

# UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

In the course of the Bologna Process:

Are Diploma Supplement labels contributing to the mobility of students in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK?



Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social sciences

Bachelor Thesis – European Public Administration

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## **Abstract**

When the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999, it was too early to say what its impact on the European higher education institutions would be. Now, 16 years later, a lot has changed. Not only has the three-cycle structure of Bachelor, Master and Doctorate programmes almost fully been adopted by the Bologna participating states, but also the Bologna transparency tools, in particular the ECTS has become the European standard credit system. Another important transparency tool is the Diploma Supplement. This document, which was designed to provide more precise information about the qualifications of the holder and which is intended to accompany every diploma awarded in one of the participating countries, was looked at into more detail in this thesis. Moreover, the Diploma Supplement label, awarded to higher education institutions which correctly implemented the Diploma Supplement, was further a subject of this thesis.

Although all these tools are in place, little is known about them actually functioning and fulfilling their objectives. Amongst other goals, the Diploma Supplement and its label were designed to facilitate and stimulate student mobility in the European Higher Education Area. In order to find out to what extent the Diploma Supplement label influences student mobility, interviews with policy-makers and admission officers from Germany, the Netherlands and the UK were conducted.

The findings of these interviews showed that the Diploma Supplement is a widely known and used tool, which has established itself in most of the participating countries. The label, however, seems not to be that well-known and further does not directly influence student mobility, as many other factors play a role in this process as well. Nevertheless, it could be confirmed that Diploma Supplements help in the application processes and, hence, provide a more direct link to mobility.

### **List of Abbreviations**

<b>BFUG</b>	Bologna Follow-Up Group
<b>DS</b>	Diploma Supplement
<b>EACEA</b>	Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
<b>EHEA</b>	European Higher Education Area
<b>ENIC-NARIC</b>	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region - National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
<b>ENQA</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
<b>ERA</b>	European Research Area
<b>ESIB</b>	European Student Information Bureau
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUA</b>	European University Association
<b>EURASHE</b>	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>LLL</b>	Lifelong Learning
<b>UNICE</b>	Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (now BUSINESSEUROPE)

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## **1. Introduction**

The Bologna Process formed the starting point of a series of fundamental changes in the European higher education system (American Friends of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, 2014). The reform not only included the introduction of the three-cycle system (Bachelor, Master, Doctorate), but also changed a lot of conditions for universities, in order to achieve the overall goal of strengthening the competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education in Europe. Moreover, cooperation and academic exchange should be increased and fostered. The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 by 30 European countries and up to date 47 countries are actively participating (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015). The implementation of the Bologna Process formed the starting point of the ‘most significant European cooperation process ever to take place in the field of higher education’ (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2012, p. 15).

Next to the introduction of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), another so-called ‘Bologna transparency tool’ was implemented. This tool is called the Diploma Supplement and it provides more detailed information about the ‘nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed by its holder’ (European Commission, 2015). The document has to be issued automatically and free of charge in a major European language and ‘is designed to increase transparency and recognition of qualifications across Europe’ (The UK HE Europe Unit, 2006, p. 3). Issuing the Diploma Supplement should benefit higher education institutions as well as students. For the institutions, not only the transparency of qualifications is increased, but it also saves time and enhances greater visibility abroad. For students, the main benefits are to have easier access to study and job opportunities abroad and to have more transparent qualifications. These are simpler to read and to compare, thereby facilitating the application process abroad (European Commission, 2015). As part of these supplements, the ‘Diploma Supplement label’ was established. The Supplement label is an honorary distinction awarded by the European Commission and upon request by the universities. In order to be eligible to receive this award, the higher education institution applying has to prove that it issues the Diploma Supplement ‘correctly in all respects’ (EACEA, 2014).

### **1.1 Problem statement**

Although all participating Bologna countries have signed the declaration and therefore committed themselves to issuing Diploma Supplements, only a few institutions are holding the Diploma Supplement label. Especially in two of the three countries of interest for this thesis, Germany and the UK, having a Diploma Supplement label is not very common, as can be seen by the number of higher education institutions holding the label (two in Germany and three in the UK) (EACEA, 2014). Also, knowledge about the existence of the Diploma Supplement itself seemed to be rather low a decade ago, as became apparent at the London conference of universities in the UK in 2004: ‘(...) it was a disturbing revelation that a majority of UK

delegates had not heard of the Diploma Supplement and not one university represented at the conference had planned to issue it to its students' (EUA Bologna Handbook, 2006, C1.3-1, p. 7). However, it has to be said that since 2004 a lot has changed. From 2005 onwards, more and more countries agreed to issue the Supplement to their students and a study by Voegtli, Knill and Dobbins (2011) concluded that 'the degree of convergence [for the implementation of Diploma Supplements] is steadily increasing since 2000 for the Bologna participants' (p. 88). Nevertheless, they also found that 'the more precise the requirements of a policy are, for example for the implementation of the diploma supplements (...), the harder it seems to achieve full convergence' (p. 92). Concluding, the number of countries which successfully implemented the Diploma Supplement only slightly increased from 2012 to 2015 and there are still some obstacles to overcome for most of the higher education institutions (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015).

## **1.2 Research questions**

Having the Diploma Supplement label not only shows that institutions promote the European idea of furthering competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education, but also that they support student mobility within the EHEA. Hence, more transparent qualifications should make it 'easier for people to move to other countries to study and so to acquire the high-level skills needed in our rapidly evolving economies' (ECTS and Diploma Supplement label holders 2011 & 2012, 2014, p. 3). Student mobility is therefore an important factor in the course of the Bologna Process and in particular, in creating the EHEA, and forms the dependent variable of the main research question, next to having a DS label as the independent variable.

### **1) Do Higher Education Institutions in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom that have a Diploma Supplement label show higher levels of student mobility than Higher Education Institutions without a Diploma Supplement label?**

In order to be able to answer this question, the following three sub-questions were developed. First of all, we need to know more about the actual institutions that hold the DS label in the three countries under investigation. Therefore, the first sub-question is the following:

#### **1.1) Which HEIs have a DS label in the three selected countries?**

If we know which institutions have the label and the reasons behind it, we can continue to take a closer look at student mobility at the selected DS label-holding universities. This leads us to the next sub-question:

## **1.2) How mobile are students in the various HEIs?**

Eventually, after having answered the two sub-questions and the main research question, we will be able to provide detailed information about DS labels and their influence on student mobility. Therefore, a concluding third sub-question is added:

## **1.3) Which recommendations can be derived from the conclusions for the different stakeholders?**

### **1.3 Relevance of research**

Over the past 15 years, common European education policies have increasingly gained in importance and a lot has changed since the inception of the Bologna Process. With the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010, some of the objectives set in 1999 were met, while others were still far from being accomplished. The ECTS system, for example, has been relatively successful, as it has been fully implemented in 23 participating countries by 2012 and in 27 countries by 2015. 17 countries used ECTS in 75% of all their HE programmes and three countries used ECTS credits in at least 49% of their HE programmes or made use of their own national credit system, which is not completely compatible with the ECTS system (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015). Also, the Diploma Supplement could achieve some success. In 2012, 25 European Bologna countries had fully complied with its rules and procedures. Concretely speaking, this means they issued the DS automatically and free of charge, according to the format set out by the UNESCO, EU and Council of Europe, to every graduating student in a major European language (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2012). By 2015, this number slightly increased to 28 countries fully complying with the rules and procedures (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015).

The Diploma Supplement label was initiated in order to award the institutions for their efforts concerning the Diploma Supplement. It should increase the institution's reputation by emphasising the modernisation and internationalisation efforts of the respective HEI. Since issuing the Diploma Supplement should increase the student's chances of further international studies or improved labour market opportunities by providing a transparent view of the qualifications, it is important to find out to what extent HEIs holding a Diploma Supplement label serve this purpose and promote the mobility of students.

This study is of social relevance since it explored the effect of Diploma Supplement labels on student mobility in three European countries and therefore makes an important contribution to the success of one of the most essential Bologna transparency tools. Higher education institutions with Diploma Supplement labels were expected to contribute more to the mobility of students in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK than HEIs that do not have the label.

## **1.4 Background information**

### **1.4.1 The Bologna Process**

The Bologna Process, initiated and formally signed in 1999 in the Italian city of Bologna, is an ‘intergovernmental commitment to restructuring higher education systems which extends far beyond the EU’ (Keeling, 2006, p. 203). The Bologna Process comprises 47 participating mostly European countries and several European organizations such as the representatives of students (ESIB), Higher Education Institutions (EUA and EURASHE), quality assurance agencies (ENQA), employers (UNICE) and academic trade unions (Education International) (Keeling, 2006). Being formerly regarded as a collection of traditional and administratively inflexible institutions, the Bologna Process attracted worldwide attention by transforming into a dynamic system of more entrepreneurial institutions and thereby drawing global attention to Europe (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). The reforms were designed to bring about four effects: enhanced worldwide attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education institutions, facilitated student mobility within Europe, a flexible and transparent system of study provisions where study programmes of shorter duration are supposed to gain more attractiveness, and the improvement of curricular reforms which should promote a framework, in which labour market relevant qualifications are more strongly supported and emphasised (Kehm & Teichler, 2006).

Although higher education officially is in the hands of the Member States and is therefore considered ‘one of the primary policy responsibilities of European nation-states’ (Keeling, 2006, p. 203), the European Commission has increasingly tried to take over this policy area. Moreover, the Bologna agenda was implemented in a decentralized way, however, ‘it is closely monitored and advanced by European-level reports, conferences, communiqués and policy declarations’ (Keeling, 2006, p. 207), which underlines the notion that the Commission has become more and more involved in HE issues in the last decades (Keeling, 2006). The entire Bologna Process comprises a range of reforms and structural changes of the European higher education systems, with the introduction of the three-cycle degree structure being the most commonly known and the most fundamental one (Keeling, 2006). This structural change ‘has quickly become the European standard in participating countries’ (Keeling, 2006, p. 207).

At the Bergen conference in May 2005, halfway to creating the European Higher Education Area in 2010, ‘it was acknowledged that ‘Bologna’ overall has demonstrated remarkable success’ (Keeling, 2006, p. 207). The two main operative goals of the Bologna declaration in 1999 were to increase the transparency and probability of recognition of qualifications (Kehm & Teichler, 2006). This was supposed to be realized by two tools, namely the Diploma Supplement (DS) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).



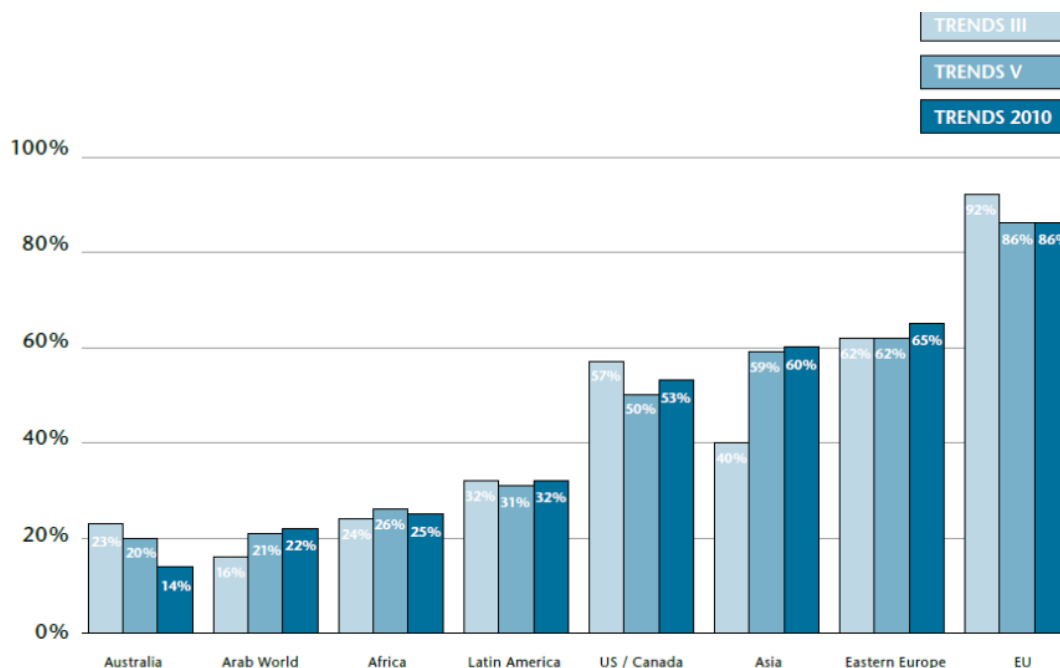
The '*Trends 2010*' report (Sursock & Smidt, 2010) examined the progress of the Bologna Process five years later. Reichert (2010) regarded the European University Association (EUA)'s '*Trends*' Reports as the best comparative sources to gain insights into institutional realities and challenges. The latest report, published in March 2010, contained many important findings, which were obtained by data collected through site visits, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. The main goal of the report was to 'analyse – from a higher education institution perspective – the ten years of change in European higher education in the context of the Bologna Process and of broader changes that are taking place within it' (p. 12).

Internationalisation is an important feature of the Bologna Process. In '*Trends 2010*' it was found that being increasingly international was the 'third most important change driver' (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 8) in the last three years and it is assumed to be ranked first in the upcoming five years, with the Bologna Process only being ranked third. Moreover, whereas the degree of internationalisation was previously measured 'by the number of exchange students and bilateral agreements' (p. 21), it now shifted to a stronger emphasis on the 'quality of these partnerships and cooperations' (p. 21). Additionally, another change in terms of internationalisation could be observed: Many European countries have introduced new legal frameworks for their HEIs, confiding them with more institutional autonomy, since this is perceived as the 'keystone for an effective and efficient HE sector' (p. 21). Therefore, they consider the Bologna Process as a chance to change national educational policies and neglect the fact that it was rather meant to be a European process.

Wilson (2009) divided Europe into 'four broad geographical areas' (p. 3), which all perceive the Bologna Process differently. She regards the UK as one area where the BP 'means raising standards through internationalising study programmes and promoting mobility' (p. 3) and the original 15 EU Member States, which include the Netherlands and Germany, as an area where the Bologna Process has raised awareness and thereby challenged the institutions to critically reflect on the structure and quality of their programmes in order to trigger a change process. Finally, the Bologna tools (ECTS and DS) and instruments, such as joint programmes, are considered to become the 'cornerstone of successful internationalisation based upon cooperation both in Europe and beyond' (Wilson, 2009, p. 3).

Despite only a few years ago mobility was the main indicator of internationalisation, institutions now incorporate it into their teaching and research approaches and at the same time, virtual mobility is increased through improved communication and information technologies (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). Nevertheless, institutions are still eager to enhance their international attractiveness predominantly in the EU (86%) and Eastern Europe (65%), followed by Asia (60%), which becomes increasingly attractive for European HEIs (see Chart 1.1).

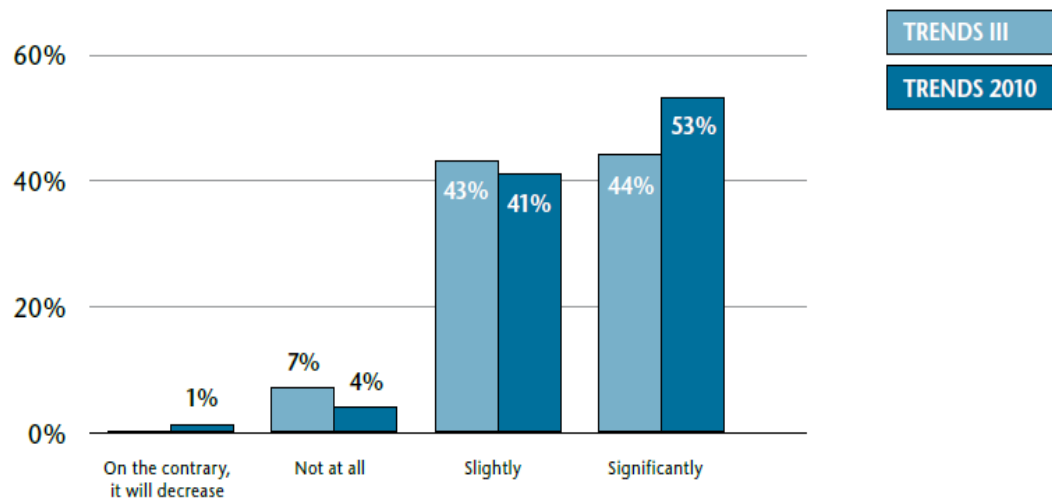
**Chart 1.1: Geographical areas in which HEIs would most like to increase international attractiveness**



Source: 'Trends 2010 – A decade of change in European Higher Education (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 74).

Mobility is an essential part of the internationalisation processes of HEIs and particularly in achieving the goals of the EHEA and ERA. This mechanism, composed of student and staff mobility, is seen as fulfilling various functions on the way to establishing the EHEA. These include promoting a European identity, improving education and personal development aims of individuals and encouraging the creation of a single market (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). In the beginning of the Bologna Process 'intra-European mobility was the focus of attention' (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 75). Through increased international student mobility and worldwide attention drawn to the Bologna Process, promoting mobility also beyond European borders has been discussed in the past years. This view was reinforced at the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué in 2009, where a benchmark figure of 20% for mobility by 2020 was determined, emphasising the explicit need for enhancing mobility over the next decade (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). However, the availability of data on mobility flows and progress in terms of mobility has been fairly poor. 'Trends 2010', nevertheless, collected data on the topic of full-degree (vertical) mobility by asking whether HEIs expect that the three-cycle degree structure provides significantly more opportunities for full-degree mobility, as can be seen in Chart 1.2 (Sursock & Smidt, 2010).

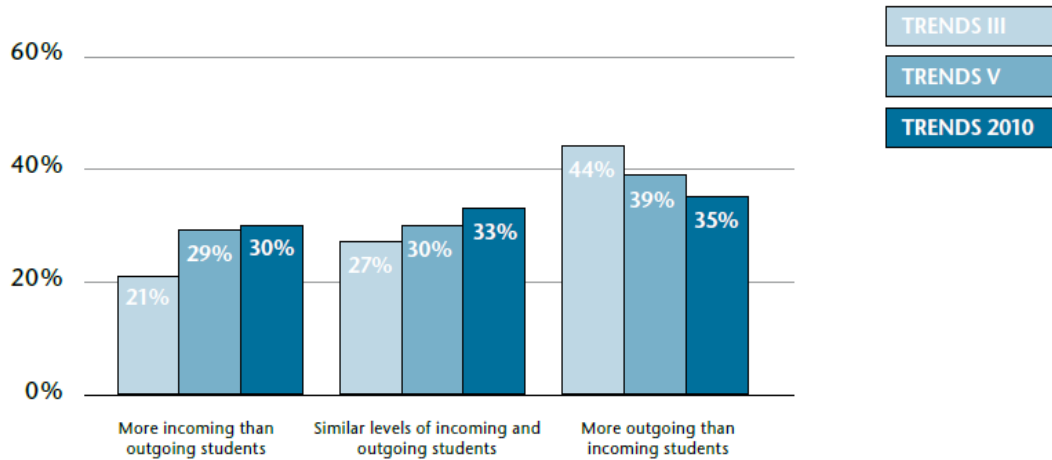
**Chart 1.2: Agreement by HEIs with expectation that three-cycle structure provides increased opportunities for student mobility from one institution to another for the next cycle of study (vertical mobility)**



Source: 'Trends 2010 – A decade of change in European Higher Education (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 76).

Coming back to the question on full-degree mobility, 53% of the institutions answered 'significantly', which represents a 9% increase compared to 'Trends III' (2003). Additionally, it could be observed that mainly HEIs from smaller countries made these statements. Nevertheless, the Commission working document 'Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training' (2009) found that also countries such as Germany stated that 'students have significantly altered their full-degree mobility' (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 76). When referring to mobility, there also has to be made a distinction between *incoming* and *outgoing* mobility. *Incoming* mobility, also called 'inbound' mobility, refers to students that move to a specific country with the purpose of studying (Eurydice Reports, 2009), whereas *outgoing* mobility, also called 'outbound' mobility, describes the other way around, namely students that moved out of the country of origin in order to study in the country of destination (Eurydice Reports, 2009). Another question in 'Trends 2010' dealt with student flows and the extent to which a balance of incoming and outgoing student mobility can be observed. Here, the results were rather evenly distributed with 30% of HEIs stating there are more incoming than outgoing students, 33% stating there are similar levels and 35% saying they have more outgoing than incoming students (see Chart 1.3) (Sursock & Smidt, 2010).

**Chart 1.3: Balance of incoming and outgoing student mobility at HEIs**



Source: *Trends 2010 – A decade of change in European Higher Education* (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 77).

From these findings, preliminary conclusions were drawn: The expectations for full-degree mobility have increased, student mobility flows show the same imbalance between Eastern and Western Europe<sup>1</sup>, with only small changes compared to *Trends III* (2003) and *Trends V* (2007) and ‘there seems to be an increased influx of international students into Europe’ (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 77). Concluding, mobility still presents a challenge to HEIs, unless it is important to the respective institutional internationalisation strategy and it has to be made a top priority of these strategies in order to fulfil its target of 20% by 2020. However, Sursock and Smidt (2010) point out that ‘mobility must fit each institution’s mission and profile and meet the educational and personal goals of each individual learner’ (p. 81). Therefore, they advise institutions to develop more concrete definitions and measurements of mobility to prevent mistakes, to mark current mobility activities for a better understanding of mobility patterns and movements and, in particular, to actively promote mobility and remove the various obstacles to it (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). Reichert (2010) confirms these thoughts and further adds that it ‘remains to be seen whether a substantial proportion of students and staff working abroad (...) will become reality’ (p. 18).

In conclusion, it can be stated that the Bologna Process has to be viewed as ‘a means to an end’ (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 33). Since its inception, the reforms were designed as the necessary educational component on the way to a ‘Europe of knowledge’ (p. 33), hence, to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. Concerning the success of the introduction of the EHEA on the national basis, it was found that in general, Dutch institutions

<sup>1</sup> See Map 1.1: ‘Trends 2010 – Student flows in the EHEA’ in Appendix 1

were more satisfied with it (50-70%) than institutions in Germany or the UK (0-50%)<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, these findings are only vague indications of the institutions' expectations of the EHEA, since it is still very early to measure. In the future, it remains to be seen to what extent the vision of 'flexibility and enhanced access to knowledge, in a lifelong learning perspective' (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 28), will become reality in the EHEA. Regarding mobility processes, it can be concluded that although the expectations for degree mobility seem to have increased, the rate of mobility for a degree purpose still remains relatively low. This can be confirmed by the latest Bologna Process Implementation Report (2015), as this document provides recent numbers of incoming as well as outgoing degree mobility. For most of the Bologna countries the rates for both types of mobility are below 5%. In more detail, the average rate for incoming degree mobile students, including EHEA and non-EHEA countries, amounted to 4.4% of all enrolments, compared to an outgoing rate of 0.33%. The latter presents the number of EHEA students pursuing a degree in a non-EHEA country (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015, p. 23). Also, funding constitutes a big obstacle to mobility. This is not only perceived by students, but also by ministries (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015). Internationalisation can be considered a feature of increasing importance. As it was mentioned above, internationalisation is currently ranked as the third 'most important change driver' (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 8) and is expected to become first in the next five years (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). Therefore, it can be assumed that HEIs will be having an increasingly international focus, which will be reflected in their international strategies.

### **1.4.2 The Diploma Supplement**

The Diploma Supplement was introduced in the course of the Bologna Process as one of the so-called 'Bologna transparency tools'. It is an additional document which contains detailed information about the qualifications obtained by the student upon graduation and was created by a working group sponsored by the European Commission, UNESCO and the Council of Europe in 1998. It is designed to give more information about the 'nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed by its holder' (European Commission, 2014)<sup>3</sup> and should be issued for free and automatically to each student in the Bologna participating countries. Issuing the Supplement is not binding for the institutions in the participating countries, but every graduate has 'the right to receive the Diploma Supplement automatically, free and in a major European language' (European Commission, 2014). As a transparency tool it was developed in order to facilitate mobility through the recognition of credits and qualifications and to provide access to lifelong learning (LLL) opportunities (The European Commission, 2014). The document itself is divided into eight sections, dealing with information about the holder of the diploma, the qualification, the level, the contents, the function, additional information, certification of the supplement and information on the national higher education system (ENIC-NARIC, 2014).

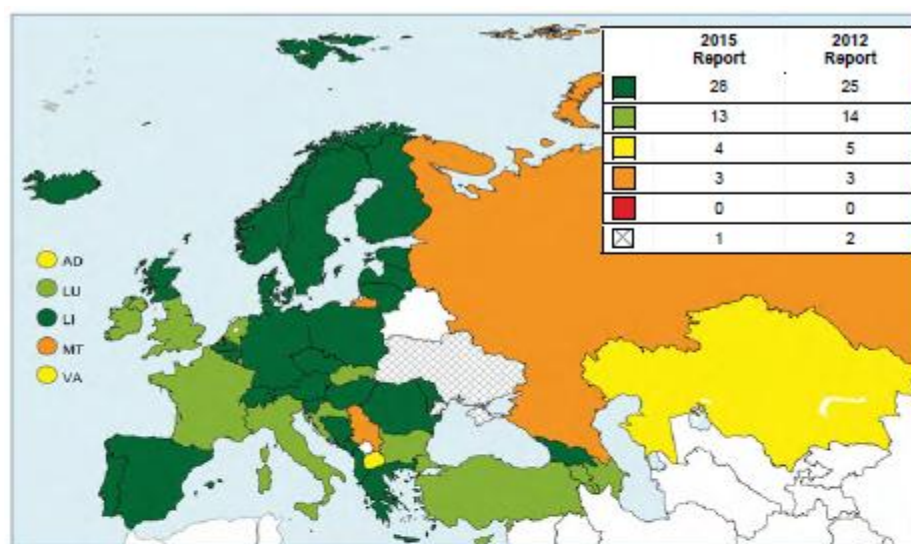
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<sup>2</sup> See Map 1.2: 'Satisfaction of HEIs with the realisation of the EHEA' in Appendix 1

<sup>3</sup> Format Diploma Supplement available at: [http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/THE\\_DIPLOMA\\_SUPPLEMENT.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/THE_DIPLOMA_SUPPLEMENT.pdf)

The *'Bologna Process Implementation Reports'* are provided by the Bologna Follow-Up Group and are a joint work of Eurostat, Eurydice and Eurostudent. They offer interesting insights about the progress of the implementation of Bologna, which are based on questionnaires conducted in the participating countries. In the latest report (2015), the stage of implementation of Diploma Supplements in the participating countries was presented. In order to differentiate more easily between the different stages of implementation, five different colours were used. Red represents the lowest stage, meaning that the 'systematic issuing of DS has not yet started', (p. 75), orange means 'a DS in the EU/CoE/UNESCO format and in a widely spoken European language is issued to some graduates OR in some programmes for a fee' (p. 75), yellow is the same but it is issued free of charge, light green means 'every graduate who requests it receives a DS' (p. 75) free of charge and the last category, which is displayed in dark green, stands for the successful implementation of the Diploma Supplement, thus, issuing a Diploma Supplement according to the format defined by EU/CoE/UNESCO to every graduating student in a widely spoken European language automatically and free of charge (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015).

### Map 1.3: Stages of Diploma Supplement implementation 2013/14



Source: BFUG questionnaire.

#### Scorecard categories

- Every graduate receives a Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language
  - automatically
  - free of charge
- Every graduate who requests it receives a Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language
  - free of charge
 OR
  - at least 75 % graduate who requests it receives a Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language
  - free of charge
    - automatically
    - free of charge
- A Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language is issued to some graduates OR in some programmes free of charge
- A Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language is issued to some graduates OR in some programmes for a fee
- Systematic issuing of Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language has not yet started

Source: Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015, p. 75.

Concerning the findings as shown in Map 1.3, some important observations can be derived. First of all, no country was in the red category, neither in 2012 nor in 2015. This means that in all the 47 participating countries, the issuing of Diploma Supplements has started. Compared to the report from 2012<sup>4</sup>, there have not been substantial changes, as can be observed in Map 1.3. While in 2009 eleven countries were issuing the DS only to some graduates or in some programmes free of charge, in 2012 there were only five and in 2015 only four countries still in this category. In the light green category, the number of countries moved up from nine in 2009 to 14 in 2012 and back to 13 in 2015, which explains the change in the number of countries in the yellow and dark green stages. A surprising fact was the change in the top category from

<sup>4</sup> See Map 1.4: 'Stages of Diploma Supplement implementation' in Appendix 1

2009 to 2012. This category, formerly containing 26 countries, then had 25 countries, leading to the conclusion that HEIs in one country decided to not issue the Diploma Supplement to its students automatically anymore. In 2015, this number increased again to 28 countries in the top category. Having these results in mind, it can be concluded that Diploma Supplements are often not very well prepared and do not seem to include the relevant and expected information for its users. Moreover, there is a need for further diffusion of the explanatory notes<sup>5</sup> and training of the responsible staff in order for the HEIs to follow the guidelines adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2007. Regarding the three relevant countries for this thesis, it can be stated that, at the time of the stocktaking, all of them were in the light green category, therefore issuing the DS according to the right format in a widely spoken European language and free of charge, but not necessarily automatically (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2012).

Three years later, this situation has changed. In the 2015 report, the Netherlands were still in the light green category, whereas Germany moved up to the dark green category and the United Kingdom is now divided into Scotland being in the dark green and England and Wales still being in the light green category. This outcome leaves room for interpretation and could let us assume that Germany has a more positive attitude towards the correct implementation of the Diploma Supplement than the other two countries. The report partly confirms this assumption, by stating that Germany issues the DS automatically also in English.

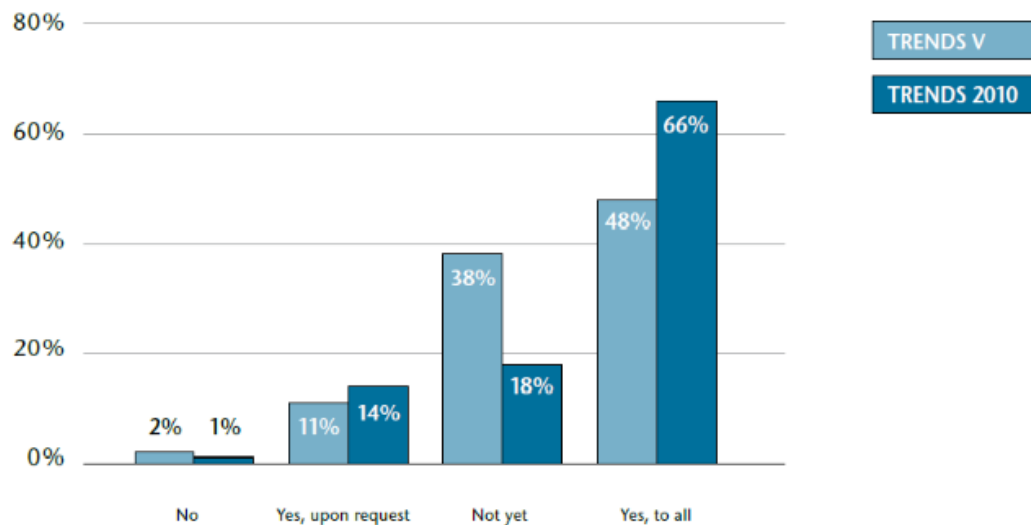
*Trends 2010* also investigated the use and implementation of Diploma Supplements. A project initiated by ENIC-NARIC and the ENQA compared a sample of 26 Diploma Supplements from 22 countries. The findings showed that the Diploma Supplements still differed considerably in terms of ‘content, structure and lay-out’ (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 55), thereby diminishing the relevance and quality of the document. Moreover, it seemed that the DS was rather written for domestic purposes, by using national expressions and abbreviations. Furthermore, institutions were asked if they issue Diploma Supplements to graduating students at all (see Chart 1.4). The result was that 66% of institutions answered to issue the DS to all students, 14% issued it on request and 18% were planning to do so in the future. The remaining 1% of institutional respondents, 10 HEIs out of 821, had no intentions to implement the DS in the near future.

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote 3



**Chart 1.4: HEIs issuing the DS automatically to all graduating students**



Source: *Trends 2010 – A decade of change in European Higher Education* (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 56).

As already indicated in the Bologna Process Implementation Report (2015) above, moderate success can be detected during the last years. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Diploma Supplement ‘does not seem to have reached its full potential’ (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 55) and seems to be a tool that is distant from academics and rather of administrative nature.

Next to the question whether the institutions currently issue the DS, it was asked if they issue it also free of charge. Here, 91% of HEIs stated to issue the DS free of charge. While ‘*Trends V*’ supposed that the Diploma Supplement is of value for international mobility and less so for local purposes, ‘*Trends 2010*’ does not agree with this position and found that the number of institutions with a regional focus issued significantly more Diploma Supplements than institutions that have a worldwide focus. Concerning enhanced entry into the labour market, there is little evidence available which proves that the DS has an impact. Site visits for a EUA’s Master degree study from 2009 confirm this and add that especially in Poland, Spain, Sweden and Germany the DS ‘was either unknown or unused by employers’ (p. 56). Generally, the Bologna transparency tools still constitute obstacles to student mobility, caused by lacks of understanding and awareness, lack of support by academics and limited funding for outgoing students. Nonetheless, internationalisation is still a very important component of the strategies used by institutions, in particular for developing academic activities (31%) and improving reputation and visibility (28%), for instance, by using Diploma Supplements (Sursock & Smidt, 2010).

Since the inception of the issuing of Diploma Supplements, not only the use itself, but also the monitoring of this use has increased. This is usually done by national bodies, such as the Rectors’ conference in Germany. Where there were only seven countries, which launched the

monitoring of the DS's effectiveness in 2012, this number has doubled by now (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015). The latest survey published by the German Rectors' conference in 2011 revealed some interesting insights concerning the use of Diploma Supplements by German HEIs<sup>6</sup>. Whereas only 13% of the HEIs issued the DS to all of the students in 2004, this number rose to 29% in 2007 and eventually to 52.7% in 2011. In more detail, it was investigated to what extent the DS is also issued automatically and free of charge. The results were that 185 out of the 207 participating HEIs issue them automatically and 163 free of charge. Another condition of the successful issuing of the DS, is to provide it in a major European language. Here, the HEIs proved to operate very progressively, as 180 HEIs indicated to issue it in English, compared to only 133 in German. Next to these findings, obstacles to the complete implementation of the DS were named. The main reasons were technical and content-related problems, closely followed by organizational reasons and shortage of staff. Additionally, it was mentioned that eight of the 16 German *Bundesländer* have integrated the issuing of Diploma Supplement into their legal systems. Since the study was designed to monitor the use of the DS, it also asked if the HEIs used information from the DS for the admission to Master studies. Here, only 19.8% answered with 'yes', compared to 72%, that answered 'no' and 8.2% which did not answer that question (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, 2011).

In conclusion, it can be stated that the use of Diploma Supplements has slightly increased since 2005 and that 'implementation is not universal' (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 56), meaning that overall, two thirds of the respondents have confirmed the issuing of DS, but the levels of implementation vary significantly. This view is also reinforced by Reichert (2010). She confirms that a vast number of HEIs have actually introduced the DS, but admits that 'more often than not, these instruments are not being applied according to the way they were designed' (p. 9). As recommendations for the future, Sursock and Smidt (2010) advise to integrate learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks.

### **1.4.3 The Diploma Supplement Label**

The European Union awards universities with labels for using ECTS credits and issuing the Diploma Supplement correctly. The DS label is an honorary distinction, given upon request and after assessment of the respective universities and can be renewed every four years. Only universities which have fully implemented Diploma Supplements, meaning they are issuing them automatically, free of charge and according to the standardized format, are able to receive this label. After applying for the label at the national agency, independent European experts will evaluate the application before it is forwarded to the European Commission and the EACEA for the final approval. If accepted, the institution is awarded the Diploma Supplement label for implementing it correctly in all respects (EACEA, 2014).

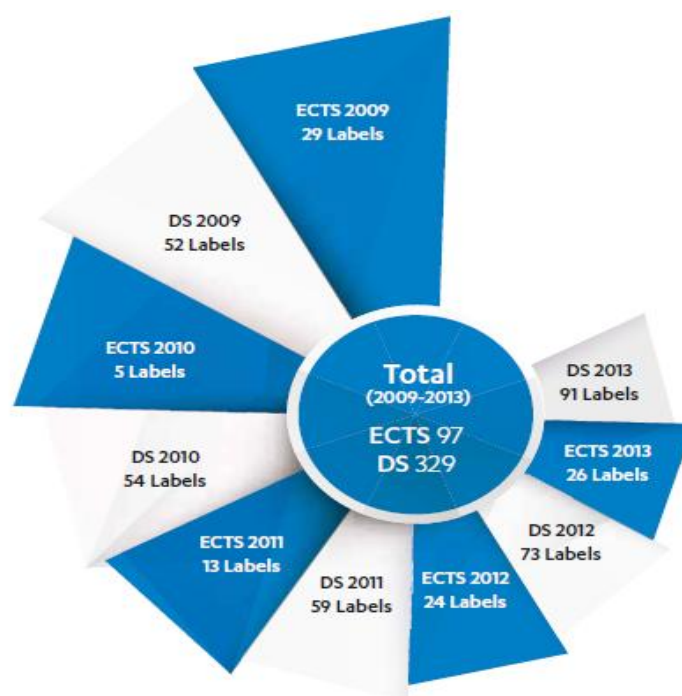
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<sup>6</sup> PDF available at: <http://www.hrk-nexus.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk-nexus/07-Downloads/07-02-Publikationen/07-02-Publikationen-Diploma-Supplement-2011.pdf>

Regarding the three chosen countries Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, the Dutch universities were holding the most labels at the time of writing (10)<sup>7</sup>. Three universities in the UK have the label and two in Germany. Comparing these countries by the number of labels could already give an indication about how the implementation of Diploma Supplements is either supported by the governments of the respective countries or, on the institutional level, how valuable they are for the institutions. When looking at differences between universities and universities of applied sciences, there cannot be found any clear differences in terms of holding the label. While in the UK only universities have the label since there are only universities, in Germany only universities of applied sciences had it and in the Netherlands five of the label holders were universities and five were universities of applied sciences (EACEA, 2014). Therefore, the type of university appears not to play a role in holding a DS label.

Between 2009 and 2013, ‘329 institutions applied successfully for the Diploma Supplement label’ (p. 4). In 2013, there were 91 HEIs which were awarded the label for the first time and 79 institutions which successfully renewed their label (Celebrating ECTS and Diploma Supplement label holders 2009-2013, 2015).

**Figure 1: Number of ECTS and DS label holders 2009-2013**



Source: ‘Celebrating ECTS and Diploma Supplement label holders 2009-2013’ (European Commission, 2015, p. 4)

<sup>7</sup> Since new information was only published in late May 2015 by the European Commission, for the most part of this thesis, it was still referred to the information provided on the website in 2014.

As already indicated above, Germany only had two institutions that were holding the DS label at the time of writing. In the latest document published by the European Commission in May 2015<sup>8</sup>, only one of the two previous label holders renewed the label, therefore being the only institution with the label in Germany now. The Netherlands, on the other hand, by far had the most DS label holders among the three countries of choice. Ten research universities and universities of applied sciences were label holders at the time of writing. The chosen HEI for this study, however, did not renew the label after 2013 and currently there are only three institutions, which have the DS label in the Netherlands. In the UK, however, the picture is quite the same as in Germany, only that all of the three HEIs renewed the label in 2013 (European Commission, 2015).

As can be observed in Figure 1, the number of institutions holding the DS label is increasing. Whereas in 2009 there were only 52 institutions with the label, the number amounted to 91 in 2013 (Celebrating ECTS and Diploma Supplement label holders, 2009-2013, 2015)<sup>9</sup>. This can be considered a positive trend and it can be assumed that the number of institutions holding the label will further rise in the future.

## **1.5 Thesis Overview**

My thesis starts off with the theoretical framework, which provides more in-depth information about the different theories and concepts used. Europeanisation and the so-called ‘push and pull-factors’ form the relevant theoretical basis and the different forms of mobility are the concepts, which taken together lay the groundwork for my thesis.

After that, the methodology used to obtain and analyse the findings is presented. Standardized open-ended interviews with admission officers and policy-makers of two higher education institutions in each of the three countries were conducted. A most similar comparison was designed to select the higher education institutions. One HEI which was holding the label and one which was not holding the label were selected on the basis of one shared factor, namely the same location. They should be as similar as possible, but different in terms of holding or not holding the label.

Subsequently, the presentation and analysis of the findings from these interviews follow and first conclusions are drawn. Moreover, the main research question and sub-questions 1.1 and 1.2 are answered here.

The last chapter contains the conclusion, which links the findings of the interviews back to the theoretical framework. Finally, by answering research question 1.3, recommendations are formulated and statements about future research are made.

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<sup>8</sup> PDF available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/doc/ects/label13\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/doc/ects/label13_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> PDF available at: <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/celebrating-ects-and-diploma-supplement-label-holders-2009-2013-pbNC0514040/>

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Europeanisation**

#### **2.1.1 A Definition of Europeanisation**

One term which is of interest when dealing with the Bologna Process and Diploma Supplements is Europeanisation. Defining the term Europeanisation turned out to be more difficult than expected, since many slightly different definitions exist. Moreover, the available literature fails to define the boundaries of Europeanisation. Therefore; it is associated with a number of processes, including policy change, cultural change and new identity formation (Radaelli, 2000). Having carefully studied the existing literature, the following definitions of Europeanisation can be regarded as important for this thesis.

According to Radaelli (2004), Europeanisation refers to ‘processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, identities, political structures and public policies’ (p. 30). He argues that his definition is based on an ‘understanding of Europeanisation as interactive process’ and not simply a process of ‘uni-directional reaction to Europe’ (p. 4). Europeanisation deals with the process of domestic change and complex patterns of adaptation. Here, he distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up processes of Europeanisation, whereby the former starts with Europe exercising power on the Member States, which triggers a change on the domestic level and the latter begins with proposals made on the national level and ends as well with change on the domestic level. Additionally, he perceives Europeanisation as approaches of governance, institutionalisation and discourse, considering these the three ideal types (Radaelli, 2004).

Risse et al. (2001) define Europeanisation as the ‘emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal and social institutions associated with political problem-solving that formalize interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules’ (p. 3). Hence, Europeanisation is understood as an institution-building process at the European level in order to explore how it impacts upon the Member States. Börzel (1999) reaffirms this perception by stating that Europeanisation describes the process of national policy areas becoming increasingly subjugated to policy-making on the European level.

Ladrech (1994) was one of the first to formulate a definition of Europeanisation. He conceptualized it as a ‘process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that

the ECs'<sup>10</sup> political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making' (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003, p. 96).

As can be seen above, it can be concluded that Europeanisation is an 'interactive process' (Radaelli, 2004), involving top-down and bottom-up approaches of policy-making. Radaelli (2004) emphasizes patterns of adaptation on the domestic level 'can be more complex than simple reactions to Brussels' (p. 4). Despite the lack of clarity in defining the boundaries of Europeanisation, it is not a new theory. On the contrary, 'it is a way to organize our concepts and to contribute to the normalization of political science by drawing systematically on comparative politics, the international political economy, international relations and policy analysis' (Radaelli, 2004, p. 15). For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of Europeanisation by Radaelli (2004), as stated above, will be used, as it presents a comprehensive view of the term, describing it as interactive process, which can be viewed from different angles and perspectives.

## **2. 1.2 Mechanisms of Europeanisation**

Since the term Europeanisation has now been defined, the mechanisms of it have to be explained. In order to receive a broader understanding of these mechanisms, they are shortly presented in the following paragraphs.

The first mechanism of Europeanisation is 'goodness of fit' (Radaelli, 2004; Börzel, 1999; Risse et al., 2001). 'Goodness of fit' is perceived as only being of relevance as long as there is divergence, incompatibility or some kind of misfit between the institutional process, politics and policies on the European level and the domestic level. Therefore: 'The lower the compatibility between European and domestic processes, policies and institutions, the higher the adaptational pressure' (Risse et al., 2001, p. 60).

Besides 'goodness of fit', there are also 'vertical' and 'horizontal' mechanisms involved. Whereas the vertical mechanism clearly delimits the EU and domestic levels, the horizontal mechanism rather looks at Europeanisation as a process, with low pressure of conforming to EU policy models (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003). In more detail, the EU may give the context or opportunities for the socialisation of domestic actors, who then decide which ideas or policies they want to implement (Radaelli, 2004).

Radaelli (2003) and Börzel and Risse (2003) also elaborated on the possible outcomes of Europeanisation. Radaelli (2003) distinguished four outcomes, which are (1) retrenchment, (2) inertia, (3) absorption and (4) transformation. Retrenchment describes the process by which domestic policy becomes less European than before, inertia presents a lack of change as shown by delays, absorption indicates domestic change as consequence of adaptation and transformation describes a change in the substantial logic of political behaviour (Featherstone &

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<sup>10</sup> Short for European Communities, which were integrated into the European Union through the Maastricht Treaty in 1993.

Radaelli, 2003). Börzel and Risse (2003) found ‘three degrees of domestic change’ (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003, p. 69), which are very similar to Radaelli’s four outcomes. They agree with the dimensions of absorption and transformation identified by Radaelli (2003), and add ‘accommodation’: European Member States adjust to Europeanisation pressures by adapting existing policies, ‘without changing their essential features and underlying collective understandings attached to them’ (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003, p. 70). Although these two approaches are very alike, the three degrees of domestic change by Börzel and Risse (2003) will be the predominant source with respect to possible outcomes of Europeanisation, used throughout the course of this thesis.

Regarding the topic of this thesis, it will be important to identify the relevant mechanisms of Europeanisation involved when dealing with Diploma Supplement labels and their effect on student mobility. To what extent is the implementation of Diploma Supplements Europeanized? Are the three countries under investigation absorbing, transforming or accommodating in terms of implementing Diploma Supplements and requesting the Diploma Supplement Label? Is there high adaptational pressure caused by a discrepancy between European and domestic policies? Can we observe goodness of fit?

## **2.2 Student Mobility**

When referring to the mobility of students, it has to be made clear what is exactly meant by the term mobility.

The mobility of students in general refers to ‘any opportunity for students to work or study abroad whilst undertaking their degree programme – whether undergraduate or postgraduate’ (University of Glasgow, 2013). Moreover, student mobility can be incoming and outgoing, in form of a ‘bilateral exchange’ or ‘one-way study abroad’ (University of Glasgow, 2013). These definitions relate to student mobility in the sense of student exchange, undertaken during the undergraduate or postgraduate studies.

Since my research question deals with Diploma Supplements which are only given to students after their graduation from one institution, if even issued at all, student mobility has to be defined in a different way. The Diploma Supplement ‘is designed to increase transparency and recognition of qualifications across Europe’ (p. 3). By improving transparency and recognition of qualifications, it becomes easier to compare these qualifications that are gained in different European higher education systems and it increases mutual understanding of qualifications. Easier comparable degrees and higher recognition of qualifications lead to an increase in mobility of ‘citizens holding higher education qualifications’ (The UK HE Europe Unit, 2006, p. 6).

Papatsiba (2006) states that ‘mobility emerges as one of the ultimate reasons for establishing the EHEA, and at the same time, its expected outcome’ (p. 97). Furthermore, ‘the goal of mobility is said to be both important and unproblematic in terms of legitimacy and

popularity' (p. 97). This underlines the importance of mobility in terms of creating the European Higher Education Area.

After having emphasized the goals and purposes of the Diploma Supplement and its contribution to student mobility, the term *mobility* can now be further defined. 'Academic mobility' in general is perceived as 'a period of study, teaching and/or research in a country other than a student's or academic staff member's country of residence' (UNESCO, 2001). Moreover, mobility can be divided into 'short-term' and 'degree/diploma mobility', which both belong to the generic term of 'learning mobility'. Learning mobility can be defined as being 'transnational, physical and for a broad range of learning purposes, be it in organized programmes or on the learners own initiative' (Maunimo, s.a.). Short-term mobility then refers to 'all types of learning mobility, as long as it is not for degree purpose' (Maunimo s.a.) and degree mobility is 'learning mobility for degree purpose, even if only a part of the programme is studied abroad' (Maunimo, s.a.). In addition, diploma mobility is considered a long-term type of mobility 'as it requires in principle a period of several years in the country of destination' (Eurydice Reports, 2009, p. 4). These two types of mobility are also commonly referred to as 'horizontal' (short-term) and 'vertical' (degree/diploma) mobility (Maunimo, s.a.). For the purpose of this thesis, we are mainly focused on 'degree/diploma mobility' or 'vertical mobility', since we are interested in Diploma Supplements, which can obviously only be issued upon the successful attainment of a degree. Nevertheless, we do not want to exclude short-term types of mobility completely to make sure to include all factors and purposes of Diploma Supplements.

Furthermore, this thesis focuses on the institutional perspective of Diploma Supplements and it therefore has to be distinguished between 'incoming' and 'outgoing' mobility. Incoming mobility, also called 'inbound mobility', refers to students that move to a specific country with the purpose of studying. It can be measured 'by the ratio between the mobile students studying in the country and the total number of students studying in the country' (p. 10). Outgoing mobility, also referred to as 'outbound mobility' on the contrary, describes the opposite movement. Students that moved out of the country of origin in order to study in the country of destination are considered outgoing students. Outbound mobility can hence be 'measured by the ratio between the number of students having the country as origin and the total student population of country of origin' (p. 10). Additionally, it has to be mentioned that incoming and outgoing mobility may refer to short-term as well as to diploma mobility (Eurydice Reports, 2009).

With regard to incoming and outgoing student mobility as concepts for my thesis, it will be investigated to what extent the two types of student mobility have changed after the implementation of Diploma Supplements and, especially, after obtaining the Diploma Supplement Label at the respective higher education institutions. Did incoming degree mobility increase after obtaining the label? To what extent did the receiving of the label influence outgoing degree mobility?



## 2.3 Push and Pull-Factors

Next to the concept of Europeanisation and the different conceptualizations of student mobility, my theoretical framework is based on the so-called ‘push and pull-factors’. In general, these factors try to explain what motivates, what *pushes* an individual to a certain decision and what attracts, what *pulls* a person to a certain destination, job or the like (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Regarding the topic of student mobility and the factors that influence the choice of a study destination, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) identified various push and pull-factors. First of all, they defined these factors in terms of student mobility. *Push* factors therefore constitute the ‘outbound’ movement, since they take effect in the home country and motivate a student to pursue an international study in another country. *Pull* factors represent the opposite movement (‘inbound’) and work within a host country, trying to attract international students. These factors either stem from the home country, the host country or the students themselves.

International education is of increasing importance and can be explained by a number of factors that have an impact on the demand for this. In many developing countries, access to higher education is limited. Therefore, moving to a more developed country in order to study is a common way to get access to higher education. Moreover, history plays a major role when it comes to the choice of the host country. Former colonies and intergovernmental institutions such as the Commonwealth provide direct links to the former mother countries, such as a shared language, culture and facilitated access to higher education. Additionally, factors such as the availability of science or technology-based programmes, the geographic proximity to the home country and the quality of tertiary education have an impact (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) identified six *pull-factors*, which influence a student’s decision to select a host country. The first is the ‘knowledge and awareness of the host country in the student’s home country’ (p. 83). It is perceived that the more information about a certain country is available and the better the reputation of the host country’s quality, the stronger is the pull-factor. The second pull-factor is personal recommendations. Here, particularly recommendations from family members, relatives or friends exercise a great influence on the choice of study destination. The third factor deals with cost issues. Tuition fees, costs of living, travel and social costs, which are comprised of the level of crime, safety and racial discrimination, play a role, as well as the number of students from the student’s home country and the possibility of working part-time. The fourth factor is the environment. This relates to the study climate, physical climate and the lifestyle of the respective country or city. The penultimate pull-factor constitutes the geographic proximity to the home country and the sixth and last factor presents the social links, thereby referring to family and friends already living in that respective country. These six factors are basically in accordance with Becker and Kolster (2012), who emphasize that, in particular, high quality, good reputation of education, good knowledge and student awareness of the respective destination country present the most

important pull-factors. Nonetheless, it is also stressed that the level and type of study as well as the country of origin of the student plays a role in the order of the named pull-factors (Becker & Kolster, 2012).

Becker and Kolster (2012) also elaborated the pull-factors with regard to the study location. These are mainly in accordance with the pull-factors of the destination country, as knowledge and awareness of the specific city and the quality and reputation of the education in that city also constitute important factors. Moreover, the costs of living and tuition fees, the level of internationalization and the living, study and work environment are thought to influence the decision. Regarding the main pull-factors that influence the decision to study at a specific higher education institution, they are also widely in accordance with the study destination country and city. Worth mentioning here is the importance of degree recognition by the host institution and country as well as the nature of governance and administrative procedures at the higher education institution of choice.

Besides the most important pull-factors, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Becker and Kolster (2012) also investigated the respective *push-factors* that influence a student's decision to study abroad. Generally, it can be distinguished between personal push-factors and environmental push-factors (Becker & Kolster, 2012). Whereas personal push-factors refer to personal preferences and individual motivations, environmental push-factors relate to national characteristics and quality of education. Although there is not much scientific research available about personal push-factors, a few influential sources can be identified. These are to a large extent, parents, family members and friends who have studied and lived abroad or have a high level of education or high socio-economic status. Nevertheless, the authors admit that the impact of these sources varies according to nationality and maturity of the students. Chen (2007) developed a model in order to find out more about students' motivations to study abroad. His so-called 'Synthesis Model'. He confirmed that the family or the spouse exercise the most influence on a student, followed by friends, fellow students and professors. Furthermore, Chen (2007) identified the most important motivations to pursue international studies. These are the 'wish to acquire an advanced degree for personal satisfaction' (Becker & Kolster, 2012, p. 12), improvement of foreign language skills and the 'importance of an advanced degree for the future career and the salary level' (p. 12).

Environmental push-factors constitute the unavailability or the aggravated access to higher education and the low value, low quality and low reputation of a national higher education degree and the domestic higher education in general. Moreover, cultural, economic, educational, linguistic, historical, political or religious ties to the host country play a role. McMahon (1992) drew a general picture of environmental push-factors and concluded that 'lower quality and prestige of local programmes/institutions and the unavailability of the desired programmes in the home country are important push-factors for studying abroad' (Becker & Kolster, 2012, p. 12). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) reinforce these findings and state that it is crucial that the educational programme in the host country is of higher quality. Additionally, they confirm that

aggravated entry requirements to the particular study programme or the unavailability of the desired programme are certainly important push-factors. Finally, the intention to immigrate into the country after graduation presents the third push-factor according to them.

Having presented the findings by the scholars, it can be confirmed that information and knowledge about the host country, city and institution can present a push as well as a pull-factor for students. Whereas available information that is transparent and helpful can on the one hand lead to a decision for the student to study abroad, thereby *pushing* a student out of the home country, it can at the same time provide a *pull* factor, since the institution, country and city are *pulling* the student by making the relevant information and knowledge available.

All in all, it can be highlighted that the student's choice of a particular host country, city and higher education institution seems to be heavily influenced by the reputation and quality of education. Moreover, it has to be emphasized that the better the knowledge and awareness of the country, city and institution, the more likely the student will select it as study destination. In addition, the influence of parents, relatives and friends should not be underestimated.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) advise institutions to 'ensure their marketing and promotion is undertaken in a sophisticated manner and that quality claims can be substantiated' (p. 90). Becker and Kolster (2012) further state that 'internationalisation and international student mobility policies of active sending and active receiving countries should to some extent reflect and affect the factors that push and pull students to and from the countries concerned' (p. 15).

Concerning my research question and based on the above explained concepts of the push and pull-factors, it will be interesting to find out to what extent the Diploma Supplement and the Diploma Supplement label can be used as push and pull-factors by the institutions under investigation for this thesis. Which pull-factors are used in order to attract foreign students? What do the institutions do to provide a wide variety of programmes and highest possible quality of education, while simultaneously keeping the fees and costs as low as possible? To what extent does the Diploma Supplement label *pull* foreign students and to what extent does having a Diploma Supplement *push* students to pursue further studies abroad? These are all questions to be answered in the following.

### **3. Methodology**

The main research question of this thesis is *whether HEIs which have a DS label show higher levels of student mobility in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK than HEIs that do not have a DS label in these countries*. In order to come to a conclusion, interviews with two admission officers and five policy-makers from the institutions in the three countries of choice were conducted. Thereby a qualitative research approach is used, which is of explorative nature.

#### **3.1 Case selection**

The sample size is six, since it was looked at six higher education institutions as unit of analysis and how they deal with Diploma Supplements from an institutional perspective. For each country, I chose two higher education institutions, one which has the so-called ‘Diploma Supplement label’ and one which does not have that label. The difference between the countries was that the Netherlands, which was the smallest country, had ten universities which had the label at the time of writing<sup>11</sup>, whereas Germany only had two universities with the label and the UK only had three. Because of these differences, variance in dealing with Diploma Supplements between the three countries was expected. Concerning the institutions without the label, a most similar comparison design was applied. Therefore, the institutions without the label were chosen on the basis of one criterion, which was supposed to make the universities as equal as possible, but different mainly only in terms of the DS label. This criterion was the same city. Two institutions located in the same city were easier to compare, since important factors such as the quality of life, including living costs, cultural and social life and the attractiveness of the study location were perceived to be similar. Moreover, the share of international students studying in the respective cities was expected to be similar, since the location is an important factor for attracting foreign students, besides the reputation and the type of institution, to name but a few. Concerning the number of international students, similar numbers could be found for the HEIs in all of the three countries. Whereas both label-holding institutions in the Netherlands and the UK had around 20% international students (N-1; UK-1)<sup>12</sup>, the label-holding institution in Germany had around 16% international students (G-1). All of the three institutions without the label had a share of around 10% international students (N-2; G-2; UK-2). Therefore, the HEIs with the label had more international students in all of the three countries.

#### **3.2 Research design**

Regarding the interviews conducted, there were attempted to be two interviews per university, one with the respective policy-maker and one with the respective admission officer. This was important since incoming and outgoing mobility of students was intended to be measured and therefore experts from both perspectives were needed. The number of interviews

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<sup>11</sup> Since the new document was only published in late May 2015 by the European Commission, for the most part of this thesis, it was still referred to the information provided on the website in 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Information was retrieved from the institutions’ websites.

therefore previously was 12. Nevertheless, due to a low response rate, there were only seven interviews in the end: Three with the responsible people in the Netherlands, three with those in Germany and one with a policy-maker from the UK. Moreover, in order to take care of reverse causation, it was tried to obtain time series about student mobility from the universities. These time series should have provided information about student mobility before and after the implementation of Diploma Supplements and hence after receiving the Diploma Supplement label. By analysing these time series, it should have been found out whether the fact to have the Diploma Supplement label actually caused student mobility to increase or whether first incoming and outgoing student mobility increased and because of that the Diploma Supplement was introduced. Unfortunately, the HEIs could only provide data about incoming and outgoing short-term mobility. Since it was intended to find out how the DS label influences student mobility, data about student mobility without a degree purpose, would not have been of any use for this study. Additionally, as already mentioned in section 1.4.2, data about the use of the DS by HEIs in Germany over a period of seven years could be gathered, which give information about the progress that has been made in issuing and using the DS between 2004 and 2011.

As for the type of the interview, a standardized open-ended interview was chosen, meaning that the formulation and sequence of questions were pre-determined and that the same questions were asked in the same order (Patton, 2002). Conducting the interviews in this manner was intended to increase the comparability of the answers and the data should be complete for each question and each respondent. The questionnaires can be found in Appendix 3. Moreover, it was easier to compute and evaluate the data, without limiting and fixing the responses beforehand. Possible weaknesses of this approach could be the standardized formulation of questions, which could cause restrictions of naturalness and the relevance of questions and answers. Advantages compared to questionnaires are a high return rate, greater depth and the prevention of misunderstandings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

One interview was held with the responsible policy-maker of each HEI. Policy-makers deal with the issuing of diplomas and grades, give input to decision-making processes and help with monitoring quality assurance and academic standards. Therefore, they are important sources of information when it comes to *outgoing* student mobility and the issuing of Diploma Supplements. The other interview was held with an admission officer of the HEIs. Admission officers recruit and communicate with students and serve as a source of information to them. Moreover, they direct the application process and answer questions of prospective students. Therefore, they are the responsible people to contact in order to obtain information about *incoming* student mobility.

Regarding the type of interviewing, I realized face-to-face interviews with the two Dutch respondents from the label-holding institution, telephone interviews with the policy-maker of the non-label holding institution in Germany and the policy-maker of the Dutch institution without the label, one Skype interview with the policy-maker from the label-holding institution in

Germany and two email interviews with the admission officer from the German HEI and the policy-maker from the British HEI.

### 3.3 Data analysis

In order to analyse the data obtained by the interviews, the questions from the two questionnaires for the policy-makers and admission officers were first divided into four sections. The first section included *general information*, the second contained all the questions related to *motivations, benefits and the use of the label*, the third comprised the *Diploma Supplement as part of the institution's strategy* and the last section dealt with questions about *future recommendations and opinions* regarding the role of the DS and student mobility. After that, the findings for each question were presented and analysed. Moreover, interviews with the German respondents were held in German, whereas interviews with the British and Dutch respondents were held in English. Therefore, answers and quotes by the German respondents were translated into English by the author. Additionally, the author looked for commonalities and differences in the answers and the reasons behind these. Since the respondents and the HEIs were promised anonymity, citations were inserted without making reference to names or institutions. For each respondent and institution, so-called identifiers were used instead. These identifiers can be found in the table below.

**Table 3: Identifiers for the respondents and institutions**

Identifier	Respondent/Institution
PG-1	Policy-maker, Germany, label
PG-2	Policy-maker, Germany, no label
PN-1	Policy-maker, Netherlands, label
PN-2	Policy-maker, Netherlands, no label
PUK-1	Policy-maker, United Kingdom, label
AG-2	Admission Officer, Germany, no label
AN-1	Admission Officer, Netherlands, label
G-1	German institution, label
G-2	German institution, no label
N-1	Dutch institution, label
N-2	Dutch institution, no label

UK-1	British institution, label
UK-2	British institution, no label

The next step was visualizing the findings in tables<sup>13</sup>, thereby creating simple and clear overviews of the collected data. In order to even more highlight the commonalities, different colours were used. Eventually, the findings were discussed and put into perspective with the theories and research questions in Chapter 4.5 and in the conclusion.

### 3.4 Limitations

Concerning the data collection method, standardized open-ended interviews are considered to be too fixed in their structure, which could pose a limitation. Moreover, conducting interviews via telephone, Skype, email and face-to-face do also constitute serious limitations. On the one hand, these include that non-spoken, non-verbal information could be missed when conducting a telephone or email interview or that usually during face-to-face interviews the interviewees tend to talk more than during telephone interviews, but even less via email. However, non-spoken, non-verbal communication, also called ‘social cues’ become less important ‘when the interviewer interviews an expert about things or persons that have nothing to do with the expert as a subject’ (Opdenakker, 2006). Also, misunderstandings can be clarified much easier through face-to-face, telephone or Skype interviews than when the questions are only answered by email. On the other hand, interviews conducted via email also have advantages over face-to-face and telephone interviewing. Not only do the interviewees have more time to think about the answers, since they decide when they want to answer the questions, they are also cheaper in terms of travel costs and also less time-consuming if communication runs smoothly. However, they can also be even more time-consuming than face-to-face or telephone interviews, if the respondents do not answer or forget to respond by mistake (Opdenakker, 2006). In addition, it must be stated that the interviews conducted by email were not planned as such. For reasons of convenience, it was easier for them to respond to the questions via email.

Unfortunately, I was only able to have one interview with the label-holding university in the UK. This was due to a lack of cooperation from the institutions and the lack of time for this research, so the data from the UK cannot be compared as extensively as the data from Germany and the Netherlands.

Also, the universities could be more different than it was assumed in the beginning. Not only location plays a role in choosing a university, other factors such as reputation and rankings are important as well. Moreover, factors such as offering courses taught in English, good

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<sup>13</sup> See Tables 4.1-4.4 in Appendix 2

marketing strategies and a high number of publications attract international students, as well as friends already studying at the respective higher education institution.

Another limitation could be that staff from different types of universities was interviewed. This accounts for the HEIs in the Netherlands and in Germany, where research universities were compared with universities of applied sciences. This so-called binary system of universities differs in its approach to learning, as universities of applied sciences are rather professionally and practically oriented and research universities work more on a scientific and theoretical basis. Moreover, universities of applied sciences closely cooperate with the market and firms, whereas research universities have the advantage to offer a broader spectrum of studies and the opportunity of obtaining a doctorate's degree. In terms of the label, however, these differences do not seem to play a decisive role, as an equal amount of universities and universities of applied sciences were holding the label in these two countries. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the reasons for applying for the label or not, could partly be derived from the type of institution, its internal strategy and alignment.

Since this study encompasses only a small number of cases from only three European countries, the results cannot be generalized to all participating Bologna countries or to all HEIs in the European Higher Education Area. Therefore, this study should only shed light on the actual use of Diploma Supplements and the DS label, as well as explore the influence of these tools on one of the major goals of the Bologna Process, namely facilitating student mobility.



## **4. Analysis**

Coming to the analysis of the findings, they were divided into four different sections. These sections are based on the content of the questions in the interviews. The two types of interviews start out with asking more general questions about the Diploma Supplement, the label and student mobility, followed by the underlying motivations and the use of the Diploma Supplement label, the institutional strategies and finally conclude with future recommendations and opinions. As previously mentioned, I interviewed five policy-makers - two from Germany, two from the Netherlands and one from the UK – and two admission officers – one from Germany and one from the Netherlands. The interview with the policy-makers is here also referred to as the first interview and the interview with the admission officers as the second interview. After presenting and analysing the findings, they were briefly discussed. In addition, they were visualised in tables, which can be found in Appendix 2.

### **4.1 General information**

Both interviews began with rather general questions about the issuing of Diploma Supplements and the label. Therefore, the first section deals with questions **1, 1.1, 2, 2.1 and 2.2** of the questionnaire for policy-makers<sup>14</sup> and questions **1, 2 and 3** of the questionnaire for admission officers<sup>15</sup>.

Starting with the questionnaire for **policy-makers**, the answers given for these questions were analysed first. After introducing the topic and procedure of the interview, it was asked which positions the interviewees were holding at the respective universities. Nearly all of the respondents either worked in the international offices or dealt with internationalization matters and developments. Moreover, four out of the five policy-makers were also Erasmus coordinators or partnership officers, therefore experts when it comes to short-term student mobility. Only one of the respondents was a policy-officer for quality assurance.

To **Question 1**, *since when the institutions are issuing the DS*, different answers were given. Whereas almost all of the institutions started issuing them between 2008 and 2012, one institution could not answer this question.

**Question 1.1** was if *the HEIs issue the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and to all students*. All of the selected institutions do so, except for the non-label holding institution in Germany. The latter do issue it free of charge, but only if requested by the student. This could already be an indication of the attitude of this university concerning the necessity of the Diploma Supplement and its support for the Bologna transparency tools.

In order to introduce the topic of DS labels, **Question 2** asked whether the respondents *knew about the DS label*. This question was only directed to the HEIs without the label. Both

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<sup>14</sup> See 'Questionnaire for policy-makers' in Appendix 3

<sup>15</sup> See 'Questionnaire for admission officers' in Appendix 3

institutions knew about the label, but the Dutch one admitted to just know it *'from screening a text about it'* (PN-2).

**Question 2.1** asked *since when the institutions were holding the label*. These periods of time also varied. The label-holding university in the UK was the first institution to get the label, namely in 2009. This university was also the only one which renewed the label in 2013, when it expired. The label-holding institution in the Netherlands was awarded the label from 2010-2013. After that, it has not been renewed, since the European Commission informed them that it will not be necessary, if they signed the Charter<sup>16</sup>. The label-holding institution in Germany received the label in 2014.

The last question to be dealt with in this section from the first interview is **Question 2.2:** *Why did your institution not apply for the label*. This question was only addressed to the HEIs in Germany and the Netherlands, which never were DS label holders. While the institution in the Netherlands could not prove that *'all the documents were absolutely without mistakes'* (PN-2), the one in Germany also stated to *'not meet all the requirements for it'* (PG-2), but also emphasized that this label was *'not something they felt the need to apply for'* (PG-2). Moreover, the Dutch institution declared that they were told by a Bologna expert *'that the label would not be continued, because (...) it is formalized by law now'* (PN-2). The German non-label holding HEI additionally stated that they put great emphasis on internationalization, but that *'they do not think to achieve that with the label'* (PG-2).

The other type of interview was held with two **admission officers**. In more detail, one admission officer from a Dutch label-holding institution and one from a German non-label holding institution. Since there were only answers from two admission officers from one institution with and one without the label, these answers are not very generalizable. Moreover, this study is of explorative nature and therefore reliability and validity are not as crucial as in other types of studies, since exploratory research is conducted whenever a new insight of a phenomenon is to be acquired or when data collection proves to be difficult. The answers of the two admission officers will be displayed and analysed in the following.

**Question 1** in this second interview was if the respondents *knew about the label* in general. Whereas the label-holding university from the Netherlands knew about the existence of the label, the German one had not heard about that label yet. Although the German institution stresses the importance of internationalization in their strategy, they also admit that more needs to be done in order to attract foreign students and that international student numbers are decreasing:

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<sup>16</sup> Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2014-2020:  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated\\_guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated_guidelines_en.pdf)

(...) *The number of foreign applicants is declining. There have been hardly any efforts to show the qualities of our institution on a worldwide basis (Internationalisation Strategy, G-2, 2011)*

**Question 2** asked if the respondents think that *issuing a Diploma Supplement would influence the incoming student mobility*. Here, the answers were different again. Whereas the respondent from the Dutch label-holding HEI stated that *'it helps'* (AN-1), because it is *'easy to make a decision on'* (AN-1) and very *'clear to read'* (AN-1), for the German respondent it was not possible to judge its impact. This may also lead to the assumption that the DS is neither issued nor used very frequently at this institution.

**Question 3**, *if incoming student mobility increased or decreased after receiving the DS label*, was only answered by the admission officer from the Netherlands. Although she stated that she *'was not sure'* (AN-1) about that, she could confirm that student numbers in general have gone up in recent years. Nevertheless, she also admitted that they *'do not get more international Master students'* (AN-1), which she reasoned to be a *'money issue'* (AN-1). Moreover, she again emphasized the importance of the DS and that she is sure that *'it helps'* (AN-1), also in terms of mobility.

#### **4.2 Motivations, benefits and use of the label**

This section of the analysis goes more into depth and asks the policy-makers for the underlying motivations for having a DS label, for the benefits the label-holding institutions see, why the non-label holding institutions did not feel the need to apply for the label and how the label is used by the institutions themselves and the students. It therefore deals with questions **3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9** from the questionnaire for policy-makers. The second interview deals with questions about visibility, benefits and goes more into detail when it comes to the role of the DS in the application process of students. This section covers questions **4, 5, 6, 7<sup>17</sup> and 8** from the questionnaire for admission officers.

**Question 3** of the interview with the **policy-makers** was *'What motivated your institution to apply for the label?'* Naturally, this question could have only been answered by the three label-holding institutions. Several differences as well as one commonality could be derived from the answers. The Dutch and German institutions both mentioned increased *'internationalisation'* (PG-1; PN-1) as being an important driver for the application and the British institution underlined the wish to *'engage more with the European Higher Education Area'* (PUK-1), which also implies internationalisation to a certain extent. Other motivations outlined by the Dutch label-holding university, were to improve *'transparency'* (PN-1) facilitate *'student mobility'* (PN-1) and *'helping the students wherever they can'* (PN-1). The German institution's motivation rather was on the institutional side. They primarily saw benefits for the reputation of the institution, since it was mentioned that they wanted to further *'expand the*

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<sup>17</sup> This question had to be skipped, due to a mistake on the researcher's side.

*international orientation of the institution*’ (PG-1) and wanted to ‘*stand out from other German HEIs*’ (PG-1). Therefore, drawing attention to and increasing the visibility of this institution were important drivers, as well as being able to compete with other HEIs in the European Higher Education Area. Next to the goal of increasing engagement with the EHEA, the British institution was also motivated to apply for the label in order to ‘*improve international recognition of academic and professional qualifications*’ (PUK-1) and provide the opportunity for outgoing mobility. This was especially emphasized in the internationalisation strategy of this HEI:

*A significant proposition of the Internationalisation Strategy, from the start, was that as many (...) students as possible should have the opportunity to spend time in another country/culture, as part of their education (Internationalisation Strategy, UK-1, 2012, p. 29)*

Therefore, for this question it can be concluded that having transparent and internationally recognized qualifications is perceived to equip students well for their future professional careers and provide them with international study and employment opportunities. Moreover, the institutions mentioned benefits of the label for their institutional strategies as well, which will arise in Question 5 again.

**Question 4** leads the questionnaire back to mobility and asks the respondents: *Do you think that the outgoing long-term student mobility increased or decreased after receiving the label?* The Dutch and German respondents again shared the same answer, by stating that they do not know if outgoing mobility increased or decreased after their institutions were awarded the label. However, they both made some further comments to this question. Whereas the Dutch interviewee could confirm that in general student flows have increased, but that it is difficult to monitor this information, the German interviewee did not think that the DS label influenced outgoing student mobility and further admitted that the institution failed to advertise the label thoroughly due to staff shortage at that time. As opposed to these two HEIs, the British one stated that it has increased after receiving the label, but unfortunately did not add more detailed information.

It is therefore not clear, if the label has a direct influence on outgoing student mobility and it seems to depend on how the label is used.

**Question 5** is closely linked to the previous question and asks about the *use of the label by the institution*. Here again, a high level of conformity could be found. A main accordance concerning the use of the label was that it is published on the institutions’ websites. All of the three institutions agreed to use them for marketing reasons and to thereby increase the institutions’ reputation. Whereas the Dutch and German policy-makers stated to publish the label on their website, the British institution also mentioned the label in its institutional strategy plan. Moreover, the Dutch and British institutions use the label for reasons of transparency and the German respondent admitted that the ‘*label is not communicated and used enough*’ (PG-1). Also,

the British institution was the only one, who clearly said they were using the label in order to *'aid with mobility'* (PUK-1) and provide *'access to study and work'* (PUK-1).

**Question 6** adds to question 5 by asking *how students use the label*. This proved to be a difficult question for the institutions, since only the British HEI had an answer to that. According to them, the students use the label in order to *'demonstrate their academic experience'* (PUK-1). The other two institutions claimed to not know how students use it, while the German HEI further thought they do not use it at all, since they never heard a student asking about it.

**Question 7** asked for the *main benefits of having the DS label*. Again, there was a high level of conformity among the three label-holding institutions. All of them stated that *'they like to show that they have the label'* (PG-1; PN-1; PUK-1) and that having the label increases the institution's visibility by *'being shown on websites and in brochures'* (PG-1; PN-1; PUK-1). While these statements made by the Dutch and German label-holding institutions were rather explicit, the British institution had a more implicit answer. They underlined the role of the DS as a *'recognized quality standard'* (PUK-1), thereby implying that it serves the institution's reputation, as well as draws attention to it and increases its visibility. Furthermore, the Dutch and German institutions both agreed on increased competition being another factor of having the label. Whereas the Dutch university explicitly said that *'they like to compete with other institutions Europe-wide'* (PN-1), the German institution rather implicitly indicated this by underlining the exemplary function the institution shows by being one of only two institutions in Germany that was awarded the label. This process of ranking institutions in terms of different factors like reputation, output of research or costs is called institutional profiling. As competition is not necessarily a benefit, it could be a positive as well as a negative factor. Competition usually strives for leadership, therefore when related to the educational sector it could mean obtaining leadership in complying with the goals set out in the Bologna Declaration, hence showing that internationalization and transparency matter and that they are able to compete with other HEIs on the European level. In addition, the policy-maker from the Dutch institution mentioned intra-institutional benefits of the label. She sees the label as a convincing tool to show colleagues *'the importance of transparency and taking time to formulate clear learning outcomes'* (PN-1). Therefore, the label serves not only representative purposes, but also institutional ones.

Concluding, increased visibility, attention and competition in terms of being a respected player in the EHEA, are arguably the main benefits for the institutions.

**Question 9** was only addressed to the respondents of the non-label holding institutions. Since they did not apply for the label, it was asked *whether they would advise their president to apply for the label* in the future. Here, the answers turned out to be completely different. The Dutch institution said they would do so, *'if it is still important'* (PN-2). As mentioned in the previous section, this institution was told that the *'label would not be continued'* (PN-2) as issuing a DS is *'formalized by law now'* (PN-2). Thus, this implies that they would be willing to

apply for it, but that according to their information, it is not necessary anymore. This position is not shared with the German institution, as they do not consider the label important for their internationalization agenda. Moreover, it is admitted that advising the president to request the label is *'not the first thing'* (PG-2), which would be suggested and that it would rather mean an additional effort for them. Additionally, it is explained that providing the graduating students with diplomas in German and English is more important to the institution than using the Diploma Supplement.

Moving to the answers given for **questions 4-8** of the questionnaire for **admission officers**, they broadly cover the same topics as the questions of the questionnaire for policy-makers, but add some questions about the application process.

**Question 4** asks *if the respondents think that having the label increases the institution's visibility*. Due to the fact that the German admission officer interviewed was from the HEI without the label, this question was only for the respondent from the Dutch institution with the label. Although admitting that she does not *'know how a student brain works'* (AN-1) and how students search for institutions, she could imagine that a label is something that is helping and that is crucial for *'clarity and the attractiveness of the institution'* (AN-1).

**Question 5**, dealing with the *main benefits of having the label*, again could only be answered by the respective Dutch admission officer. The given answer is well in line with her colleague from the same institution confirming the attitude that *'the label is good for the reputation of the institution'* (AN-1). Although there is only one answer to this question, congruence can at least be detected internally within this institution.

**Question 6** directs the questionnaire to the application process by asking: *Do Diploma Supplements facilitate the application process?* Since this question is no longer about DS labels, both interviewees were able to answer it. Here, both respondents agreed that they do simplify the application process. The Dutch admission officer stated that the DS *'makes it so much easier'* (AN-1) and as an example she mentioned that the grade average is already calculated and that a DS is *'much harder to reproduce'* (AN-1), thereby decreasing the chance of having faked diplomas. The German admission officer added that *'useful things can be found in the DS'* (AG-2).

Therefore, its role as transparency tool can be confirmed by these two interviewees.

**Question 8** asked *if applicants who have a DS have higher chances of getting accepted to the HEI*. The answers provided by the respondents are quite similar. They both denied his question and stated that having a DS or not *'does not influence the decision'* (AN-1; AG-2).

Thus, the Diploma Supplement most certainly facilitates the application process as it contains important information for the admission officers and it does not affect the decision of admission to the HEI.

### 4.3 Diploma Supplement as part of the institution's strategy

This third section deals with the Diploma Supplement as part of the institutions' strategies and about future plans concerning the renewal of the DS label. Consequently, this section covers **questions 8, 8.1, 8.2 and 10** from the questionnaire for policy-makers.

**Question 8**, *if the institutions want to renew the label after the period has expired*, yielded a high degree of conformity. All of the three respondents affirmed that they would like to renew the label once it expired. Nonetheless, not without any strings attached. While the Dutch label-holding institution explained that there most likely is no need to renew it, since it is supposed to be '*incorporated in the Charter*'<sup>18</sup> (PN-1), the German HEI stated they would only renew it if the procedure is not as complex as the application procedure. Meanwhile, the British institution indicated that they have already renewed it in 2013.

**Question 8.1** is a sub-question of question 8 and asked for the reasons *why they would like to renew the label*. Here, the answers of the label-holding institutions varied. Whereas the Dutch respondent particularly emphasized the '*institutional benefits*' (PN-1) of the label, the British institution grounded this decision by highlighting the DS' role as a '*recognized quality standard*' (PUK-1) and the German respondent again would only renew it, '*if it is fairly easy to renew*' (PG-1), therefore not providing a proper answer to the question.

Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the label-holding institutions are regarded as having rather positive attitudes towards the renewal of the label, whereas one institution is rather hesitant.

**Question 10** generated fairly comprehensive answers. Here, the interviewer wanted to know *what strategies or instruments are used by the higher education institutions in order to attract foreign students and to increase internationalization*. Many different answers were given, but this question also yielded a high level of conformity. The first commonality mentioned by three out of five respondents, was the intention to focus more on *student exchange*. The institutions stressed that they have large networks of partner universities and that they promote student exchanges through the international offices. This strategy was mentioned by the two Dutch institutions and the label-holding German institution. Moreover, the label-holding Dutch university added that they also regularly participate in student exchange fairs.

The second commonality, which was mentioned by four out of the five institutions, was formalising an *internationalisation strategy*. This strategy entails the internationalisation goals the HEIs have and is seen by them as one strategy to increase internationalisation and attract foreign students. In more detail, this strategy explains how the institution wants to increase internationalisation, what already has been achieved in this area and what needs to be further

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<sup>18</sup> Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2014-2020:  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated\\_guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated_guidelines_en.pdf)

improved and targeted in the future. Two of the five institutions further elaborated on this by stating that one instrument is to *'stimulate international mobility by increasing the amount of international programmes'* (PN-2) and further explained *'that it is very important to attract international students'* (PG-2).

By formalizing an internationalisation strategy, the HEIs show that this is high on their agenda and that they have made this a top priority. Moreover, the researcher interprets this as increasing the institution's visibility within the higher education institution.

The third commonality found for this question was offering *English-taught programmes*. This was said by three of the five HEIs. The Dutch HEI without the label highlighted that they have a *'website only for English studies'* (PN-2) and the German label-holding institution added that they also have other educational programmes to help foreign students during their time at this institution. The last commonality found among the two German institutions, were *services* designed to support international students as best as possible. These services included helping with visa applications, finding accommodation and providing extra courses and workshops. Nevertheless, when asking if these services were offered to short as well as long-term international students, it was admitted that these services were mainly offered only to short-term exchange students.

Besides these commonalities, some other interesting points were raised by the HEIs in terms of strategies. The Dutch label-holding institution in particular highlighted its online communication and marketing. In order *'to get an idea what is going on in the student community'* (PN-1) and to ensure that they *'can provide the best possible support'* (PN-1) they make a lot of use of Facebook, Twitter and their own website. The Dutch non-label holding institution again underlined its international focus by listing activities such as *'international weeks for students, minors and internships'* (PN-2) as well as emphasizing the development of *'intercultural skills, mobility of staff and students'* (PN-2) and their institutional aim of being *'Bologna-proof'* (PN-2) in terms of issuing the Diploma Supplement and complying with European standards. The German label-holding HEI explained that they have a Graduate Centre for Master students, where 90% of the student body is international and the working language is English. The other German institution noted their international programme, which is designed to support students socially as well as academically to speed up the integration process and help them being successful students. Because of this programme the institution was awarded *'International Higher Education Institution 2012'* by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in 2012.

#### **4.4 Future recommendations and opinions**

The fourth and last section of the analysis covers questions about the interviewees' opinions about future developments and about the role of the Diploma Supplement in terms of mobility and the European Higher Education Area. Hence, in this section it is dealt with



**questions 11, 11.1 and 12** from the questionnaire for policy-makers and **questions 9, 10, 11 and 12** from the questionnaire for admission officers. Again, the answers from the policy-makers will be analysed first, followed by the answers from the admission officers.

**Question 11** of the interview with the policy-makers asked the respondents for their *opinion what they think needs to be changed or improved in the future in order to increase outgoing student mobility at the national level*. Here, three commonalities were found among the given answers. The first commonality as mentioned by two label-holding institutions, were high *outgoing student numbers*. In more detail, the Dutch label-holding institution said that *'outgoing numbers were immensely rising'* (PN-1), but she could not think of any improvements. The German label-holding institution also confirmed that *'outgoing numbers were very high'* (PG-1) at their institution. The second commonality was *intercultural competences* or *intercultural preparation*. This was mentioned by the label-holding institutions in Germany and the UK. Whereas the German institution again stated this only institution-wide, the British institution emphasized the *'increased support of the development of intercultural competences'* (PUK-1) on the national level. The third commonality was related to participation of students in mobility programmes. Here, the Dutch institution without the label said that *'students have to have the ambition to go abroad'* (PN-2) and the British HEI also stressed *'widening participation'* (PUK-1) of outgoing mobility. Other answers to this question included the promotion of *'language learning'* while staying abroad, increased *'credit recognition'* and a *'more active attitude of teachers'*. Furthermore, it was admitted that it is difficult to say for the policy-makers what could be done, since their expertise focusses rather on internal institutional structures.

**Question 11.1** is directly linked to the previous question and goes more into detail, by asking if there is also a *role for the Diploma Supplement in terms of increasing outgoing student mobility*. This question was only answered by three institutions. While the Dutch and the British label-holding institutions do see a role for the DS, since *'it gives a lot of information'* (PN-1; PUK-1) the Dutch institution without the label does not consider it very important in this process.

**Question 12** deals with the *importance of the Diploma Supplement in the creation of the European Higher Education Area*. This question was answered by four out of the five HEIs and they all agreed that they are important. Moreover, the British HEI and the Dutch institution without the label also stated why the Diploma Supplement is important for the EHEA. They both confirmed that the DS *'facilitates and stimulates mobility'* (PUK-1; PN-2), thereby acknowledging that the DS is fulfilling its overall aim of enhancing mobility. The only additional comment which was raised by the Dutch label-holding institution was that if the HE systems were as similar as possible in the EHEA, she would not see the need for the DS anymore. However, she cannot imagine this happening soon and therefore considers the DS as very important at this point in time.

Moving to the questionnaire for **admission officers**, the last four questions also dealt with the influence of the DS in the Bologna Process and future recommendations concerning incoming student mobility on different levels.

**Question 9** asked *if the respondents think that the DS has been more important in the beginning of the Bologna Process*. While the Dutch admission officer stated that she thinks it gets more important since *‘institutions need time to implement it’* (AN-1) and it is quite a lot of work, too, the German admission officer could not estimate its impact.

**Question 10** wanted to know *what needs to be improved or changed in the future in order to increase incoming student mobility at the institutional level*. Here again, the German respondent said he could not estimate this. The Dutch respondent would appreciate a *‘common format for the DS from the EU’* (AN-1). This common format already exists and is a condition for receiving the label. Therefore, this may lead to the conclusion that more training of the responsible staff is needed. Furthermore, she thinks *‘offering more scholarships’* (AN-1) and *‘enhancing housing possibilities’* (AN-1) are important in order to increase incoming student mobility at the institutional level.

**Question 11** was almost identical to the previous question, only different in terms of the level. Here, it was asked for *improvements or changes in the future in order to increase incoming student mobility at the national level*. The Dutch admission officer emphasized the importance of *‘changing the location’s reputation’* (AN-1) in order to attract more foreign as well as national students. She mentions popularity as an important factor for the attraction of students. On the national basis, she could imagine that tuition fees might be a hindrance for international students as well as the *‘bluntness of the Dutch people’* (AN-1). The German respondent again stated that he could not estimate this.

**Question 12** was the last question of the interview with the admission officers and asked *whether it would be helpful if also countries that are not participating in the Bologna Process would be issuing the DS*. Here, both respondents agreed that it would be helpful. The Dutch admission officer again emphasized the benefits of the DS, that it *‘is so much easier to read and understand the grading system’* (AN-1).

#### **4.5 Answers to the research questions**

As can be seen in this chapter, there are a lot of commonalities in the answers, but also differences. Every institution mentioned at least once the importance of internationalization and student mobility also played a role for most of the respondents. Regarding the Diploma Supplement, every institution confirmed that they issue it and except for one institution, every student receives it automatically and free of charge. The DS label is also widely known, but its importance is in some cases not considered very high. Moreover, information about the label seems not to be the same everywhere and it is perceived that students neither know nor use it. Eventually, after analysing the interviews, the DS label does not seem to influence student

mobility very much and it becomes evident that a lot of other factors are at stake when it comes to the increasing mobility of students.

Regarding the research questions as presented in Chapter 1.2, the main research question, as well as sub-questions 1.1 and 1.2 can already be answered now. The main question **‘Do Higher Education Institutions in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom that have a Diploma Supplement label show higher levels of student mobility than Higher Education Institutions without a Diploma Supplement label?’** has to be answered with a tentative ‘no’, meaning that having a DS label does not, whereas issuing the Diploma Supplement does seem to influence the level of student mobility at the higher education institutions.

As could be derived from the analysis, promoting student mobility is only one of the goals of the DS for the HEIs, but not the one most frequently mentioned. Other factors such as increasing transparency, internationalisation and being able to compete on the European level, constitute more important drivers for the HEIs to implement the DS fully and request the label. Moreover, long-term degree mobility does not seem to be very high on the internationalisation agendas of the HEIs. Rather, student exchanges on a short-term basis are highlighted by the representatives of the institutions, as well as offering English-taught programmes and providing various services to international exchange students. As already mentioned in the first section of this chapter, most of the policy-makers (four out of five) were Erasmus coordinators, therefore very familiar with short-term mobility. This could be one reason why emphasis is rather put on short-term than on long-term mobility.

Regarding the Diploma Supplement itself, it becomes evident that it is a highly valued tool for most of the institutions under investigation, which is confirmed by asking if the DS plays a role in the creation of the EHEA. Here, all the HEIs consider it very important for the EHEA, especially in terms of aiding mobility. Moreover, the DS is regarded as an important tool in the application process of new students, since it makes it easier to read foreign diplomas and to understand grading systems. Therefore, the DS has developed into a successful tool in order to make qualifications more transparent and easy readable as well as comparable. This is also reinforced by statistics provided by the German’s Rectors’ Conference, which displayed a steady increase of DS implementation and use by HEIs in Germany during the years (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, 2011)<sup>19</sup>. In conclusion, it can be stated that the Diploma Supplement is considered to help in terms of mobility.

Nevertheless, this does not prove that the Diploma Supplement label directly influences student mobility. In more detail, it is not very probable that this label has an impact on student mobility at all. This can be seen by a number of answers gained from the interviews.

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<sup>19</sup> PDF available at: <http://www.hrk-nexus.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk-nexus/07-Downloads/07-02-Publikationen/07-02-Publikationen-Diploma-Supplement-2011.pdf>

First of all, most of the HEIs could not estimate the impact of the DS label on outgoing mobility or indicated that they think that it did not affect it, whereas only one institution said outgoing mobility has increased after receiving the label. The answers to question 5a underline the presumption that the label does not have a direct influence on student mobility, as they express that the label is mainly used to be published on the website and to increase transparency. Only one institution mentioned mobility as being one area where the label is used. This also implies that the label is rather used for marketing purposes, in order to increase the institution's reputation and visibility, than to aid students with mobility.

Secondly, when asked how the students use the label, the respondents also mainly did not know how students use it or if they even know about the label. This also reveals a lack of awareness and communication of the label between the institutions and their students.

Thirdly, the importance of the label seems to be decreasing. This can be seen by the number of institutions applying for the label. Whereas in 2012, there still were ten label-holders in the Netherlands and two in Germany, in 2015, there are only three HEIs with the label in the Netherlands and one in Germany (European Commission, 2015). However, decreasing importance cannot be confirmed for sure, since the two Dutch institutions said they received the information that the implementation and use of the Diploma Supplement is now integrated into the national legislation and therefore the need for the label is not there anymore, if every institution is issuing the DS accordingly.

Lastly, it has to be kept in mind that whether students move to another country in order to study depends on many factors, as could be seen in Chapter 2 of this thesis. These pull-factors include the reputation of the institution and the country of choice, as well as living costs, tuition fees and the official language of the country and of instruction. Moreover, the contents of the study programmes and career prospects attract students, not to mention social ties such as family and friends. In light of the DS label, this could also constitute a pull-factor. Nevertheless, there is no proof for that and the respondents do not even think that the students know about it.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Diploma Supplement label is seen as only a minor contributor to student mobility.

The first sub-question was the following: **Which HEIs have a DS label in the three selected countries?** This question can be also already answered in this chapter. Several similarities in the institutional characteristics could be found.

First of all, all of the label-holding institutions emphasize the importance of internationalisation at their institution. This also becomes evident, since every label-holding institution has an internationalisation strategy, which is re-evaluated and reformulated every couple of years. Nevertheless, internationalisation was also stressed by the institutions without the label and they also have implemented an internationalisation strategy. Therefore, having an internationalisation strategy or simply highlighting the importance of internationalisation cannot

be considered a determining feature of a label-holding higher education institution only. Yet, when asking more specifically about the label, differences become apparent. To Question 2.2, *why the institution did not apply for the label*, the Dutch institution without the label answered that they *'would not have met all the requirements for receiving the label'*. This could also imply that the DS label does not seem to be of high importance to this institution, as they did not seem to be willing to translate their course descriptions also into English, which was the missing requirement for the label. The German institution made this even clearer, as it was stated that they *'did not see the need for the label'* and that since they issue the DS only on request by the students, they would have not fulfilled the requirements for it either. Nonetheless, while asking if they would advise their president to request the label, the Dutch respondent said *'yes, if the label is still important'*. This underlines that they would be rather more willing to request the label than their German colleagues, since they answered this question with: *'no, it would not be the first thing'*. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that this could also mean that the HEIs did not consider it important to translate the course descriptions, because of the simple reason that these courses were only offered in the official language of the respective country and not for the reason that the DS label was not considered important.

Concluding, higher education institutions which have the label and institutions which do not have the label are not necessarily very different from each other. They all stressed the importance of internationalisation, English-taught programmes and especially mobility in terms of student exchange, but they differ in their opinions regarding the importance of the label. Moreover, the label-holding institutions mainly applied for the label in order to increase their visibility and improve their reputation, as well as enhancing competitiveness with other European institutions. Therefore, it was rather seen as an institutional benefit. Finally, it has to be mentioned, that the Dutch non-label holding institution seemed to be more in favour of the label as the German HEI without the label.

The second sub-question, **how mobile the students in the different HEIs are**, can only be cautiously answered. Due to the fact that institutions mostly only keep a record of incoming and outgoing short-term mobility and they often do not know where the graduate students go or what they are doing after their graduation from the institution, it is quite difficult to answer this question. However, several comments and assumptions were made by the interviewees, which can provide insight into student flows at the institutions.

The respondent from the Dutch label-holding institution stated that, in the Netherlands, the *'outgoing student numbers are immensely rising'* and that also the number of students for *'credit mobility are going up'*. These statements lead to the assumption that, at least in the Netherlands, student mobility increases. Nonetheless, this assumption should be treated carefully, since the same respondent also admitted that monitoring of the data about degree mobility is not in place yet and that it is therefore difficult to make inferences about that.

An indicator, of the level of mobility at the different HEIs, could be the number of international students. Although these numbers only included incoming students and although mobility is not identical with internationalisation, but is rather a feature of it (see section 1.4.1), they could provide an insight into student mobility in general and tell us more about the institution itself. As already stated in section 3.1, the label-holding HEIs in the Netherlands and the UK have the highest numbers of international students. Here, both label-holding institutions have a share of more than 20% international students (N-1; UK-1) and the non-label institutions both have around 10% international students (N-2; UK-2). The label-holding HEI in Germany, has a share of around 16% (G-1) and the non-label holding HEI has 11% international students (G-2). These numbers could lead to the conclusion that there is a connection between having the label and student mobility, since the numbers of the label-holding HEIs in the Netherlands and the UK are almost 100% higher and the number of the institution with the label in Germany is about 50% higher, than those of the institutions without the label.

In addition, having high outgoing student numbers and supporting outgoing mobility was named as being important by three out of the five institutions. This implies the notion that promoting outgoing mobility is of increasing importance to the institutions. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that this mainly relates to outgoing short-term mobility and that monitoring of outgoing degree mobility is difficult and not in place yet, therefore this question cannot be surely answered.

## **5. Conclusion**

The main objective of this thesis was to find out to what extent the Diploma Supplement label has an impact on student mobility. This also implied to elucidate if the Diploma Supplement serves its role as one of the Bologna transparency tools, by making qualifications more transparent and facilitating the application process and student mobility. By means of interviews with policy-makers and admission officers from higher education institutions with and without the label in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the research questions could be answered and final conclusions could be drawn.

### **5.1 Discussion of the findings in light of the theory**

Europeanisation was the first concept addressed in Chapter 2. Radaelli (2004) defined Europeanisation as *'processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, identities, political structures and public policies'* (p. 30). When applied to this study, the concept of Europeanisation can be easily transferred to the topic of this thesis. The Diploma Supplement was appropriated by the Bologna Process, which was an intergovernmental commitment signed by the 47 participating Bologna countries and several European organizations, designed to restructure the European higher education system and ultimately leading to the creation of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 (Keeling, 2006). Although intergovernmental and decentralized in nature, its implementation is closely monitored by means of reports, regularly held meetings and policy declarations (Keeling, 2006). How does this transfer to the research questions of this thesis now? In particular, the 'institutionalisation of procedures and rules' (Radaelli, 2004) can be observed here, since structural changes such as the three-cycle structure and most importantly for this study, also the adoption of the Diploma Supplement, were institutionalized. In more detail, by issuing the DS accordingly and applying for the label, the institutions show that they comply with the rules of the Bologna Process. The Europeanisation of higher education policies can also be confirmed by Börzel (1999), who stated that national policy areas become increasingly subjected to policy-making on the European level.

Regarding the mechanisms and outcomes related to Europeanisation, these can also be found for this topic. One of them was the vertical mechanism. This mechanism applies when adaptational pressure to EU policies is high. Therefore, this could be the mechanism at work when it comes to the implementation of the DS. The higher education institutions in the participating countries are advised by the Bologna Declaration to implement the DS. By close monitoring through different bodies such as the Bologna Follow-Up Group or national bodies such as the Rector's Conference in Germany, the adaptational pressure is increased. Concerning the DS label, the horizontal mechanism could be observed. This mechanism is the opposite of the vertical mechanism, as it presents low adaptational pressure and views Europeanisation as a

process. This logic can be applied to the DS label, as conformity is low and it is rather seen as an additional benefit than a necessity for the HEIs. However, this is only one theory and difficult to prove, since it was not explicitly asked in the questionnaire. Concerning the outcomes of Europeanisation, Börzel and Risse (2003) defined three ‘degrees of domestic change’: Absorption, transformation and accommodation. Since accommodation is the process where states adapt existing policies without changing their fundamental characteristics and understandings, instead of completely changing their key features, this can be considered the suitable outcome of Europeanisation for the implementation of the Diploma Supplement. Through adaptational pressure created by the EU, the participating countries and other bodies, the institutions implemented the Diploma Supplement without changing fundamental institutional structures.

The different kinds of mobility as defined in Chapter 2.2 were used throughout the entire thesis. As it became apparent, the interviewees were rather experts for short-term mobility and in general, there was more data and knowledge about this type of mobility available, as it is usually harder for the institutions to monitor outgoing degree mobility. Nevertheless, this thesis focused on degree mobility, since the Diploma Supplement is only issued with the diploma and therefore, data about short-term mobility was not relevant. The only assumption that can be made about the relationship of these two types of mobility is that students may be more motivated to pursue further studies abroad when they previously have been abroad for a student exchange.

Push and pull-factors were also mentioned in Chapter 2 as being another concept for this study. In general, these factors try to explain what motivates, what *pushes* an individual to a certain decision and what attracts, what *pulls* a person to a certain destination, job or the like (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). As also stated in the theoretical framework, section 2.3, there are several pull-factors related to the choice of a particular study destination. These can also be found in the answers of the interviews. Here, increasing the institution’s reputation, visibility and improved competitiveness are the main motivations and benefits attached to the label. Closely connected to that, good marketing and communication strategies help attracting foreign students, as available knowledge and transparency by the institutions is also crucial in this process.

Although some of the respondents mentioned to ‘*not know how a student brain works and how they search for institutions*’, they seem to be on the same track when it comes to attracting international students, since they all emphasize the importance of transparency, internationalisation and being able to compete on the European level. Nevertheless, since not only reputation and knowledge about a study destination attract students, studying in a different country also has to be affordable. Therefore, costs constitute a decisive factor as well. For Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), cost issues include tuition fees, cost of living, travel and social costs, which imply the level of crime, safety and racial discrimination, as well as the number of students from the student’s home country and the possibility of working part-time. Relating these cost issues to the interview data, it becomes obvious that more could be done to enhance access to higher education institutions for students. Since there are no tuition fees in Germany anymore,



costs do not seem to be an issue here. However, in the Netherlands this could be an issue, as there are tuition fees and as living costs are also higher here. The admission officer from the Dutch label-holding institution also highlighted this and stated that more scholarships and housing have to be made available in order to attract more international students. In the UK, this is assumed to be similar as tuition fees are much higher than in the Netherlands.

Coming back to the Diploma Supplement and the label as possible push and pull-factors, there is to say that in this, albeit limited, study no evidence could be found which confirms that having the label and issuing the Diploma Supplement attracts foreign students or promotes outgoing mobility. Moreover, the number of English-taught programmes and the possibility of student exchange and internships during the study programme could constitute possible pull-factors.

## 5.2 Recommendations

After the findings have been brought into context with the relevant theories and concepts, the third sub-question, **which recommendations can be derived from the conclusions for the different stakeholders?**, can now be answered.

First, it becomes clear that the Diploma Supplement as well as the label have not been communicated enough to the students. By taking a look at the answers from the interviews, knowledge about the DS and the label seem to not have left the internal walls of the institutions. While asking about the use of the label by the students, the respondents either stated that they do not know or they assumed that the students do not even know about the existence of the DS until they graduate. Moreover, the German label-holding institution admitted that they could have done more to communicate the label, but that this simply was an issue of staff shortage. Therefore, it is recommended to increase communication and promotion of the DS and the label, in order to show the benefits and use of these tools to the students. This could be done in form of an information mail or by advertising it more clearly on the website.

Secondly, some of the HEIs interviewed for this study seemed to be confused about the continuation of the label. Here, national differences were visible. Both of the Dutch HEIs shared the information that the label will no longer be continued or that it will not be necessary to apply for the label again, since it is *'formalized by law now'* (PN-1; PN-2) to issue the DS automatically, free of charge and in a major European language. The Dutch label-holding institution further gave the information that the label will be incorporated in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education<sup>20</sup> and therefore it would not be necessary to apply for it again if the institution undersigned the Charter. The German and British institutions did not seem to have this information, as the British institution renewed the label recently and the German HEI only first received it in 2014. To sum up, communication of the continuation of the label seems to be confusing and could be improved. In order to achieve that, joint action of the various

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<sup>20</sup> Available at: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated\\_guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated_guidelines_en.pdf)

stakeholders, such as the participating countries, the national bodies, the respective Bologna experts and the higher education institutions themselves, is needed.

Thirdly, it became apparent that the Diploma Supplement as one of the Bologna transparency tools is highly appreciated by the policy-makers and in particular by the admission officers. The admission officers confirmed that they facilitate the application process and the policy-makers agreed on increased internationalisation and visibility. Furthermore, as could be seen by different sources of data, such as the Bologna Process Implementation Reports, the implementation and use of it has steadily increased during the years. This is a very remarkable achievement and should be further promoted. As previously mentioned, the benefits of the Diploma Supplement are basically only known by the institutions. Although time-consuming for the administration, it seems to be of great use for the admission offices, as they facilitate the application process immensely. Since the DS label is supposed to facilitate mobility and make qualifications easier readable as well as comparable, it is essential to inform the students about these benefits. Therefore, raising awareness and increasing information about the existence and use of the Diploma Supplement and the label, is the most important recommendation drawn from the findings.

Fourthly, the HEIs have to ensure they provide a welcoming and supportive environment for their students in order to increase incoming student mobility and internationalisation. They have to show that they are open for people from all around the world and from all different cultures, which could be achieved by providing intercultural training and preparation. The Dutch label- holding institution is already on the way, since they require their staff to take an English test in order to be able to communicate better with international students. Only if the students feel welcome and at home, they will spread the word, the institution's reputation will be improved and internationalisation promoted. By issuing the DS to their students, they will make sure to prepare their graduates well for future study and work opportunities, since qualifications obtained at their institution are made transparent and thereby visible.

Finally, as mentioned before (section 1.4.1), funding constitutes one of the biggest obstacles to mobility for students, which was proved by the latest Bologna Process Implementation Report (2015). This was also mentioned by the Dutch admission officer, who stated that more scholarships should be offered in order to increase incoming student mobility. Therefore, increased financial support by the countries and HEIs is needed and highly recommended.

### **5.3 Discussion and future research**

In conclusion, the research does not show that the Diploma Supplement label directly influences student mobility. Higher education institutions which have the label do not show higher levels of student mobility than higher education institutions which do not have the label in

Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. However, the Diploma Supplement does show a more direct link to student mobility, as it is said to facilitate and stimulate mobility.

Holding the label, nevertheless, is perceived as having benefits for the institutions, which include increased visibility, an improved reputation and enhanced abilities for competition with other HEIs. Also, internationalisation is of high importance to the institutions, as it was mentioned by all of the respondents several times and emphasized in their internationalisation strategies.

In the future, internationalisation can be expected to become even more important for the institutions, as well as an increased use of the Diploma Supplement. However, the institutions have to promote mobility more effectively and monitor it more closely. Additionally, awareness about the Diploma Supplement and the label has to be increased among the students in order to be able to contribute more to outgoing degree mobility.

All in all, this study can only provide a very limited view on this topic and cannot be generalized for all HEIs in the European Higher Education Area. In order to increase external validity, more research is needed in the future. Notably, more interviews with participating countries, HEIs and students should be conducted. Additionally, as the last question of the interview with the admission officers showed, it would be helpful if also countries outside of the EHEA provided a DS to their students.

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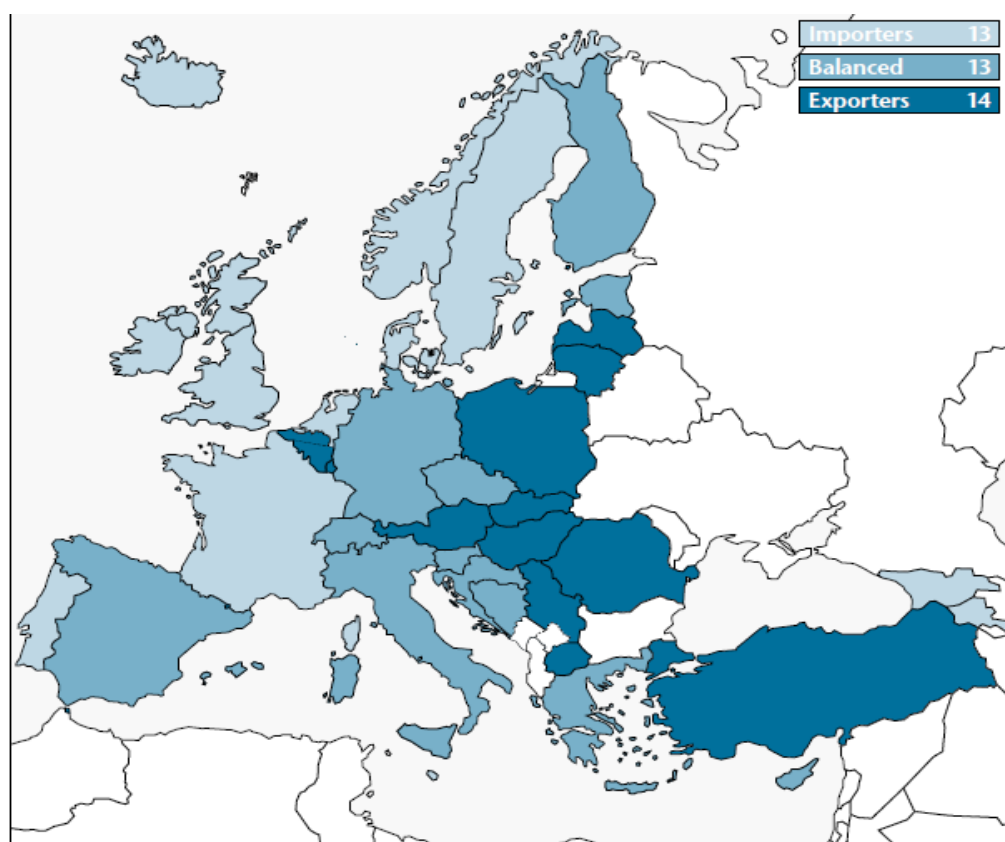
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## Appendices

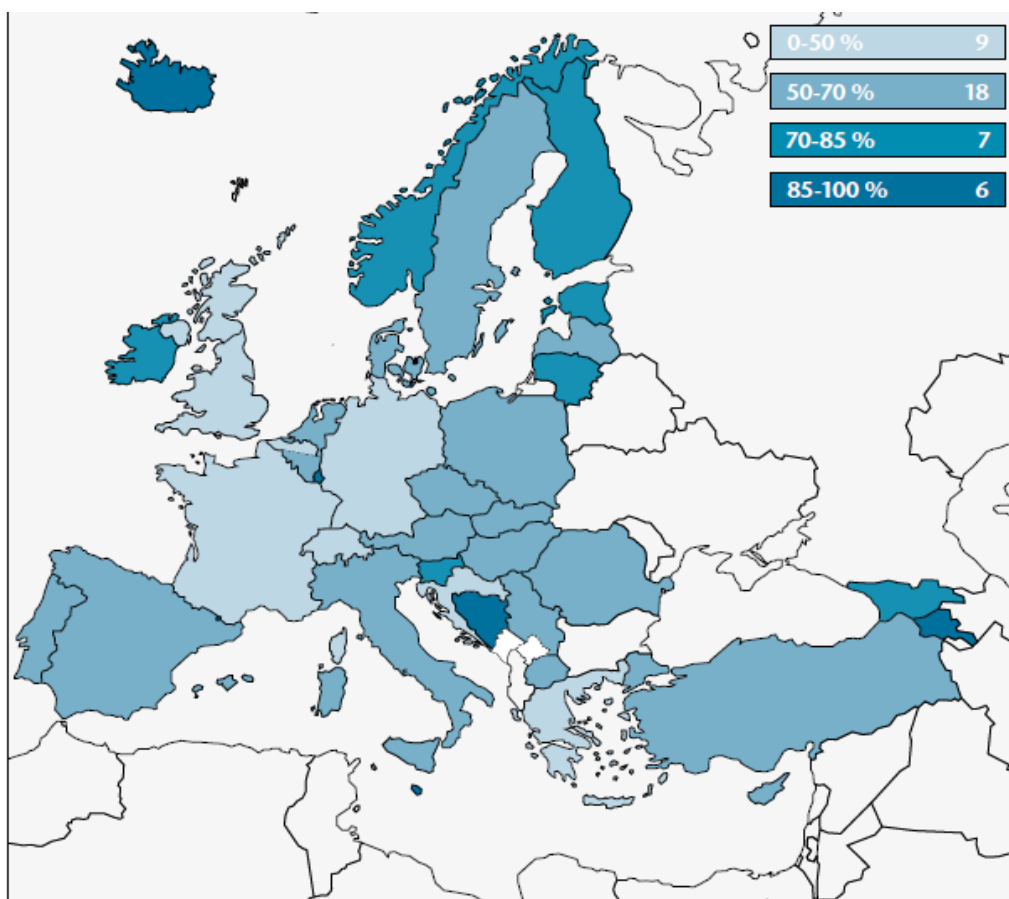
### Appendix 1: Background information

**Map 1.1: Student flows in the EHEA**



Source: 'Trends 2010 – A decade of change in European Higher Education (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 78).

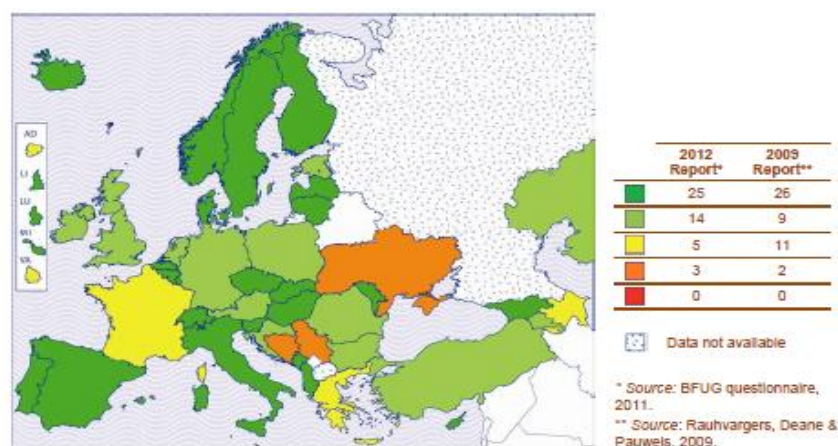
**Map 1.2: Satisfaction of HEIs with the realisation of the EHEA**



Source: 'Trends 2010 – A decade of change in European Higher Education (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 30).



## Map 1.4: Stages of Diploma Supplement implementation 2010/11



### Scorecard categories

- Every graduate receives a Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language
  - automatically
  - free of charge
- Every graduate who requests it receives a Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language
  - free of charge
- A Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language is issued to some graduates OR in some programmes free of charge
- A Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language is issued to some graduates OR in some programmes for a fee
- Systematic issuing of Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and in a widely spoken European language has not yet started

Note: Indicator measures the implementation of the Diploma Supplement against four criteria:

- 1) Diploma Supplement should be issued to every graduate
- 2) Diploma Supplement should be issued automatically,
- 3) Diploma Supplement should be issued in a widely spoken European language;
- 4) Diploma Supplement should be issued free of charge.

Source: Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2012, p. 53.

## Appendix 2: Overview of the results

**Table 4.1: Overview of the results of section 1**

Questions/ HEIs	Position at the HEI	Q.1a	Q.1.1a	Q.2a	Q.2.1a	Q.2.2a	Q.1b	Q.2b	Q.3b
<b>Dutch label</b>	Internationalisation Erasmus Coordinator	2011	yes	2010- 2013	-	-	-	-Yes it helps -Clear to read	Not sure
<b>German label</b>	International Office Erasmus Coordinator	Do not know	yes	2014	-	-	-	-	-
<b>German No label</b>	International Office Erasmus	2010	No, on request but free	-	yes	Not all requirements met	no	Difficult to say	-

	Coordinator					No need			
British label	International Development Partnership officer	2008	yes	2009	-	-	-	-	-
Dutch No label	Policy-officer for quality assurance	2012	yes	-	Yes, a little	Not all requirements met Formalized by law	yes	-	-
Commonalities	International affairs Exchange coordinators	-	yes	-	yes	Missing requirements	-	-	-

**Table 4.2: Overview of the results of section 2**

Questions/ HEIs	Q.3a	Q.4a	Q.5a	Q.6a	Q.7a	Q.9a	Q.4b	Q.5b	Q.6b	Q.7 b	Q.8 b
Dutch label	Internationalisation Transparency Mobility Helping students	Do not know	Publish on website Transparency	Do not know	Visibility/ Attention Competition Internal institutional benefits	-	Yes Important for clarity and attractiveness of institution	Good For Reputation	Yes Makes It easier Harder to reproduce	-	no
German label	Internationalisation Attention/visibility competition	Do not know	Publish on website Used too little	Do not know	Visibility/ Attention Competition Internationalisation	-	-	-	-	-	-
German No label	-	-	-	-	-	Not the first thing	-	-	Yes Useful things can be found in DS	no	no
British Label	Engagement with EHEA Improved recognition of	increased	Transparency Mobility Access to study and	To demonstrate academic experience	DS as recognized quality standard (-> attention/visibility)	-	-	-	-	-	-

	qualifications		work								
<b>Dutch No label</b>	-	-	-	-	-	Yes, if still important	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Commonalities</b>	Internationalisation	unknown	Publish on website Transparency	unknown	Visibility/ Attention competition	-	-	-	yes	-	no

**Table 4.3: Overview of the results of section 3**

Questions/ HEIs	Q.8a	Q.8.1a	Q.10a
<b>Dutch label</b>	Yes If incorporated in Charter ->not necessary	Benefits on institutional side	Student exchange Online communication Educational fairs & events
<b>German label</b>	Yes Only if easy to renew	Only if easy to renew	Internationalisation strategy Student exchange English-taught programmes services
<b>German No label</b>	-	-	Internationalisation strategy English-taught programmes
<b>British label</b>	Yes Already renewed it	DS is recognized quality standard	Internationalisation strategy services
<b>Dutch No label</b>	-	-	Internationalisation strategy Student exchange English-taught programmes
<b>Commonalities</b>	yes	-	Internationalisation strategy Student exchange English-taught programmes services

**Table 4.4: Overview of the results of section 4**

Questions/ HEIs	Q.11a	Q.11.1a	Q.12a	Q.9b	Q.10b	Q.11b	Q.12b
<b>Dutch label</b>	High outgoing numbers Do not know	yes	Yes (if still important) No, if HE systems very similar	Yes, institutions need time to implement it	Common format for DS from EU More scholarships Enhanced housing	Improving location's reputation Lower tuition fees Bluntness of Dutch people	Yes, much easier to read and understand grading system
<b>German label</b>	High outgoing numbers Intercultural competences/ preparation	-	yes	-	-	-	-
<b>German No label</b>	-	-	-	Difficult to assess	Difficult to assess	Difficult to assess	yes
<b>British label</b>	Intercultural competences/ Preparation Increased participation/ Willingness Language learning Credit recognition	yes	Yes, DS facilitate mobility	-	-	-	-
<b>Dutch No label</b>	Increased participation/ Willingness Active attitude of teachers	No	Yes, important to stimulate mobility	-	-	-	-
<b>Commonalities</b>	High outgoing numbers Intercultural competences/ Preparation Increased participation/ willingness	yes	yes	-	-	-	yes

Green: first commonality

Blue: second commonality

Purple: third commonality

Brown: fourth commonality

Red: difference

Black: Only one answer given

a: Interview with policy-makers

b: Interview with admission officer

### Appendix 3: Questionnaires

#### Questionnaire for policy-makers

1. Since when are you issuing the Diploma Supplement?
  - 1.1 Are you issuing it automatically and free of charge to all of your students?

*I know that your institution is (not) holding the Diploma Supplement Label. Therefore, I would like to ask you more about it.*
2. Do you know about the DS label?
  - 2.1 If you know about the label and your institution is holding it, since when does it have the label?
  - 2.2 Why did your institution not apply for the label?
3. What motivated your institution to apply for the label?
4. Do you think that the outgoing long-term student mobility increased or decreased after receiving the DS Label?
5. How does your institution use the label?
6. How do you think the students use the label?
7. What are the main benefits of having the label?
8. Do you want to renew the label after the period has expired?
  - 8.1 If yes, why?
  - 8.2 If no, why?
9. Would you advise your president to request the label?
  - 9.1 If yes, why?
  - 9.2 If no, why?
10. Which strategies does your institution use in order to attract foreign students and increase internationalisation?
11. In your opinion, what needs to be improved or changed in the future, in order to increase outgoing student mobility at the national level?
  - 11.1 Do you see a role for Diploma Supplements in that?
12. How important do you think Diploma Supplements are in the creation of the European Higher Education Area?
  - 12.1 If important, why?
  - 12.2 If not important, why?
13. Do you have documents or time series data about student mobility that I can use in my thesis?
14. Can you provide me with an example of a Diploma Supplement how it is issued at your institution?

### Questionnaire for admission officers

1. Do you know about the Diploma Supplement label?
2. Do you think that issuing a Diploma Supplement influenced the incoming student mobility?
3. If yes, did the incoming student mobility increase or decrease after receiving the DS label?
4. Does having the label increase the institution's visibility?
5. What are the main benefits of having the label?
6. Do Diploma Supplements facilitate the application process?
7. Are they used to evaluate applicants?
8. Do applicants who have a Diploma Supplement have higher chances of getting accepted to your institution?
9. Has the Diploma Supplement been more important in the beginning of the Bologna Process?
10. In your opinion, what needs to be improved or changed in the future, in order to increase incoming student mobility at your institution?
11. In your opinion, what needs to be improved or changed in the future, in order to increase incoming student mobility at the national level?
12. In your opinion, would it be helpful if also countries that are not participating in the Bologna Process had a Diploma Supplement?