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Lonergan's General Empirical Method and the European Higher Education Area

June 10, 2014

This is a participant-observer report concerning curriculum deployment of Bernard J.F.

Lonergan's insight-based critical realism and general empirical method for interdisciplinary research methods and allied courses in Copenhagen Business School (CBS, Denmark), from 2001 to the present. I also report similar instruction in interdisciplinary methods for management and organization studies at the International School for Social and Business Studies (ISSB, Slovenia) in 2012.¹ The overall time period has been entirely under the aegis of the Bologna Process, begun in 1999, and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), launched in March, 2010.

Both the originating Bologna Process and subsequent EHEA envision curriculum development appropriate to “ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction” (European Commission, 2013). In addition, the Bologna Process calls for specification of the “*necessary European dimensions of higher education*” (Ibid.). The point of this working paper is to report teaching success and indicate potential merits of Lonergan's general empirical method, grounded in insight-based critical realism, as a robust epistemological basis for EHEA university curriculum and instruction. The design approach to Lonergan's method offers grounds to think it uniquely adapted for interdisciplinary social science in the complex trans-cultural, multi-lingual, and religiously pluralist EHEA, thus providing curriculum content adequate and appropriate for the “necessary European dimensions of higher education.”²

Insight-based critical realism has been steadily deployed as the epistemological grounds for interdisciplinary research methods curriculum design at undergraduate, Master's, and doctoral level management and organizational studies courses at CBS as opportunity presented (Lonergan, 1990; Lonergan, 1992). Due to dissemination of these developments in management education conferences and

¹ CBS is a Danish national university; ISSB is a private university in Slovenia.

² For the purposes of this working paper and its intended community, some familiarity with Lonergan's work is presumed. Should this working paper be of merit, more detailed treatment can later be included.

academic journal publications (Tackney, Sato, & Strömgren, 2010; Tackney, Sato, & Strömgren, 2013; Tackney & Gwozdz, 2014), a similar instructional offering was created for 2012 Master's and doctoral seminars at the ISSB, explicitly under Bologna Process auspices and with EU financial support (See Appendix A).

It was the 2012 teaching opportunity and experience that prompted reflection on the routines of course instruction, student participation in class and governance, course evaluations, academic committee decisions, curriculum revisions, and faculty mobility deployment, which have taken place in educational institutions throughout the EU since the 1999 Bologna Declaration. There is an internalization element of reflection on and revision of curriculum as the Process proceeds. This internalization is evident in the curriculum deployment to be described. But there is also an externalization of developments back into the ongoing Process, incidentally evident to the author in the mobility support to Slovenia and the diffusion of curriculum notions into the EHEA. Certainly others in the EU are no less engaged in both aspect of curriculum related to Lonergan's works. In Ireland, David Coghlan, S.J. has steadily produced organizational development and action research teaching, conference papers, and academic publications with curriculum implications (Coghlan & Cagney, 2013; Coghlan & Shani, 2013).

This brief review of deployment of Lonergan's epistemology and method in management and organizational studies at CBS and the ISSB will indicate the basic functions of dynamic capability in the academic epistemic communities currently engaged in actualizing the EHEA.³ For those unfamiliar with the Bologna Process, I first offer a brief summary. Then I report the details of the interdisciplinary research methods framework developed and end with a working paper suggestion greater coordination.

The EHEA was envisioned by the 1999 Bologna Process, which is “an autonomous intergovernmental arrangement, based on a common policy document (the *Bologna Declaration*) to which European countries may become parties and in which the European Union plays a role” (Reinalda

³ For this paper, ‘epistemic communities’ is defined following Haas as knowledgeable actors with expertise and professional responsibilities (see page 3). In terms of insight-based critical realism, these professional engage in community deliberations for action grounded in judgment following on direct or reflective insight, cognizant of what knowing is (cognitional theory), why this is knowing (epistemology), and have knowledge of that which is to be known (metaphysics) (Lonergan, 1992).

& Kulesza, 2005, p. 7). Signed by 29 national education ministers in 1999, 47 nations now participate. The most recent report is the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué. The Process depends entirely on autonomous and independent higher education institutional cooperation for success: the diverse epistemic communities throughout the EU university and higher educational institution arena.

Yet, Bologna is also a very curious Process. It lacks legal sanctions, but packs plenty of implicit coercion. The Declaration explains, “Any pressure individual countries and higher education institutions may feel from the Bologna process could only result from their ignoring increasingly common features or staying outside the mainstream of change” (Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities, 2000). The Declaration website states, “Universities and other institutions of higher education can choose to be actors, rather than objects, of this essential process of change” (Ibid., p. 6). Thus, a pattern of emergent probabilities appears to characterize Bologna Process creative momentum, dependent on the many EU university epistemic committees, and their embedded national histories, to enact the EHEA.⁴

Each autonomous actor in the Process is an *epistemic community*; “a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (Haas, 1992). For Bologna Process and EHEA outcomes, the dynamic capability (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) of these communities to configure and reconfigure educational resources as the Process proceeds is worthy of study. The management of knowledge, its epistemological characteristics and curriculum referencing, are primary concerns. The adequacy of decision outcomes for the EHEA going forward will reside in the epistemic community’s reasoned and responsible use of its dynamic capabilities. A key element in appropriate academic committee function envisioned in the future, according to the Bologna Process and EHEA goals, is “student participation in the management of higher education” (European Commission, 2013).

Specification of the *necessary European dimensions of higher education* is an explicit Process goal, from first Declaration to the most recent 2012 Bucharest Communiqué. This goal envisions the

⁴ On emergent probabilities and culture, see *Insight*, variously (Lonergan, 1992).

externalization of local curriculum decisions even in the appropriate design of interdisciplinary research methods for management and organizational studies in the EHEA. To this end of externalization, the author and colleagues have, in fact, detailed in conference and journal publications a history of academic committee decisions, curriculum development, and teaching enactment to offer an epistemological framework for interdisciplinary research methods at undergraduate and graduate levels at CBS and ISSB, based on Lonergan's insight-based critical realism and general empirical method.

What is offered by this insight-based critical realism approach? Briefly, this curriculum approach to interdisciplinary research methods helps students to first grasp the personal nature of insight by reflection on its intrinsic properties and occurrences. Specific courses often begin with a shared exercise that helps students "see" the reasoning behind the sampling distribution of the mean, a key principle for inferential statistics. A sense of personal insight aids awareness of and directly links the student to sound empirical method through a grasp of basic cognitional operations and their place in social science (B. Lonergan, 1988). Students reflect on their own experience, recognize distinctions between questions for knowledge or deliberations of value, and then come to recognize the complementarity between quantitative and qualitative research methods as a function of complementary cognitional heuristic structures. Course participants come to grasp that causal relations are challenged by the statistical anomaly. For project-based group work, the engaged student-researchers are helped to shift seamlessly between these complementarities through the course of literature review, methods crafting, data collection, analysis and discussion.⁵

While Lonergan's texts can be a challenge, insight-based critical realism particularly appeals to undergraduates facing the bewildering range of methods for upcoming project work (Tackney et al., 2010). Students can grasp the notion of 'dramatic knowledge' for synopsis-based oral examination performative success (Tackney et al., 2013). And doctoral students find their research competence, regardless of initial persuasion, strengthened in group statistics discussions by an appreciation of the complementarity between causal explanation and the statistical analysis of what Lonergan usefully

⁵ For a thorough pedagogy on self-appropriation, see King (2011).

labeled ‘empirical residue’ (Tackney & Gwozdz, 2014). Finally, Lonergan’s concept of emergent probability in history and culture offers students a reasoned and reasonable platform to pursue interdisciplinary studies with a degree of confidence as participants in the emerging EHEA, which is then enacted by their very presence and participation (Lonergan, 1992, cf. pp. 146 - 151).

Over more than a decade, three study boards at CBS sanctioned deployment of insight-based critical realism in curriculum design at undergraduate, Master’s, and doctoral levels. These boards, due to Danish tradition, already had elected student representatives for the “management of higher education.” With Danish study boards already featuring elected student representation, administrative concerns for curriculum design appear to have moved substantially ahead of curriculum in other national settings, where student representation has yet to be actualized. CBS curriculum revision directly benefitted from the student representative support for instruction using insight-based critical realism, and use as an introductory text for interdisciplinary research methods. To date, over 2,000 students and faculty have been introduced to Lonergan’s general empirical method at CBS and at the ISSB in Slovenia, 2012 (See Appendix A).

The necessary European dimensions in higher education goal of the Bologna Process calls attention to specific curriculum content for the emerging EHEA. Insight-based critical realism and general empirical method helps ground interdisciplinary research methods instruction in a manner responsive to this call. Thus, this content appears to constitute a Europeanization of higher education through “soft power” because it deals with the concrete implications of EU process in member states for curriculum design. These “soft power” developments appear to be understudied, underappreciated dimensions of the EU experiment. Yet, they are all the more important because the topic deals with the education of the Union’s next generation of citizens.⁶

There are a number of Lonergan Centers throughout the world devoted to dissemination of his works through research and teaching, particularly in respect to theology and philosophy. As noted, there

⁶ I would like to thank Associate Professor Magali Gravier, a CBS department colleague and EU scholar, for her comments, paraphrased here, in response to an early version of this working paper.

are a number of scholars scattered throughout the EU who are also actively involved in Lonergan studies. This working paper is offered as a simple first step toward coordination of Lonergan studies and activities within the European Union, whether these are being pursued in theology, philosophy, or – as in this case – a management and organization interdisciplinary research methods curriculum. Lonergan’s approach to epistemology and method appears to offer compelling curriculum content for the necessary European dimensions of the emerging EHEA research methods repertoire.⁷ Perhaps an effort to coordinate further research and teaching activities and personnel within the EUEA would be worth pursuing.

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⁷ “Insight” is one evaluative criterion in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (See McIlrath & MacLabhrainn, 2011).

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Appendix 1: A Breakdown of Courses and Student Numbers, 2000 – Present

CBS, course levels:	Course title	Student numbers	Estimate:
Doctoral:	Applied Quantitative Methods for Non-quantitative Doctoral Researchers in Organization and Management Studies ⁸	100	since 2010: 20 students annually
Master's :	Research Methods and Writing Strategies ⁹	720	since 2009: 6 x 120
	Leading and Managing ¹⁰ Projects	400	100 x4, two concentrations
	Research Methods ¹¹	15	Spring 2014
Undergraduate:	Interdisciplinary Research Methods (BLC)	840	120 x 7
	Interdisciplinary Research Methods (ASP) ¹²	240	Six years: three x 30, three x 60
ISSB, course levels: Master's Doctoral		90	June, 2012
Interdepartment seminar		25	Faculty session, June 2012
	Total:	2330	

⁸ <http://www.cbs.dk/applied-quantitative-methods-non-quantitative-doctoral-researchers-in-organization-and-management-0>.

⁹ MSc, Business, Language, and Culture Program (BLC).

¹⁰ Business, Language, and Culture; Cand. Merc. (psyk.).

¹¹ HA (kom.).

¹² Asian Studies Program.

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