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The emergence of liberal arts and sciences education in Europe : a comparative perspective

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Abstract

This article explores the question of why liberal arts and sciences education has been (re-)emerging in Europe over roughly the last two decades. A period, which is also characterized by the Bologna Process, that is the introduction of distinct undergraduate ? graduate degree cycles, and the explicit framing of higher education policies within the concept of the knowledge economy (the Lisbon Strategy). It will do so by taking a historical and comparative approach, looking at the histories of liberal arts and sciences education as they evolved in Europe and the USA. The article aims to analyse why liberal arts and science education seems to be a relevant response to the needs for higher education reform in Europe. In particular to the need to differentiate the massified European systems, in terms of broader and more flexible approaches to bachelor education in order to overcome the disadvantages of too early and over-specialization, by re-establishing the balance between breadth and depth of the curriculum, and in terms of redefining elite education in overly egalitarian systems. The focus on Europe will highlight developments in the Netherlands, where the progress of liberal arts and

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sciences education is particularly substantial and where the model has already obtained a special status within the higher education system. This will be further illustrated using Amsterdam University College as an institutional case study on the new European version of the liberal arts model, with an emphasis on its meaning in the globalized higher education context of the 21st century. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)