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Abstract

Master of Business Administration (MBA) is a hundred years old American title, apparently invented with the creation of the first graduate business school in North America. The MBA education began to spread to the rest of the world after World War II. In Europe, the interest in MBA education have raised in the latest twenty five years, foremost in Great Britain, but also in the rest of Europe. The MBA program can be seen as an example of an American model for management education, which has diffused and perhaps is on its way to become the dominant model for management education in Europe.

In this paper we study the cross-national patterns of diffusion, transformation and adoption of management education programs (in this case MBA programs). Two assumptions are being made about the relation between the organizations and the institutional field they are part of. First, it is assumed that organizations are not just passive recipients of institutional standards and scripts merely engaged in unreflected copying of such forms and practices from the institutional field. In this paper organizations are assumed to play a far more active role in selecting, translating, editing and interpreting such institutional standards and scripts. Second, it is assumed that these scripts are dynamic entities that develop and may change over time. These scripts are also shaped by the institutional actors in the field - including business education institutions - during the adoption process. The theoretical interest in this paper, thus, is on explaining and specifying the mechanisms and dynamics behind the processes of diffusion, transformation and adoption of institutional standards and scripts. The empirical focus in this paper is on the diffusion of the American standard for management education - MBA programs - in four European countries (Denmark, Italy, Spain and Sweden).

Based on these four cases studies, we also develop an interpretive key of the diffusion and standardization of management education in Europe. In details, we analyze how national traits are maintained though educational labels are aligned with the US standards. Moreover, we argue that national traits enter in the definition of management education contents through the influence of institutional actors in the field - including business education institutions. These patterns of influence play a role at both the national and the single business education institution level.

In the final discussion, we describe the further developments of the research, proposing an agenda for cross-national comparisons on the diffusion of management education models.

Introduction

MBA, Master of Business Administration, is a hundred years old American title, apparently invented with the creation of the first graduate business school in North America. The MBA began to spread to the rest of the world after World War II. In Europe the interest in MBA education have raised in the latest twenty-five years, foremost in Great Britain, but also in the rest of Europe. There are now over 1250 MBAs on offer around the world (The Merlin Falcon MBA guide), about 700 of these being in the US. There are no clear statistics yet on how many people get a MBA every year; according to information from AACSB (American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business), an approximate estimation is about 100 000 candidates get an MBA every year in US. Figures from Europe has not been obtainable.

There are no general rules or norms on how a MBA program should be organized or what it should contain. Further, the label MBA is not protected which means that in principal anyone could arrange an education program and label it Master of Business Administration. At the same time MBA-programs are being compared with each other, they are subject to standardization, and they are at least partly viewed as being similar or at least belonging to the same category of educational programs.

One may ask why it is that a well established educational model begins to circulate around the world. What is more, in the absence of a prescribed and protected model, what it is that is spreading under the label MBA, throughout the world? Is it only a label, or is it a specified model? In the first case one may expect great differences between various MBA programs with similar labels but different contents, in the second case we may conclude that management education throughout the world is on its way to become similar as it is influenced by an American management education model.

In this paper we discuss the cross national patterns of diffusion, transformation and adoption of MBA-programs. In other words, we address the following research question: *what comes out of adopting the same label (MBA) in different contexts?* The paper is based on studies of four MBA-programs in four European countries: IESE (Barcelona, Spain), Copenhagen Business School (Copenhagen, Denmark), SDA-Bocconi (Milan, Italy), and Uppsala University (Uppsala, Sweden).

These cases provide interesting observations of the development of management education in Europe, especially in relation to ongoing discussions of the Americanization of management education. We may also from this study draw some conclusions about how forms, practices and procedures diffuse around the world. In the following section we address this second issue by presenting the perspective on diffusion that has been applied in this study.

What is diffusing?

Following from observations of great similarities between organizational practices also in deeply different and distant settings, there has been a growing interest in organization theory on the diffusion of ideas, ideals and practices (e.g. Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 1995; Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996; Christensen et al. 1997; Røvik, 1998). A well established and often pursued view of such diffusion rests on the assumption that procedures and practices spread more or less according to a physical model where connections between actors are assumed to explain the rate and speed of diffusion (e.g. Rogers, 1983). Strang and Meyer (1994) have shown that connections seems insufficient as an explanation. For example, diffusion of forms and practices can be observed also in settings with little direct connection between actors. Thus, in order to better explain diffusion processes, Strang and Meyer(1994) suggest that connection between actors may be completed with an understanding of the institutional conditions for diffusion. Diffusion is increased where the actors involved are perceived as similar. Such perceptions of similarities are often the effects of categorizations following from theorization. Not only the actors involved, but also the diffused models are being theorized and thus simplified and this helps them to circulate between contexts.

Such a view suggests that models do not remain unchanged as they spread. In order to show how models change as they spread Sahlin-Andersson (1996) has described such processes as *editing processes*. What is more, such a perspective suggests that the adopters of diffused models are far from passive adopters, but active translators (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996; Christensen et al., 1997). Røvik (1998) has suggested that organizations copy standards and models only partially and that they are translated in various phases as they spread. Thus models undergo *processes of translation* as they spread, and we may find various local constructions of diffused models. In other words, diffused practices may be presented under the same label, but at a closer look one can find that as the label has been adopted locally it has resulted in locally shaped practices and meanings (Strandgaard Pedersen and Dobbin, 1995). Not only local variants of the diffused models are edited as they change, but so are the origins to which the adopting actors often refer. This is to say, that there is not necessarily one origin of such diffusion processes, and the original model (if such one can be identified) may look very different from the general model that is being spread. Stories about, or editions of, exemplary models are constructed as these models spread (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996).

We find it important, in order to better understand the mechanisms of diffusion and translation, to distinguish between *labels and models*. We suggest that the spread of a label may be understood as a diffusion process, although it is not an automatic process but one shaped by institutional conditions and active

diffusers, mediators and adopters. In order to understand the spread of models, however, we have to study the various translations and constructions of local as well as generalized models. In this study, we have used the label MBA to identify the studied cases. What is more the MBA label seems to have remained unchanged as it has spread (it is not even translated into the local languages but the English label is used). When distinguishing between label and model, from the cases we may conclude to what extent there is a certain model tied to this label. This also gives an understanding to what extent the spread of a certain label is also part of a homogenization and possible Americanization of European management education. In the end of this paper we speculate about where and how MBA models are being constructed.

MBA and Management Education

The above presented perspective on diffusion suggests that we need to understand the spread of MBA in connection to the wider institutional context within which this diffusion is taking place. The spread of MBA certainly has to be understood in relation to the more general diffusion of management ideas, ideals and practices. During the last thirty years, the diffusion of MBA has been accompanying the raising interest in management education (Engwall and Gunnarsson, 1994; Amdam, 1996). In almost all European countries, educational institutions have provided more management education programs than ever in the last two decades, both inventing new programs and shaping the existing ones for management purposes (EFMD, 1995).

In Europe there seems to be a greater diversity in the picture of management education (and in the educational system in general), than that of the US. The generalised education for business and commerce, in Europe, has a long history outside the university sector, when European universities were reluctant to recognize business and management as an academic discipline in the beginning of the century (Engwall and Gunnarsson, 1994). National educational systems play a more dominant role in the European countries compared to the US and business and management education are thus developed through a complex variety of institutions - France had its Grand Ecoles; Germany, Holland and Scandinavia had Hochschule; and in England the way in to business was through practical work (after university) and membership of the right class - before the boom in the 1960s and 1970s where the American dominance on the management educational systems seems to have increased (Engwall and Gunnarsson, 1994; Amdam, 1996).

At a first glance, the diffusion of management education programs is the effect of a twofold process: the first is the development of Business Administration as a separate academic discipline from Law and Economics (Locke, 1989; Engwall, 1992). The second is the adoption of US technical tools and methods in the management of firms (Kipping and Bjarne, 1998). As to the first process, after

the World War II Business Administration progressively acquired the academic status by the definition of study programs separated from Law and Economics in the Universities and Business schools all over Europe. It was the last part of the overall process of academic legitimation of economic disciplines that had started in the 19th century (Augello, 1990).

As to the second process, during the 1950s the economic boom forced European companies to restructure their production systems. They largely relied upon US models and techniques imported through consulting firms and managers educated in US business schools. Management tools and management education therefore entered within firms slowly replacing engineering skills and methods.

The combination of the two processes implied the change in the mechanisms of selection and reproduction of the European business elite, shaping the education path of the younger managers (Marceau, 1991). So, while the interest in management education in general may be linked to the overall modernization of Europe in the second half of this century (see also Hobsbawm, 1993, for an historical account), the booming of MBA education in Europe is mainly linked to the trend towards internationalization and globalization of business (Whitley, Thomas, and Marceau, 1981; Porter and McKibbin, 1988).

Research on Management Education

The educational systems and their changes have been largely explored within organizational studies (Weick, 1976; Meyer and Scott, 1983). A specialized literature on the historical and institutional evolution of management education has developed, proposing a blended perspective to analyze changes and the diffusion of new educational products. This literature can be grouped into three mainstreams. The first mainstream describes the role of management education and the relations between management education and the diffusion of management practices and the selection of top managers. These studies focus both on national issues in order to fix the context of analysis (Engwall, 1992) and on single institutions to study its development (Marceau, 1991). The second mainstream reconstructs the historical development of management education products, describing the national changes through the diffusion of management templates coming from US and Japan (Zamagni and Gemelli, 1997; Locke, 1989; 1997) and the evolution of business systems (Whitley et al., 1981). The third mainstream focuses on the alignment between management education and new trends in the business world. This mainstream looks at management programs as the quick answers towards new educational needs emerging from the business world (Porter and McKibbin, 1990). Much research on other vehicles of diffusion of management education, such as consulting firms (Kipping and Bjarne, 1998) and popular media (Alvarez, 1997), underpin the same categorization, especially sharing the socio-historical view.

Along with the existing literature of management education, the way in which external factors impact on the functioning of these institutions has been object of studies from both a micro-organizational view (March and Olsen, 1976; 1989) and an institutional perspective (Rowan, 1982, Covalleski and Dirsmith, 1988; Borum and Westenholz, 1995). From these two approaches the picture has emerged that, though tightly coupled with the environment in certain aspects, educational organizations maintain rooms for local maneuvering.

Building upon the constructivist approach (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), Zucker (1988) argues that although institutional actors are affected by the norms culturally reproduced within the institutional context, they are themselves involved in its framing. Their policies, and the norms they endorse, concur in constructing the organizational fields, though not necessarily as a result of intended course of actions. More recently, Dobbin (1994) and Brint (1994), have addressed the same point from respectively an institutional history and a sociology of culture perspective. These authors suggested that the interplay between institutional actors is the primary source of norms and legitimacy framing an organizational field.

Scott and Christensen (1995), Borum and Westenholz (1995), Strandgaard Pedersen and Dobbin (1997) have directly discussed the social construction of organizations and organizational fields. Assuming organizations as both adapting to and being influenced by the external environment, these authors reasoned that the process of change within an organizational field can be described starting from the institutional actors' policies to cope with the external environment. These policies regard both the institutional features and the competitive moves to market-driven challenges. Expressing a similar theme, Zucker and Darby (1997) held that under changing organizational conditions, organizations construct patterns for interpreting reality. Once institutionalized, these patterns shape the courses of action within the whole organizational field.

The combination of the different perspectives described above gives the opportunity to consider social and historical features with the institutional and micro organizational aspects. We keep this approach to design a map as complete as possible, without losing complexity. In addition, the combination reveals the implicit duality existing in the analysis of management education. On the one side, many studies underline broad institutional dynamics involving socio-historical aspects and the diffusion of ideas and models. On the other side, a part of the new institutional theory points out the importance of locally constructed elements that shape the adoption of educational models. In the case of MBA programs, the "macro" institutional aspects are related transnationalization and globalization trends, while the local actors decide on the adoption of an MBA and its content. In this paper, we try to use both perspectives in order

detailed study descriptions, formal guidelines, curricula etc.). This data material first and foremost provided information about the formal aspects of the MBA programs and how the program is presented to external stakeholders (e.g. structure and duration of the program, admission criteria and procedures, content of the courses, forms of examination, profile of faculty and participants etc.).

In each case, this first round of data gathering was followed by interviews with key informants in the form of present as well as former directors of the MBA programs. These interviews provided information about the historical background - founding of the programs, later developments and changes - together with various explanations, evaluations and descriptions of the present programs. In this way, the interviews supplemented the first round of data gathering.

In order to contextualize the MBA programs further, background information was collected about the educational institutions hosting the programs (e.g. their main strategies, participation in exchange programs, relations with other institutions and business community) together with general information about MBA programs and the different types of programs existing. This data is generated, primarily from MBA guides, Internet Web pages, studies and reports on management education etc. With regard to the timing of the study, all four MBA programs were studied at the same time (winter 1997).

Thus, an overriding idea behind this research design has been to enable the project to carry out a comparative study of four in-depth cases without losing the contextual aspects.

Various MBA-programs

The discussion so far may have given the impression that there is only one American MBA model that is spreading. From a theoretical perspective we have reacted against such a picture, suggesting that models are constructed and reconstructed as they spread. Also on empirical ground we can quite easily find that there is no such thing as one American MBA model, but many. At first the MBA was a straight forward two year full time postgraduate course and this still holds as the "classic" course today. But as universities and business schools in Europe and elsewhere have begun to offer MBA programs, new varieties have emerged. As such, there are seven types of MBA programs available throughout the world: (The Merlin Falcon MBA guide. Internet: <http://www.merlinfalcon.co.uk/>).

The *two year full time MBA* is a classic post-graduate business study, somewhat analogous to the Master of science in business administration in the Scandinavian countries. The *full time one year MBA* is a more intensive

to analyze the dynamics emerging from the adoption of the same educational label in deeply different socio-historical and operational contexts.

Data and methods

As mentioned previously in the paper, the focus of this comparative study is on MBA programs in Europe. The study is comparing four European MBA programs from four different national contexts (Denmark, Italy, Spain and Sweden). The four programs studied are hosted by four different educational institutions: Copenhagen Business School (Copenhagen, Denmark), SDA-Bocconi (Milan, Italy), IESE-Universidad de Navarra (Barcelona, Spain) and Uppsala University (Uppsala, Sweden).

The four MBA programs have some features in common, which provide a basis for a meaningful comparison. These common features are as follows: 1) all programs use the MBA label for their education; 2) all programs are connected to an educational institution (university or business school); 3) all educational institutions are early adopters of the MBA program within their country and have nation-wide reputation; 4) all programs are situated in a national context where English is not the first language. However, the four MBA programs differ with regard to national context, as mentioned above, and years of experience with MBA programs (see figure 1. and further descriptions of the programs below).

The method of this study is relying on a case study approach. Data about the four cases is generated by "contextual insiders". This is to say, that data for each case is generated by researchers who are familiar with the local context of the cases - the national context as well as that of the local educational institution hosting the MBA program - in order to minimize the risk of misinterpretations due to insufficient contextual knowledge ¹.

Data generation for the four cases is coordinated by a common format for the cases, which was developed prior to the data generation. This means that a common case format was agreed upon with regard to the type information, which should be contained in the case descriptions of all four MBA programs. Yet, the case format was open concerning what data sources was used to retain the type of information required (e.g. from documentary material, interviews etc.) - this could vary from case to case.

For each case various documentary material was collected and analyzed (e.g. homepage presentations from the www, official brochures, alumni magazines,

¹ The Italian and Spanish cases have been done by Carmelo Mezza. The Danish case has been done jointly by Christian Honoré and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen. The Swedish case has been done by Tina Hedmo and Susanne Åberg. Anders Ivarsson took part in the initial phase of the Swedish study.

course than the two year MBA, because of its reduced time. Sometimes it can involve practicals and project assignment and then usually takes more than one calendar year. *The executive MBA* is for executives sponsored by their company in taking an MBA. The participants usually continue working alongside with their MBA studies, so this program usually involves courses and project work during evenings and week-ends. *The part time MBA* can vary in length from two to eight years but most last from two to three years. These programs usually contain the same compulsory core subjects as full time MBAs, but often with fewer electives. *The Open or Distance learning MBA* involves less classroom teaching and contact with other students as group and discussion work is more limited or non-existent. The courses rely on carefully written self-study materials, presented in various written and audio-visual units. *The Modular MBA* combines the academic content of the MBA with periods of practical work in a company where the academic content can be immediately applied and developed. These have been more popular in Europe than in America. These courses do lend a certain flexibility to the shape and length of the MBA. *The Company MBA* is taught and validated by the school, but the content is agreed between the school and the local business community. The idea is to produce an MBA which has the academic rigour of the Business School and also direct relevance to a particular business or local business issues. Most courses emphasise project work and encourage students of varying backgrounds but from the same area to stimulate the exchange of ideas and contribute to group projects and discussion sessions.

In the following sections we introduce the four MBA programs compared in this study by summarizing the main aspects of the four case-studies. In relation to the various types of MBA programs described above, the four MBA programs in this study covers only two of the types. Two of the programs are Executive MBAs (CBS and Uppsala) and the other two programs are Full-time MBAs (IESE and SDA-Bocconi). In the table below we summarize some of the basic data on each program.

Figure 1. Overview of the four MBA programs

ISSUE	CBS	UPPSALA	IESE	SDA-BOCCONI
<i>Starting year</i>	1994	1980	1964	1971
<i>Label</i>	Executive MBA	Executive MBA in international business management	MBA - general management	MBA
<i>Size</i>	30 participants in each program	30 participants in each program	130 participants in each program	65 participants in each program
<i>Format</i>	2 years part time	2 years part time	21 months full time	16 months full time
<i>Educational context</i>	public business school	public university	private business dept. in university	private university
<i>Main motives for starting the program</i>	To create high status education and to complement more technical educations. To avoid reductions of staff.	To spread the research that has been carried out in the department and to enhance industrial contacts. To get access to certain funding possibilities.	To shape a new entrepreneurial class To modernize the educational system	To expand the school's educational offer. To modernize and internationalize education

CBS. The MBA program of CBS started in 1994. It was the first MBA in Denmark and is addressed to executives of Danish companies as a domestic alternative to moving abroad to attend post-graduate management education. Prior to this start, attempts failed to create a Scandinavian executive MBA (with INSEAD and IMD as role models) in cooperation with Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki, and resulted, in Denmark, in the CBS MBA and a competing MBA run by a private institute (CIMI). Being an executive MBA, it is part time (two years) and an academic degree corresponding at least three years of education plus a minimum of three years of relevant work experience, are main requirements for admission. Approximately 50% of the teachers are faculty members from CBS, the other 50% are international faculty recruited from abroad; only administrative staff is dedicated full time to the program.

The MBA appears as one of the various educational programs of CBS, sharing the school's human and financial resources. In terms of students, it is a marginal activity of CBS, that still focuses on academic degrees (B.Sc., Msc, Ph.D.) Yet, in terms of prestige, the MBA is considered a high-status activity at CBS. The MBA title is not recognized by the state, although CBS – as a state funded institution – had to receive a formal approval by the Ministry of Education before launching the program. Although it is state funded, CBS

requires a tuition fee to MBA participants; this marks a difference with most Danish post-graduate programs that are for free.

CBS' MBA emphasizes internationalization by providing courses on international management as well as two study trips to non European countries to explore globalization issues. Together with international management, the program covers other functional areas of management. Teaching methods are largely multifaceted, ranging from case studies and academic materials to videos and testimonials. The faculty is free to adapt the workload and the materials to the specific need of the audience. The program is taught in Danish (and in English as regards the international faculty) and the materials are both in English and Danish. All participants are Danes (or Danish speaking).

SDA-BOCCONI. SDA-Bocconi MBA started in 1971. It was the first MBA program in Italy, where no post-graduate program existed till 1982. Nowadays, the Ministry of Education does not recognize MBA title, even if state recognized institutions deliver it. SDA is the business education department of the larger University Bocconi, the most well-known private institution running economic and business programs. SDA provides four types of post graduate programs: MBA, Master in international management (MIEM), part time management programs for executives, and small and medium business programs. MBA is the most important program, involving most of the faculty and the administrative staff. It is mainly addressed to people with work experience, although young graduates with a brilliant academic record are usually admitted after getting grants from the business community or the bank system.

The program is full time (16 months) and it is taught in English and Italian (from 1990). In the last decade materials in English has grown in relation to the increasing internationalization of SDA's faculty. MBA follows a mix of the US scheme (the emphasis on functional areas) and the Italian academic tradition (the systemic approach). The outcome is an overall focus on general management issues related to small and medium firms, specific industry problems, and international management. The relation with the business community gives SDA the opportunity to propose on field works (workshops, internships, and project works) for the participants before graduation.

IESE. IESE MBA program started in 1964 in Barcelona. It was the first MBA in Spain and is the outcome of an educational analysis on Spanish firms undertaken by the University of Navarra with the collaboration of Harvard Business School. IESE is the business department of the University of Navarra and had been established in 1958 with the object of strengthening Spanish firms through the diffusion of best practices and management techniques and at the same time emphasizing the human factors within business. University of Navarra is

a private institution recognized by the state and supported by the Catholic Church; the MBA title, however, has no legal value in Spain.

IESE MBA is full time (21 months), addressed to people with three years work experience (it is a basic requirement), and from 1981 it is taught in Spanish and English. Since the beginning IESE MBA has been following the Harvard scheme: it has been emphasizing general management issues and covering the functional management areas. The educational mark of IESE consists in the emphasis on trust and integrity in management, consistently with the values purported by the University of Navarra. Most of classes (around 80%) are taught through the case-study teaching method. IESE is the largest producer of case studies in Europe and has the license to translate and diffuse Harvard's cases within EU.

Uppsala university. The executive MBA program of Uppsala dates back to 1980. In that year the Department of Business studies at Uppsala university started a new post graduate program in international business, mainly aimed at persons with a basic degree in engineering who worked in Swedish companies. At that time the program was financed with special grants from the government (at least to some extent, the grants did not cover all the costs). After a few years, these grants were withdrawn and from 1984 the program was financed by a special fee paid by the participants' employers. As the department started to charge fees from the participants, they also felt the need to interpret the diploma into English, and it was at this time that they started to use the label MBA (as an interpretation of the until then used Swedish label "påbyggnadsutbildning i internationellt företagande - särskilt exportfrågor"). The program was started by a group of researchers who worked within the area of international business. This group saw the program as a way of spreading their research results as well as a way to establish and strengthen their contacts with business companies. This same group of researchers is still working with the program. In relation to the rest of the activities at the Department of Business studies in Uppsala the MBA can be defined as a marginal but high status activity.

The program in Uppsala was among the first MBA programs to be started in Sweden. It is a part time two year program, with classes for approximately two full days once every third week. The group also makes a study trip abroad. The motive for teaching methods as well as the timing of classes and trips is to establish the course as an arena where participants can exchange experience and network with each other. There are no optional courses, but all participants follow the same courses. Previous work experience (as well as a present employer who is willing to recommend the student and pay for the program) is a main requirement for admission.

The study trip is one of the international elements of the program, another is the content. The program consists of four blocks: international business, organization and management of international business, international marketing, and the project. The program is held in Swedish and all participants are Swedes. The program includes a high proportion of literature and lectures in English.

Analysis

We will compare the four programs in two ways. First we have listed elements of the programs that are *similar*. Second, we have listed elements that are *different*. Results from these analyses are summarized in figure 2 and in figure 3 below. From the comparison of the four programs, we deduct that the recurrent aspects may identify the basic elements of the MBA model in Europe. It is interesting to notice, that if only few aspects are similar it implies that the MBA model does not consist of an established and codified set of rules, but it is only a label while the programs have been reconstructed by schools to couple with the local contexts.

As reconstructed by the four schools, the first element within the MBA model is the *admission procedure*. Except for minor differences, the four programs have admission procedures based on interviews by the admission staff, and in three of the four cases language tests (TOEFL and GMAT, with similar entry levels). These procedures, close to the US MBAs, are applied independently from the targeted participants of the four programs. These admission criteria differ considerably from those used in other programs in the local universities. Consequently, we may imagine they are not affected by the local contexts, at least not on the formal level. In practice it seems as though exceptions are frequently made from these admission criteria in order to fill the programs. This further implies that the spread of MBA does not seem to be demands driven (that is there have not been local demand from potential participants in the local context) but driven by the local school's interest to start such programs.

The *student profiles* are also similar in the four programs. The targeted audience of MBAs are graduated people (with a Bachelor or equivalent) plus at least three years of work experience. They all emphasize heterogeneity as an important aspect of the group of students. However, the actual students may notably differ from the target; full time MBAs may include participants with brilliant academic scores as executive MBAs stress work experience.

Tuition fees are also very close (120 - 150 000 DKR). The choice of charging the same tuition fees seems to be symbolically motivated; schools deal with tuition fees as a device for signaling and reputation. In addition, given the difference in the organization of the program and the number of participants, tuition fees

appear to be decoupled from real costs and aligned to some form of external standard, common to all the well-known European MBA programs.

Similarities also appear in the *content* of the four programs. MBAs courses cover the functional areas of management, introducing international management topics. They maintain a generalist approach to management.

We find an emphasis on internationalization and relations to the local business community in all four programs. All four programs have advisory boards where the local business community is represented and all four programs have more or less active alumni societies. Alumni networks are in all four cases vehicles of diffusion and promotion of the program offered. By setting more or less formal agreements with other schools (mainly US business schools) the programs seek to establish themselves as parts of an international network.

Figure 2: Similarities between programs

<i>ISSUE</i>	CBS	UPPSALA	IESE	SDA-BOCCONI
<i>Admission procedure</i>	academic degree min. 3 years, work experience, EPT, GMAT, interviews, recommendations from employer	academic degree min. 3 years, work experience 1 - 3 years, interviews, recommendations from employer	4 yrs undergrad. studies 3 yrs work exp letters of rec. TOEFL, GMAT Interviews, carried out by ex-alumni	4 yrs undergrad 3 yrs work exp. heterogeneity references TOEFL, GMAT Half mgmt people
<i>Ideal student profile</i>	25 - 30 years old, app. 3 years of work experience - preferable in managerial position heterogeneous group	25 - 30 years old, app. 3 years of work experience - preferable in managerial position heterogeneous group	25 - 30 years old, app. 3 years of work experience - preferable in managerial position heterogeneous group	25 - 30 years old, app. 3 years of work experience - preferable in managerial position heterogeneous group
<i>Tuition fee</i>	155 000 DKr, paid by the employer	140 000 SEK + 18 000 for study trip (= 141 000 DKr) has to be paid by the employer	30M ITL (= 120 000 DKr)	32 M ITL (=125 000 DKr)
<i>Content of program</i>	general management modules, internationalization	international business + general management	cases + general management	general management
<i>Advisory board</i>	With representatives from Danish industry, alumni and CBS.	Previously with senior managers, later with senior researchers	With leading Italian business managers and leading academics	With top academics and CEOs of MNCs
<i>Alumni</i>	yes, but not yet so active	yes, but not yet so active	yes, very active and involved in planning and admission procedures	yes, quite active

The aspects above are similar in the four analyzed cases. However, there are many aspects that are differently designed in the four MBA programs. These aspects are adapted to the local context. They are not perceived by the schools as

part of the general MBA model. Instead these aspects are open for customization. The first of these aspects is the *organization of the program* (see figure 3 below). The four schools follow notably different criteria in terms of dimension of faculty, dedicated staff and relation with the institutions they are in. In the Scandinavian cases, the programs are small in terms of participants and they require few dedicated people. The SDA and IESE cases show how these business schools offer other management education programs than MBAs, and they need a larger structure and staff. In these last cases, SDA and IESE appear to be very visible and important part of their institutions' strategy for reputation and the institutional relations with the business world.

Grading systems and exams also differ in the four cases. Except for IESE, that applies the US/Harvard system, the other programs adopt the grading methods commonly used in the national educational contexts. Exams are linked with the teaching methods adopted in the programs. The differences in those aspects make us suggest that they are outside the MBA model as it is perceived by the schools.

Figure 3: Differences between programs

ISSUE	CBS	UPPSALA	IESE	SDA-BOCCONI
<i>Organization of the program</i>	Facilities rented from faculty, organized directly under the president of CBS.	Integrated in dep. of business studies under a special label for financial reasons.	Special department within the university.	Integrated in Bocconi, but a brand name of its own
<i>Dimension of faculty</i>	50/50% national and international faculty	core of researchers as teachers + guest lecturers	112 professors (78 full time/ 34 part time) 11 nationalities	111/16 national/international prof. + guest lecturers
<i>Grading and exams</i>	13 scale, written exams/projects	pass with distinction pass/fail after each course, written exams	ABC-grading system, written exams/projects	Final written exams after each course
<i>Main language used</i>	Danish	Swedish	English/Spanish	English
<i>Competitors</i>	Other Danish programs	Other programs in the Stockholm/Uppsala region	Well known European programs	Other Italian programs, and the most well known European programs
<i>Definition of student/participant</i>	Participant	Participant	Student	Student
<i>Partners and network</i>	Personal network, scholars from American and European schools	Personal network, scholars from American and European schools	Harvard + institutional agreement among a group of (mainly) American schools	institutional agreement among a group of (mainly) American schools
<i>What is meant by internationalization</i>	content (knowledge about internationalization of business) internationalized faculty, study trip	content (knowledge about internationalization of business) + study trip	language, international faculty, Harvard cases	language, content (general management)

Yet the conceptual separation between aspects within and outside the MBA model has no self evident boundaries. As a matter of fact there are some elements reported in the four cases that may appear at the same time as parts of the MBA model and outside the model. These elements pertain to internationalization, language use, and elitist approach.

As to *internationalization*, although it is a common feature of the four cases, the national context strongly affects its operational meaning. In the case of SDA and IESE programs, internationalization is mainly related to teaching in English and the use of US textbooks and teaching materials. In the case of

Uppsala, and partly CBS, internationalization is decoupled from the use of the English language, and it is linked to the focus on international management topics and the involvement of large MNCs. In CBS the use of foreign faculty is highly emphasized. In both north European programs, the groups of participants make study trips abroad.

As we have mentioned above, internationalization is also pursued by networking. The adopted patterns of networking are twofold: in some cases it is based on institutional agreements between schools that decide to offer joint educational programs (it is the case of IESE) or encourage faculty exchange (this is the case of IESE and Bocconi). In other cases (most clearly found in CBS and Uppsala) it is based on personal relations: outstanding professors bring their foreign experience in the schools to either start new programs or update the existing ones.

Internationalization is also, in all four cases, associated with the frequent references made, in the interviews as well as in published material about the programs, to the American MBA-model. Sometimes added to such a characterization is that the program does not follow the standard model, but is formed as a more unique high quality product. At the same time as these frequent references are made to an American model we have found that there is no such thing as one American model and what is more, the programs are to a great extent products of local considerations and traditions.

The strategy for internationalization seems to be affected by the time of adoption of the MBAs. The four programs are early examples in their countries; however, SDA and IESE were early adopters at the European level, so they essentially refer to the US MBAs and their characteristics. In the case of CBS and Uppsala, the programs started later when many other MBAs were already on the European field (especially in France and UK). So these schools also had access to other European schools' experience that had edited and reconstructed the US MBA model. As a consequence, early adopters' main decision was about the opportunity to offer a MBA program; once the decision was made the inspiration may have come from the US experience. Late adopters had more editions to choose between as role models, and thus had a more complex decision to take. They had to consider not only whether to start an MBA, but also more clearly which type of MBA to establish. Such a decision making process may be more strongly affected by local features and institutional dynamics at the school level.

Thus we may distinguish between two phases in the process of the diffusion of a label. In the first phase there seems to be a rather specific model attached to the label. In the later phase, while the label remains unchanged, various editions of the model have evolved and there seems to be a great variety to select from. In this study, so far, we have not included the most recent adopters

on the European scene. However it would be interesting to see whether this second phase has been replaced by another pattern of diffusion. In the end of this paper, when discussing how the study could be continued, we will speculate about the features and explanations to such a third phase of diffusion.

The *use of English language* in teaching and to use textbooks that are written in English is seen as an element of internationalization in our four cases. When we compare the cases, however, they seem to outline a somewhat more paradoxical pattern. Where the pressure for internationalization is strong due to the process of opening of society (the case of Spain and Italy), language is a main issue. MBA programs taught in English are a symbol of genuine internationalization. For SDA and IESE the announcement that they teach programs in English is a way to attract foreign students and this way become international. The Scandinavian programs that we have studied have not had as a main objective to attract foreign students. However, while Swedish and Danish are such small languages, the quite extensive use of English in the programs does come as a consequence of internationalization.

As to *elitism*, MBAs were born as top educational programs for high potential people. From this viewpoint, they were an example of the use of educational offer to select and reproduce the leading elite (Marceau, 1991). Also the four programs we have studied clearly seek to signal elitism. In all four cases special rooms have been set apart and been especially furnished for the programs' classes. Apart from this, however, elitism is signaled in somewhat different ways. In Italy and Spain MBA programs recruit "students" whose high potential is measured in terms of academic background and work experience. By being enrolled in full time programs, they are intended to take part in advanced educational programs; so they are advanced students, and in this way defined as at least potential parts of an elite. This is self-evident in the case of Italy, where the university system has no post graduate program in management education except for academic oriented programs (*dottorato di ricerca*).

In the case of CBS and Uppsala the focus of the executive MBA is on participation and sharing of experience. In this way, the emphasis is on the quality of participants and their engagement in discussing their experience. The strong ties between executives emerging from the program, help the group building and foster their awareness of being an elite. Both schools have in fact started the programs in order to overcome the egalitarianism implicit in the Scandinavian University system. As a consequence, these MBAs may be represented as elitist program within egalitarian systems.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have made an attempt to define the main elements of the adoption process of MBA programs. We have discussed four MBA cases, CBS, SDA, IESE, and Uppsala outlining the main characteristics of the processes with regard to similarities and differences. The pursued outcome was the identification of some basic features of the MBA programs that were not affected by the local pressures and some other features that might be directly linked to the action of local forces.

From the comparison of the four case studies we may draw four conclusive remarks. Of course, they cannot be full explanations of the involved dynamics, but they can provide useful clues for the interpretation of the overall adoption process.

First, from the four cases we argue, that there is not a single process of adoption, but *each program is the effect of a different pattern of adoption*. Such differences may be linked to the timing of adoption (early versus late adopters) and the institutional agreement with other schools (links with Harvard as in IESE case versus internal bargaining process as in the case of CBS). By assuming the existence of different adoption processes, we also suggest that what is not affected by those differences makes up the MBA model.

Second, yet we have found *clear similarities between the cases*: admission procedures, tuition fees, the generalist approach, the international and elitist approach, and the ideal student profile are very similar over the four cases. These elements seem to be the basic features of the model, whereas organization, grading systems and exams are shaped according to the local context. Based on these observations, we have drawn a separation between on the one hand those aspects of MBA that seem to be tied to the label - elements that make up a wide spread model, and on the other hand aspects that are outside the model and thus left to the school's decisions. We argue that what is similar between the cases are elements of the model that seem to be attached to the MBA-label. It is mainly linked to *formal and procedural aspects signaling reputation*, and it represents the tie between European and US MBAs. What is outside the model is not an immediate attribution of the label, so the differences do not affect the reputation of the programs. In addition, it finely tunes up the program for the local audience, making the educational offer aligned with the national standards. The elements outside the model are actually object of the reconstruction at the local level; the existence of an "outside the model" part explains how it is possible to adopt the same label (MBA) in dramatically different educational contexts.

Third the separation between elements within the model and outside the model gives us the opportunity to address the issue of the reconstruction of the

US MBA model. As we reported above, *the MBA ideal-type consists of the mix of many experience in the US context*. However, European management education institutions have concurred in creating a US MBA model to refer to. Actually, this model is largely the effect of a local reconstruction aiming at finding the right product for a fast changing management education. The existence of a superseding model is affirmed by the alignment with the label MBA and the "within the model" elements; at the same time the world view guiding the reconstruction is set up by the local needs. The progressive alignment of local needs due to the process of globalization and unification of Europe may in a few decades lead to the expansion of the MBA model, so reducing the space for local customization. However, this dynamic is still controversial in its prospective results.

Finally, our interpretation of the adoption process reveals how there is *no trade-off between heterogeneity and homogeneity in the diffusion of MBA programs*. On the contrary, they are parts of the same process, and coexist in the definition of the form and contents of the programs. From our four case studies, we suggest that heterogeneity and homogeneity are at the same time pursued by the educational institutions, which try to both align to a legitimated label and distinguish as providers of tailor made courses. The issue is that different parts of the MBA programs are involved; homogeneity plays its role as regards the within the model elements. Heterogeneity plays a major role in the definition of the outside the model elements. From this perspective, it is meaningless to explore now whether homogeneity is prevailing against heterogeneity and vice versa. It is more purposeful to investigate whether the boundaries between within and outside the model part get loose, and how each part is either expanding or reducing.

Discussion and further research

This paper is based on an initial study of the spread of MBA throughout Europe. The aim of the study is to further our understanding of how management education in Europe develops but also to learn more about how models and labels diffuse and how they change as they diffuse. In this last section we will speculate further around a few issues that this study has pointed out as crucial in this context and we will indicate how these issues can be studied further.

This study has included four programs, in four countries. Clear differences were found, especially between southern and northern Europe. These differences can be explained by differences in national educational systems, but also in the different starting times of the programs. In order to learn more about the timing as well as how nation-specific educational systems affect the shape of the

MBA's, more countries as well as more programs within each country could be included in the study.

We have suggested that depending on the timing of adopting the widespread model, the adopters have different sets of models to choose between. For the early adopters, in southern Europe, MBA was seen as an American model, and this model was adopted via institutional direct links with American schools. As the northern European schools started their programs much later, there was already a whole set of new European as well as American programs to find inspiration from. Variation evolved as the model spread. Also during this process of circulation, while certain aspects of the exemplary model were more or less taken for granted, other aspects had been translated or edited so that it was no longer clear which model to imitate. Still MBA was perceived as an American education model, but at this time several European constructions of this American model had developed. By extending this study to involve more programs, also those that have started much later and those that have started after initiatives taken from EU and other international organizations to fund new programs, we could learn more about the various phases in the spreading of the model. One could for example expect that as the model has become more well known and spread, again there is a tendency that more homogeneous expectations about what an MBA is have evolved and, thus, more model elements may be attached to the label with less space for local translation. These late adopters may be expected to be similar, not because they copy the same model, but because similarities have been constructed in the diffusion process.

Some of the later programs have started as a result of financing offered from EU and others, and many of the later adopters have had access to several presentations, comparisons and evaluations of existing programs. Many of these comparisons and evaluations are made by independent organizations, by mass-media etc. It is not uncommon to find descriptions and ratings of MBA-programs in journals, newspapers and special reports, on the national as well as the European level. Via such comparisons and evaluations a standardized model of (a European) MBA evolves. There are also a number of networks as well as standardizing bodies in America as well as in Europe. A number of programs have been accredited during the last couple of years, and in order to be accredited the programs have to meet a number of prescribed criteria. Thus there are a number of potential regulators in the field. In order to understand the diffusion of MBA-programs as well as the development of management education in general it seems to be of crucial importance to learn more about these potential regulators and how they edit the circulated models.

One could also speculate whether the early adopters change as a result of the later adopted programs, either by learning from them or by reacting against them. In this study, the early adopters have several times emphasized that they are no "standard programs", but that they are different and much better than

the "less serious" copies of MBA-programs that have started in all sorts of places. As the label has become so wide-spread it seems as though the early adopters seek ways to maintain a unique position and to distinguish themselves from the many late adopters. Another question related to this issue, concerns the relation between the American and the European programs. We have speculated about the fact that early European adopters may be affected by the later adopters. As the label diffuses and many new programs start, the old and more established programs seek ways to distinguish themselves from the rest. One such way of distinguishing themselves is through accreditation and standardization. Another way is to organize exchange programs and the like between certain schools, at the same time excluding others (see Brunsson and Jacobsson 1998 for similar arguments and examples). A comparison between European and American programs could show whether this is true for American programs in relation to programs in the rest of the world as well. Have American MBA programs changed as a result of the circulation of the model around the world or have they more or less remained the same?

There are more questions to raise regarding forms of regulations in these cases. We have stressed that MBA is not a protected or state regulated title. Even in educational systems that are in general subject to state control and state supervision, MBA programs are not subject to such forms of control. The MBA programs are found in some kind of a grey zone between state control and lack of it. Thus these programs are certainly interesting cases when it comes to questions about the limits to state control, how educational institutions handle state control and the lack of it, and finally how boundaries around the state seem to be drawn right in the middle of a management program.

In this paper we have focused on the diffusion of MBA programs throughout Europe. The many MBA programs, and the whole field of organizations surrounding them, also form channels through which management ideas are circulated. In the wider picture the diffusion of MBA programs is part of, and could be seen as a driving force, towards wider spreading of management ideas. Further studies could indicate whether the MBA programs form such channels through which management ideas spread. Do these programs have an impact on other educational programs? And how do they affect the participants, and management in those companies where these participants work? We have shown that on the one hand it seems that the adoption of MBA-labels does not mean that identical models are being adopted everywhere, but there is space for translation and local adaptation. When adopting this label, however, it might be the case that universities as well as participating companies and students take part in establishing channels through which further homogenization may evolve. One may in this context ask how and where variation can be created?

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