPAS.

The process of content analysis was conducted with the support of Nvivo9® software, following standard procedures for the technique (BARDIN, 1996). The program also allowed to observe the degree of similarity of terms used in the several sources (documents and interviews) and build some categories of analysis described in sections of this text. The Figure generated by the program (Figure 1) shows a map with data sources statistically grouped according to word similarity (cluster analysis), showing first the relative distance and autonomy of perception and reflection

on the research object by the several informants. On the other hand, the figure also indicates that official documents (RD and WP) are farther from the Bologna Declaration than interviews with each participant (P). This, as we shall see, empirically confirms the proposed theoretical interpretation we make in the sections devoted to results.

**Figure 1.** Sources of information grouped by similarity of words



Source: Figure produced by the research team with Nvivo9@ software.

### 3 A LOOK AT THE PROCESS OF CONVERGENCE FROM SPAS

The Bologna Declaration has set a new scenario in higher education and its most important features include: widespread deployment of European credit, called European Credit Transfer System (ECTS); curricula organized as two cycles (undergraduate and graduate) with a minimum of three years for the first cycle; an easily understandable and comparable system of titles that must go through an accreditation process to ensure its quality; and transparency through the European Diploma Supplement (MINISTROS EUROPEOS DE EDUCACIÓN, 1999).

Note that countries have not been forced to follow the process of homogenization; rather, as can be seen in EHEA documents, the aim was to give an incentive to equal advancement among EU member countries as expressed by one respondent: “What Europe

has tried all along was not to force countries, but rather that all of them moved evenly towards this idea of transparency and comparability”. (P11).

To meet the agenda set by Europe, the Spanish government began the process by the LOU (2001). Its Title XIII is fully directed at the then European Higher Education Area, indicating the important responsibility of the University Coordination Council in the process and also announcing the creation of ANECA to coordinate changes, especially in terms of accreditation and evaluation.

As we shall see, these innovations seem attractive, but the circumstances of the moment when they were carried out made reaching their goals a difficult task.

### 3.1 The design of university education within the EHEA: “A Spanish-style Bologna system”?

Structuring the Bachelor’s Degree in four years (240 ECTS) and Master’s Degree in one year (60 ECTS) in Spain, unlike the vast majority of European countries, is one of the most controversial issues in interviews and documents consulted, specially the MECD’s position about it.

The framework document on Spain’s university integration to the EHEA shows how the Ministry submitted two alternative proposals for consideration by the University Coordination Council: in one of them, a Bachelor’s Degree of 240 ECTS (four years) was proposed and the other one includes BDs of 180-240 ECTS (3-4 years), and 120 and 60 ECTS for Master’s (MECD, 2003). Finally, the first proposal was chosen, with Bachelor’s Degrees of 240 ECTS and Master’s of ECTS 60 (as 4+1).

With this structure, the Spanish university system has proved to be particularly unique within the EHEA, since only six of the 49 member countries had degree systems totally organized in 240 ECTS in 2011 (Armenia, Cyprus, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Turkey and

Ukraine). In the other countries implementing the Bologna process, the model of 180 ECTS credits prevails for undergraduate studies 120 for graduate studies (EURYDICE, 2012). For this reason, one respondent did not hesitate to say: “We have made a Spanish-style Bologna system” (P8).

In the interviews we could see different stances regarding that decision. For some, the 4+1 model was not successful: “I think the first error was when Spain decided for the 4+1. I don’t understand, but we have to accept and work for the 4+1” (P1). Among other things, it is clear that keeping the four years for bachelor’s and 1 for master’s makes it much harder to harmonize study plans with the rest of the EU, since most countries use the 3+2 formula.

However, some voices advocate the importance of also respecting the history of each country, of each institution and the specificities of each course: “We have to reach an agreement [...] but of course we also have to respect particularities, specificities, characters and personalities of institutions, regions and different countries in Europe and that is the point in my opinion – how much we are all forced to work in the same way” (P4).

Some of the reasons for the choice of a 4+1 system would have to do with the previous tradition of five years of undergraduate studies and the internal problems that such change would create. So, adopting only three years of education meant reducing programs and cutting some disciplines, which ultimately threatened teachers’ job security as explained by one of the statements: “How would they go from five to three years? Everyone was scared. It is a strictly labor issue, a labor and concept issue, because every teacher believes that his or her thing is the most important one” (P8).

“Fear” of change is highly present when evaluating the process and the reasons for the decision: they were afraid that the Spanish university system would be dismantled, of what would happen with associated professors they had; that is, those who the crisis had left out (P9).

Along with labor and political problems, another statement also refers to economic rather than academic implications of the 3+2 proposal, since “instead of paying for a one-year degree, we’d pay one year for master, and incomes are very different” (P5). The economic impact of that change was precisely one of the main elements of students’ and professors’ nationwide protest against the university reform in 2007.

In relation to the structure of the university system, another debate took place in Spain about whether or the bachelor’s degree was enough to enter the world of labor or students needed to take a master’s degree after that. Royal Decree No. 55/2005, establishing the structure of higher education, considers that the BD is final; that is, it enables people to enter the world of labor. The very Bologna Declaration says literally that “the degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labor market as an appropriate level of qualification” (UE, 1999, p. 02).

However, the new model is also criticized for the excessively general nature of bachelor’s courses, so that master becomes relevant: “The academic path of any student should be five years: BD plus something more to go to the labor market” (P9). However, the design of masters’ degrees is criticized by respondents, especially at their early stages when the first Masters’ degrees were created under the EHEA while graduate degrees had not been defined.

In short, we can see that the Bologna proposal was distant from the reality of the university system, leading, as already noted, to a “Spanish-style” Bologna system. The following section describes how this process was implemented.

### 3.1.1 ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS: BOLOGNA IS “LIKE CANDY THAT THEY PUT IN YOUR MOUTH AND THE TAKE AWAY FROM YOU IMMEDIATELY”

Project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe (GONZÁLEZ; WAGENAAR, 2003; 2005) is key to the process of

convergence at methodological level. Taken as an official document by the EHEA, project Tuning proposes to change the university culture and to implement a new didactics: the pedagogical process focused on student's learning and oriented to skills development, continued assessment and policies for institutional evaluation and accreditation of professors were its key aspects.

This new pedagogical approach as well as European convergence are almost unanimously perceived as particularly important and necessary aspects by all those involved in this study. However, the real possibilities of implementing Bologna generate slightly "acid" criticism among respondents, especially because of the scarce resources to actually develop a model theoretically based on teaching quality. Official EU data confirm the downward trend of Spain's higher education budgets so that a 2.9% decrease was recorded in 2009-2010 over the previous two years (EURYDICE, 2012, p. 3).

One of the respondents said: "You have to pay for it, but then there is no money. Besides, in a crisis like the current one [...] they put the candy in your mouth, and then they take it away immediately" (P2). Another one said: "Plan Bologna is like a Ferrari" (P5). Indications are that Bologna is indeed such a powerful educational plan as a Ferrari, but the same testimony tell us that "these are hard times to maintain a Ferrari". Here are some examples of this contradiction between existing guidelines (theory) and the context in which they had to be implemented (practice) after the 2001 LOU.

Some specific effects of economic limitations are seen in the strict credit supply and curriculum homogenization. With the passage from the old undergraduate system to the new Degree, in the specific case of SPAS in the INEFC, loss of optional format and delimitation of subjects and group settings become apparent. There is also faculty reduction, which results in classes with many students, making it difficult or even impossible to implement the theoretical model, which has an impact on the quality of teaching.

Along with funding cuts, some voices also highlight the lack of motivation of some teachers to implement the changes and inadequate training received throughout the process to introduce the new pedagogical approach.

Finally, Bologna has also brought new demands on teachers regarding the processes of accreditation by external agencies created for this purpose. This aspect is also under a lot of criticism, especially for the priority given to research and scientific publication over teaching and information in evaluation criteria established by those agencies.

Thus, in addition to economic difficulties, it is evident that the new proposal implies another form of organization for the university system, generating a big rupture since it goes against one of the identifying axes, which is teaching in the field of SPAS.

Therefore, it can be said that “entrance in the field implies a paradoxical adherence to a more or less radically new set of assumptions and, correlatively, the discovery of stakes and demands unknown to and misunderstood by ordinary experience” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 24).

Now, while in this section we spoke of contradictions and resistances within the field, we will see some aspects which paradoxically make the field of SPAS one of the most dynamic fields when implementing Bologna in its study plans.

#### **4 THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN SPAS: THE CHALLENGES TO A NEW SCIENTIFIC FIELD IN THE FACE OF THE CHANGE**

##### **4.1 THE WHITE PAPER AS “A COMPASS” AND OTHER EFFECTS IN THE FIELD**

The metaphor in the title speaks about the role and political force gained by the WP in the process of shaping study plans in Spain. Its importance is unmistakable in the historical process of

granting degrees in SPAS, and its guiding role is evident in the words of one respondent: “We follow it as Polaris, and the compass went to the WP” (P9).

As stated by an important ANECA official at the beginning of the process, SPAS studies were included in the first calls for preparation of WP at his request: “As the coordinator for the preparation of WP for all degrees, I have to say it now, [that of SPAS] was one of those which I also proposed, for the process with PE to begin. [...] It was very hard work, it was actually like staging of what PE studies could be in the future” (P11). This testimony also shows how such authorized agent linked to the Spanish university system gave high academic importance to the course – which he still calls “Physical Education” – to bring it to the University.

Its preparation was coordinated by the School of Sports Sciences at the University of Extremadura, and more specifically by its dean, who at that time was also the president of the Spanish Conference of Institutes and Schools of Physical Activity and Sports Sciences as well as of the Spanish Association of Sports Sciences (AECD). It was a very young school and this was certainly a very important factor for it to take over the function since it needed to assert itself in the scientific field of SPAS, and also within its own university. Under this coordination, the 22 centers that then imparted those studies participated in the process – a fact that was highly valued by ANECA.

The end result of the White Paper also reflects power relations in the field, because there is a predominance of content relating to sport and health when in fact SPAS’s career opportunities are mainly in teaching and management (VIÑAS, PUIG & PÉREZ, 2009). Suggestions by Hernandez and Rodríguez (2006) also tried to extend the working field of future professionals, but they looked to a more balanced distribution between the distinct content areas.

The hegemonic culture of the contents of sport as well as health can find explanations on its historical roots in Spain (PASCUAL BAÑOS, 1997; PASTOR PRADILLO, 2007). One

respondent emphasized that the powers proposed by the WP are distant from professional needs: “All health competences are highly overestimated in the White Paper” (P10).

Despite this, interestingly, the WP indicates that the most appropriate knowledge area for the field of SPAS is that of Social and Law Sciences, and the draft White Paper on SPAS was even registered in this area in the second call made by ANECA, following the traditional linkage to a more pedagogical and humanistic area. According to one of the members of the Conference at that time, no one pointed out the Health area as a priority, and it appeared only as secondary, although this possibility existed because of the proposal’s general nature.

In short, it is clear that the end result was not the consequence of an objective analysis of the needs of the labor market but of power relations in the field – in this case, the greater force exerted by people linked to the disciplines related to sport and health. The divergence in points of view clearly reflects in the final results of the vote on the WP, since over 25% of the representatives did not approve the document as it was (ANECA, 2004).

#### 4.2 THE SPAS DEGREE: “UNDER FEAR”?

In the late twentieth century, incorporation of centers that taught SPAS studies into universities began to take place and corresponding schools were created. In 2013, all the old and new centers are already schools or part of schools, except the INEF of Catalonia. Despite being an autonomous body, it is also governed by the same university regulations of the rest. This incorporation has not taken place without difficulties: “Being at the university meant a crisis” (P3).

As a new field under a consolidation process, adapting study plans to Bologna meant facing a new challenge to legitimate fields that were still very new to the Spanish university landscape. The preparation of the WP is therefore understandable, meeting the

schedule and indications of ANECA and configurations of all study plans: “The SPAS are the disciplines, possibly of all in the country, which meet the White Paper more literally, because I think the SPAS study plans were made under the shadow of fear” (P10).

Academic fields with great social and political recognition such as Medicine, Engineering or Law did not fear it, but the situation was different for SPAS. Therefore, meeting the new guidelines in very strict terms was urgent to have the least possible risk to those already existing. The disappearance of the specialty of Physical Education Teacher (MEF), being diluted in the training of generalist primary teachers, further increased that fear.

Moreover, the urgency to write the WP so quickly is also explained to prevent other professional fields from colonizing the specificity of the field of SPAS: “It means marking territory. This is the explanation of why it took place at the beginning, why so quickly [...]” (P8). Another protagonist also refers to the “borders” of SPAS and where the professional threat is perceived: “On the one hand, there is training of teachers who have their specific area; and on the other hand, there are also all aspects of health, which sometimes are on the border in SPAS studies” (P11).

The protagonists of the WP had the management of all institutions offering SPAS training in their hands; they were involved in the meaning of the scientific field game. Their responsibility to make decisions and to predict effects on the field came from their personal biography, but especially from their immersion in the process that established them as academics. As Bourdieu said, these subjects

[...] have incorporated a host of perception and valuation practical schemes that work as instruments to construct reality, as principles of vision and division of the universe in which they act; they need not postulate the goals of their practice as ends. They are not subjects facing an object (much less facing a problem) which would be constituted as such by an intellectual act of knowledge; they are, as they say, deeply involved in the work (BOURDIEU, 2007, p. 145).

The data indicate that the Bologna process and its effects on SPAS, with the drafting of the White Paper, represent an important crisis in a field still under consolidation, with a commitment to achieve social recognition.

## 5 FINAL REMARKS

The analysis of the process of implementing plan Bologna on SPAS studies in Spain from the theoretical perspective of the scientific field proposed by Bourdieu allows us to understand it in all its complexity and helps to escape the simple anecdote.

The author indicates the need to scientifically know the social conditions through which scientific construction occurs and the subjects of those constructions, besides products and science policies themselves (BOURDIEU, 2003).

In our work we have highlighted three key issues: 1. The large distance between the starting point (the Spanish university system) and the final goal (the model and patterns of EHEA), embodied in a very different conception of university studies; 2. The unanimous agreement by all SPAS actors to quickly adjust to Bologna and the leadership provided by one of them; and 3. The search for legitimacy of the field motivated by the fear of not being recognized or being colonized by more established professional fields.

The analysis of the interviews highlights the strength of the agents responsible for the process as well as the active conduct of others in judging the social, economic, political and academic forces of that context. This understanding of the agents indicated the incorporation of the meaning of scientific game that constitutes scientific habitus according to Bourdieu (1998), implying schemes of perception and action, knowledge and acknowledgement of the laws of the scientific game, as well as what is at stake when playing.

Finally, the fear of disappearance of the Bachelor's Degree studies in SPAS and meddling by other more established scientific

fields has been one of the “drivers” of the field in search for its legitimacy. The field had to work better and faster than anyone in the construction of the WP and later with study plans in order to assert itself in the area of higher education and react to threats.

This article intended to provide some insight into the implementation of Plan Bologna in SPAS from the perspective of the theory of scientific field, having unveiled the system of relations between institutions and agents that was established in the new configuration of the Bachelor’s Degree.

Further studies are recommended on a wider range of respondents, especially including university students who, without being in the day to day development of study plans, expressed their opinion in other forums that were not taken into account in this article – and also the prospect of a school organically linked to a university, which would allow comparison, contrast and expansion of the study reported here.

Learning what has been done in this first decade of the century and what has not been done in university studies, especially in SPAS, is a new history lesson that will help us to organize ourselves for a better future.

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Correspondence address:  
Faculdade de Educação Física  
Campus Samambaia  
Caixa Postal 131  
CEP: 74001-970 Goiânia – Goiás

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