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Why is there so little progress on the social dimension in the Bologna Process? Some hypotheses

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Little Progress of SD in Bologna-Process: The example of national strategies

- In **2007** in London, the Ministers took note of the report of the first social dimension working group.
- This report contains the "definition" of the social dimension ("should reflect total population")
- but also the recommendation to all countries to develop a social dimension strategy and to identify underrepresented groups for this purpose.
- Detailed guidelines were proposed for the development of the strategy.

Little Progress of SD in Bologna-Process: The example of national strategies

- In **2015** in Yerevan, the Ministers adopted a strategy for the SD.
- The most important point in it: All member states should develop a national strategy or action plan and identify underrepresented groups.
- Guidelines and detailed action steps were presented again for the process of developing national strategies.

Little Progress of SD in Bologna-Process: The example of national strategies

- By the Paris Summit in **2018**, less than a handful of states had developed an SD strategy ( !).
- A few (mostly nordic) countries argue that they have already implemented many measures to improve SD and thus see no sense in a coherent strategy paper.
- ➔ After 12 years (!), practically no progress at the (international) political level
(but more and more universities are implementing widening access and diversity strategies)

On the other hand....

- Member States always mention the social dimension as one of the most important issues for the future of the Bologna Process/European Higher Education Area.
- Thus, why is there so little progress?

Some hypotheses
to stimulate discussion

1. Money comes first (into mind)

- For each Bologna implementation report there is a large survey on the progress made in the member states.
- On the social dimension, most countries list their student support systems first, followed by measures for students with disabilities. Especially in the Balkans, support for war orphans is often mentioned. Longer lists are rare.
- ➔ Thus, states first think of costly measures when it comes to the social dimension, but money is always lacking.

2. Different financial starting points

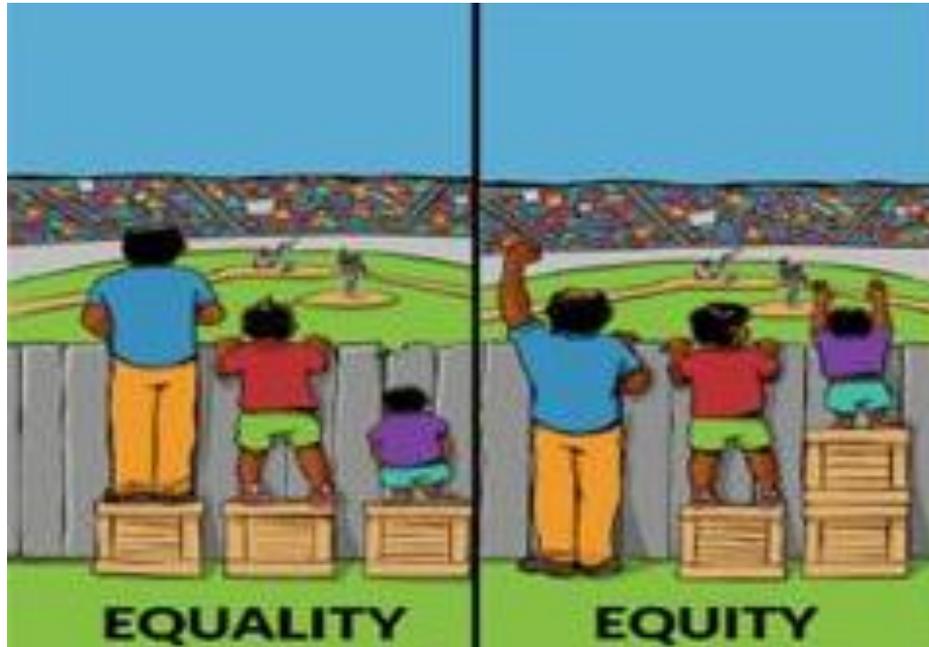
- In some countries, higher education is free. For them, this is the starting point, which is why financial student support is the main topic of discussion.
- In other countries, high fees are also charged at public universities. For them, this is the starting point and therefore the subsidy of study places for some is the focus of the discussion.

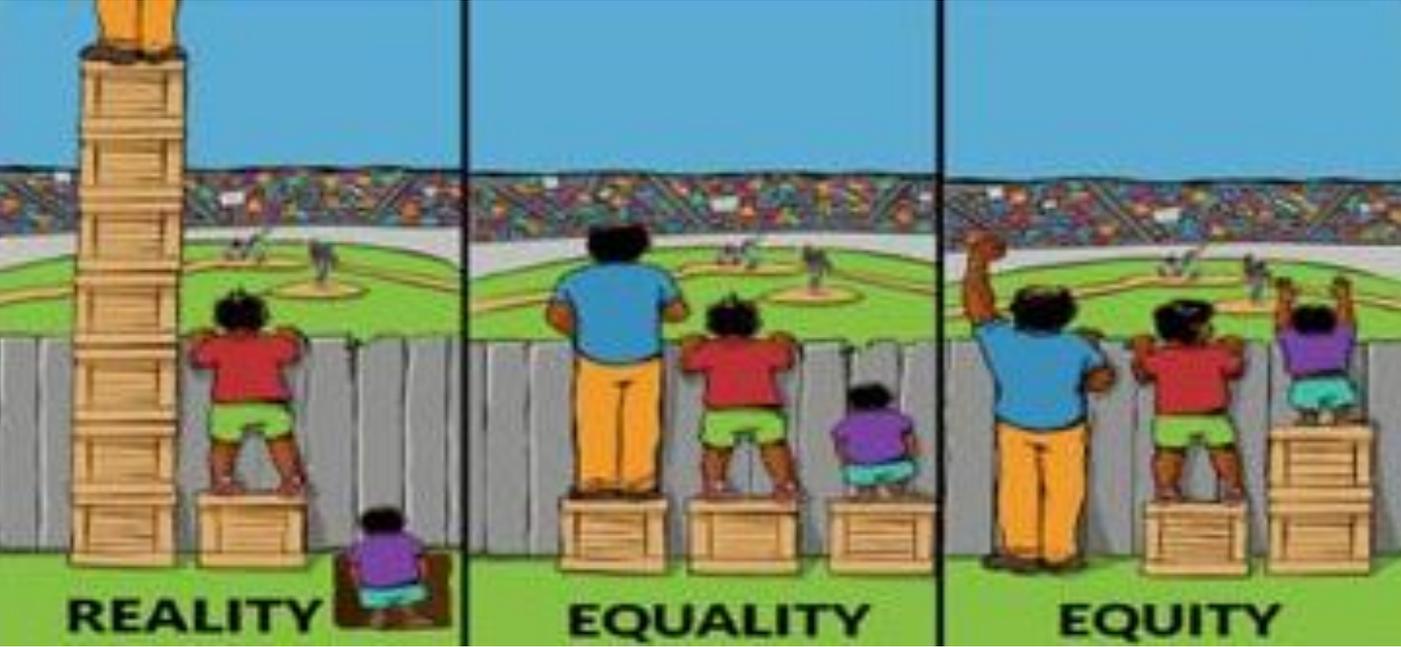
3. It's widely overseen how effective small and cheap measures can be

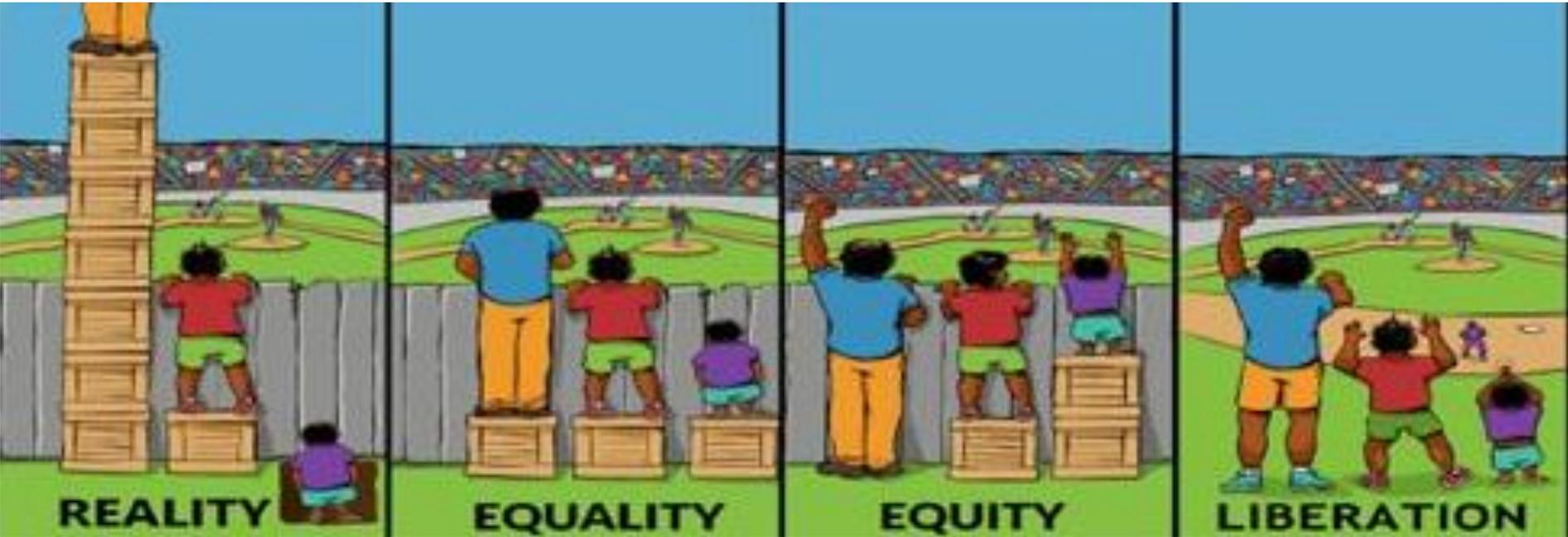
- There are so many measures to improve the social dimension that cost nothing or little. For example:
 - Better information and counselling, especially in a language that is understandable even for (potential) 1st generation students.
 - Sensitising teachers and the general staff to diversity and different student needs ("Can you hear me? I think we do not need the microphone.")
 - Close cooperation with the student representatives, e.g. to show potential students "real life studying" and reduce obstacles or to build buddy systems, or....

4. Main lever to improve the SD is not used

- The explicit or implicit (!) selectivity of the school system is hardly addressed in politics.
- Either because it is negated or because it falls under other political responsibilities.
- And perhaps also because the difference between equity and equality is not understood or these concepts are difficult to translate into national languages.







No ideological debate needed

Barrier free /
Inclusion

➔ The foundations for this are laid in the kindergarten and in the schools

5. It's all about who deserves it

- In some (mainly Eastern European) countries, the fairness discourse revolves mainly around merit.
 - Those who have better marks at school get a free place at university.
 - If you earn more credits or better grades, you get a scholarship.
- However, at the same time it is acknowledged by some, that there are systematic differences on which individual performance depends (e.g. urban vs. rural areas).
- Social need, on the other hand, is taken into account less often.

6. World class not working class universities

- Since the inflation of university rankings, many HEIs believe that they must become "world-class universities".
- Everyone wants the best students/researchers, but they should already come in as "the best" – then it is easier to make them even better.
- RPL, for example, is seen in this context as a reduction in quality because not the best come but those with lower access requirements.
- There are therefore fears that too much diversity could damage the quality of the university.

7. Lack of knowledge about SD

- There is still a lot of unknowingness about the social dimension.
- This concerns among other things:
 - Why improving the social dimension is important
 - How broad the social dimension should be thought of
 - The extent of under-represented or disadvantaged groups in HE (lack of data)
 - What could and what must be done

Thus, why is there so little progress?

1. Money comes first [into mind]
2. Different financial starting points
[HE regarded as a public good or not]
3. It's widely overseen how effective small and cheap measures can be
4. Main lever to improve the SD is not used
[kindergarten and school policy]
5. It's all about who deserves it
[performance fairness, merit]
6. World class not working class
[quality of universities]
7. Lack of knowledge about SD





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Thank you very much!

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