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**External influences and local responses.
Changes in Polish higher education 1990-2005**

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During the last two decades, higher education in Poland has undergone substantial changes. This study focuses specifically on the timeframe 1990-2005, as this was a period in which the higher education system in Poland was heavily impacted by external influences. This timeframe is marked by two major events - approval of the Laws on Higher Education by the Polish Parliament, first in 1990 and last in 2005. The years between 1990 and 2005 saw the Polish higher education system experiencing a struggle between an expectation to adopt Western European model(s) of governance (analogical to the economy and political system) and the aspirations of the academic community to restore the mythical concept of the university as the ivory tower.

Transformations in Polish higher education were also part of a much grander agenda of socio-economic and political changes. After the communist regime was brought down in 1989, a number of institutions had to be reinvented or simply restructured. Indeed, after 45 years of political, economic and semi-cultural isolation, Poland opened up to the external (i.e., western European) world. Immediately, Poland demonstrated a strong aspiration to become part of the European community. Leaving the Soviet Block, Polish higher education was exposed to the intensive processes of Europeanization in various fields. At the same time, higher education in particular experienced growing internationalization. However, transnational pressures to restructure higher education are not unique to post-communist Poland, as it has been widely acknowledged that globalization is deeply affecting various aspects of higher education worldwide (Scott 1998; Beerkens 2004; Deem 2001; Enders 2004, Teichler 1999). In referring to the process of Europeanization, I will employ the definition given by Claudio Radaelli, who defines it 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 in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies (Radaelli 2003: 31).

When considering Poland's role in the European Union, one must remember that the European Union was formally established in 1993, but Poland did not join until nearly nine years later.

Yet it also is fair to say that Poland began negotiations for an association agreement in late 1990, and about a year later, on 16 December 1991 the European Union Association Agreement was signed by Poland and came into force on 1 February 1994. Since 1989, Europe (as symbolic value) and the European Union (as a political actor) have been important points of reference for Poland, since both have had formal and informal influence on the Polish transformation. Higher education in Europe operates under national legislation and national governments have the formal authority to shape higher education policy. The European Union has limited power and authority to steer higher education and therefore must rely on soft coordination; but for developing countries like Poland from 1990-2005, the EU became a major point of reference and one that Georg Herbert Mead said "generalized others" (Strang and Meyer 1993). Jürgen Enders (2004: 361) also highlights a number of different trends under the general headings of "internationalization" that have begun to challenge a dominant position of the nation state.

In addition, since 1990, the process of internationalization of higher education has accelerated prompting changes in two different dimensions (Teichler 1999): (a) a broad scope of border-crossing activities that resulted from intuitional, rather than governmental, initiative, and (b) trends toward internationalization, regionalization or globalization of the actual substance and structure of higher education. As Urlich Teichler (1999) and Philip Altbach noted:

> Perhaps at no time since the establishment of the universities in the medieval period has higher education been so international in scope. Internationalization is a key part of the future, and higher education is a central element in the knowledge-based global economy. (2001: 240)

The included literature review provides additional perspectives for understanding the impact of transnational trends on national systems of higher education. The review also represents different views on the development of modern higher education. Massimiliano Vaira (2004:496) illustrates various views on this development by referring to the difference between seeing *the forest, the trees or both?*" This paper aims to explore the influence of the Western world on transforming higher education in Poland. The first perspective the paper will examine is often called "world polity" (Thomas, et al 1987) but it also exists under other names, such as *convergence theory, globalization from above perspective, top-down macro process* (Vaira 2004). World polity is an "overreaching ontological and symbolic normative cathedral" constructed at the supra-national level which creates an agenda, or an account of legitimate actions (Thomas, et al 1987: 95). This perspective views higher education as facing growing political, economic and institutional pressure to evolve toward some kind of institutional uniformity. Each national context is expected to adopt a similar institutional order and policy

model. The pressure, or expectation, comes from transnational organizations, agents of world polity, such as OECD, IMF or the World Bank (despite their different agendas) that – to avoid complexity – make attempts to define the appropriate and legitimate form of higher education. This perspective provides a theoretical background to explore the absorption of ideational contents by higher education institutions, as it expects organizations to adapt trends and to respond to external constraints and normative pressure by structural adaptation and imitation (DiMaggio, Walter and Powell 1991). It is based on the assumption that transnational processes push individual higher education systems in the same direction and force them to converge to the appropriate (effective and efficient) proposed model. Torben Heinze and Christopher Knill (2008) distinguished two fundamentally different models of convergence: vertical (sigma convergence) and horizontal (delta convergence). The first model refers to a situation in which a domestic structure becomes more similar to a specific model, whereas the second one fits a situation in which several domestic structures become more similar over time.

 Further, world polity involves vertical convergence, in which the power of world polity is strong and becomes a driving force for change, either through growing normative and mimetic pressure or through a process of *policy borrowing* across nations (Halpin and Troyna 1995). World polity theorists, such as John Meyer, John Boli or Francisco Ramirez claim that a national system of higher education evolves in a similar direction "by gradually acquiring common characteristics as the trends push them towards a common model" (Bleiklie 2007: 395). A number of scholars have also shed light on transnational trends in higher education, seeing them as the *world society* at work. They often refer to the growing mobility of students, the standardisation of research grant applications and the harmonisation of teaching through the Bologna. They all aim to establish a European standard in higher education and within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They emphasise that national systems should acquire a number of common characteristics that none of them had before and, hence, this contributes to growing isomorphism (DiMaggio. Walter and Powell 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Thomas, et al 1987).

The second perspective is often called *path dependency* (Arthur 1994, Mahoney 2000, Boas 2007). However, it has been argued that there is a strong tendency towards normative concepts of higher education offered by transnational organizations such as OECD, IMF, EU UNESCO and the World Bank. Unlike the convergence theory, path dependency views these norms and ideas as having been translated, developed and implemented in highly institutionalized environments. Substantive analyses of path dependent sequences offers explanations for particular outcomes, often "deviant outcomes," "exceptionalism," or in general for outcomes that

have been predicted by theory, but for various reasons did not occur (Mahoney 2000: 508). These types of local peculiarities, such as norms, traditions and range of local or national peculiarities, produce *path dependencies* (Musselin, 1999; Bleiklie 2001, Kogan et al 2006). They filter transnational concepts or ideas such as *mass model of higher education* or *entrepreneurial university* through local values, norms, or institutional settings and fit them into national institutional contexts (Bradley et al. 2000, Hirst and Thomson 1996). This phenomenon has led to growing diversity among higher education systems across the world. In other words, the translation of ideas and institutions has such a strong impact that outcomes in different countries vary significantly.

Nevertheless, there are also attempts to reconcile these seemingly opposed – concepts, one of convergence and the other of divergence. Indeed, there is a third perspective, based on Teichler's (2007; Kehm and Teichler 2006) observation of the process of implementation in Bologna. Teichler's observation led to interesting conclusions, namely that higher education systems have become structurally similar; however the link between structural characteristics and the content remains loose and not that obvious. An example of structural homogeneity and diversity of content comes from the Bologna Process. Research conducted by Sarah Guri-Rosenblit, Helena Sebkova and Teichler (2007) shows that the Bologna Process made a significant contribution to the harmonization of structure in European tertiary education. This was done through the introduction of the three cycle system and the diffusion of the credit transfer system (ECTS), but a uniform structural framework hides very different content.

Regardless of the perspective, the impact of the transnational script is relatively easy to spot and track in developing countries that aspire to become a member of an elite club, such as the European Union. In most cases, the accession is a long process of adaptation of certain values and building institutions that involve a roadmap to obtaining formal membership to international organizations such as the EU or the Council of Europe. Sometimes, however, the process can be less formal (but not less important) if a country wants to become modernised and (even more important) seeks to be politically recognised as such.

Opening to Western Europe

After communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed in 1989, the new post-communist governments embarked on a wide range of reforms that mostly had a neoliberal flavor. Since then, the transition from communism to capitalism and from totalitarian regimes to democratic governments has been widely contemplated. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that the transformations in Poland are still ongoing and frequently generate heated debate and even

controversy concerning both process and outcomes. Hence, it makes the transformation a very attractive topic of analysis and a great deal of literature has been produced on the subject (e.g., Domański i Kozłowski 2007, Balcerowicz 1997, Kozek and Morawski 2005; Blok 2006; Mach 1999). Additionally, there has been widespread discussion on diffusion and neoliberalism but little has been done on the impact of the diffusion of western European norms, values and institutions in Central and Eastern Europe. Based on the western European script, social values, norms and institutions (e.g. the free market economy, democratic political system) can be defined as those adopted by the CEE after the fall of the communist regime. However, analysis with this focus excludes the field of higher education policy regardless, as Raymond Morrow and Carlos Torres (2000: 44) noted, "perhaps no place has been more subject to these processes of internationalization and globalization than university." Thus, the study of the impact of world polity on Polish higher education seems to be both an interesting and important subject to focus research attention.

Similar studies on education have been conducted with regard to other parts of the world, such as Latin America (e.g., Torres 2002), Africa (Teffera and Altbach 2004) and Asia (Pretorius and Xue 2003). However, the process of westernising Polish (and Eastern and Central Europe) higher education is mostly the subject of policy papers produced by transnational organisations, such as the EU, that are viewed as agents of world society (Meyer et al 1987). As Voldemar Tomusk (2003:17) points out "(…) many of the recent reports concerning East European higher education reforms focus on successfully copying one or another Western like structure(…)" For the purpose of this analysis, I propose to focus on the timeframe 1990-2005 because it is a completed period. The transformation of Polish higher education began in 1990 with the introduction of a new law of higher education (12/09/1989) that, to date has been the most adventurous and radical change in Polish higher education since the beginning of political and economic transformation. The 2005 passage of the new law through parliament and the government also held symbolic meaning for higher education in Poland, as it represented elected officials re-gaining some form of control in higher education.

A starting point of this analysis is an assumption that, after the great success of the Solidarity Revolution, Poland moved towards a western direction without much consideration of alternative options, such as following the socio-economic model of Ordoliberalism advocated by Ludwik Erhard, or the autocratic political model applied in Chile. Yet, values, norms and institutions that operated in western countries (both the U.S. and Europe) often existed under the general heading of "western institutions" and the process of adopting them was called "westernisation." Clearly, the question about taking a western direction is a subspecies of a more

general theoretical question about the causes of isomorphism in organisational fields (DiMaggio, Walter and Powell 1991). The western script – that is sometimes seen as "coercive" or "normative" - was generally seen not only as a choice but an incredible opportunity that simply must be taken.

In 1989, when the great change was taking place in Poland, the geopolitical situation of Poland did not leave room for much choice, because in a world of clear divides it is difficult to be somewhere in-between. Leaving the Soviet bloc was a strategic move for the Polish government and joining Western countries seemed to be the only alternative. Therefore, one may assume that the fall of the Iron Curtain gave Poland an opportunity to determine its own political and economic future; however, in reality no other serious alternative could be considered. Poland's decision to move in a western direction was explained by Michał Federowicz (2004: 25) as "the region (CEE) was isolated and the nature of its political and economic institutions was based on neglecting liberal values and democracy. Anticommunist transformation was meant to restore both liberal values and democracy as fundamental values of emerging order."

For the Poland that had remained behind the Iron Curtain, the great change of 1989 had several dimensions (Domański, Kozłowski 2007). One of the key dimensions was to open up to the external world, as the countries in the Soviet bloc had remained in political, cultural and economic isolation. It was not isolation in a literal sense, but relations with the world outside of the Soviet bloc were limited and controlled by the Communist Party (PZPR). International relations and various exchanges in political, cultural and economic arenas were largely limited to countries within the Soviet bloc. The symbol of divide between the so-called West and East was the Berlin Wall. For countries such as Poland, the world beyond the Berlin Wall was generally referred to as the West. Clearly, this was a slogan, descriptive with a naive emotional meaning attached that referred to a nonexistent society. It was a biblical New Jerusalem for the oppressed Polish society. The myth of the West resonated with anti-communist ideology and fueled attempts to break the regime. The West was linked to political and economic freedom and to the wellbeing of a society. Therefore, it was not a surprise that the first democratic government automatically took the western direction and wanted Poland to become a part of the "better world." A symbolic declaration of these aspirations was made by Poland's democratically-elected Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki (in office between August-December 1989) who – during his exposé to the parliament – identified major aims for his government by saying, "We would like to open Poland for Europe and the world. Full and correct development in all aspects has been disabled by irrational moves. We must make up for lost time, in particular in developing our relations with EEC and USA and other strong economies." This shift towards

western concerns was stable, despite growing dissatisfaction with rising unemployment, and it was confirmed by Prime Minister Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (in office from January to November 1991). Prime Minister Bielecki made the following statement Poland's regarding new relationship with the West: "Our strategic aim remains to be full membership in international associations. The Council of Europe in Strasburg will still be a place for our intensive cooperation with other European countries. Accession to the Council of Europe required holding a democratic election. But we will develop our relations with other European organizations." Obviously, in the beginning of 1990s, accession to EU or NATO appeared to be more wishful thinking than reality. There should be no doubt that a strategic goal of Polish policy aims to join major transnational organizations, such as the EU or NATO. The first aim was to join the Council of Europe, which at that time could provide extra security measures in an unstable region. This union was very much expected, because at the time a large number of Red Army soldiers still camped in Poland with no real plans to return home.

To sum up, from the very outset, Poland demonstrated an aspiration to join the West. Unstable political and military situations in the region left Poland almost no choice. Working with the West was much more than a political choice; it was an historical window of opportunity that many Polish citizens felt needed to be taken. Therefore, accession to transnational organizations such as the Council of Europe and the EU or NATO became, while at times unrealistic, obvious goals for the Polish government.

2. Polish transformation – external condition of changes in higher education

The year 1989 was not only a great moment and a turning point in Poland's modern history, but it also marked the beginning of a long and much wider process of cultural and institutional change, particularly in politics and economics. In the political realm, the process of change began on 4 June 1989 with the first quasi-democratic parliamentary election, in which 35% of the seats in the lower chamber of the parliament, and 100% of the seats in the higher chamber, were to be democratically elected. The remaining seats (65% of the seats in the lower chamber of the parliament) were reserved for the Communist Party and its acolytes. This ended the monopoly of the Communist Party (PZPR). The process of democratisation was steady but gradual and occurred through the adoption of the following western democratic standards and institutions: (1) The introduction of the rule of law; (2) free and democratic elections (3) the Montesquieu model of separation of power and responsibility. These standards were regulated by the so-called "Little Constitution" of 1990, which disseminated the balance of power between different actors. In the same year, the first democratic local elections were held. One year later

the first president was elected and in 1992, fully democratic elections took place. The process went smoothly with only occasional political turbulence produced by political clashes between numerous political parties in the parliament. Various institutional arrangements from different European countries were applied in Poland, but lacked democratic tradition. The process of westernisation in politics also covered other aspects on Poland's affairs, such as regulation of the relationship between Poland and the Roman-Catholic Church as well as civil control over the Polish army (1989).

The transformation of the Polish economy did not occur in a vacuum. Therefore, attention needs to be drawn to the context of transnational changes in the western economy of the 1980s. The western economies were in the middle of an economic crisis, which pushed them to employ radical measures (such as New Public Management), introduce austerity plans and maintain close control of inflation. These measures were accompanied by the extensive privatisation of the state's own industry. As Federowicz (2004) noticed, it is worthwhile to consider the question, 'what would have happened if the Polish transformation took place in the middle of 1970s?' The economic "script" was written by advocates of Keynesianism who – unlike monetarists - see a large role of government and the public sector in the economy. Nevertheless, in the beginning of the 1990s, the economic script was changing and was re-written by neoliberal economists form the University of Chicago who were linked to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Therefore, economic reforms in developing countries were set to follow a neoliberal model as a result of coercive pressure enacted by international institutions such as the IMF or World Bank; in particular, the IMF binds its financial loans to its requirements. For Poland, it was an obvious goal to become a modern civilised country and (even more important) to be politically recognised as such. It was also important as the country struggled to maintain its reputation as having a stable economy. For example, in 1989, Poland had to pay back 40 billion USD as being considered a solid partner became an issue of great importance. Otherwise, it could have become difficult for Poland to negotiate the reduction of Polish debts (e.g. with the Paris Club and London Club) or postponing repayment of loans. The only way achieve a strong reputation was to follow a certain path required by the IMF and apply all of its recommendations. In the beginning of the 1990s this was relatively easy to do because, in the public discourse, capitalism appeared to be a coherent concept. Its great diversity, sometimes even contradictory models and cultural differences were largely absent in public debate (Hall, Soskice 2001). Therefore, adopting a radical and neoliberal model of economic reforms (also called "shock therapy") was explained by Glasman (1994) as "solidarity" but was not able to defy the dominant paradigm of political, social and economic development that was promoted by international organisations.

However, Tadeusz Kowalik (2000) claims that this explanation is too trivial to explain why Poland took such a liberal direction with economic reforms, but he agrees that the IMF had a profound influence on the Polish government, noting that its experts (such as Jeffrey Sachs) were directly involved in setting and incorporating the agenda of economic reforms. Therefore, it was diffusion along the nodes of a network (Bockman and Eyal 2002: 310), rather than a tutor and pupil-based relationship (Jacoby 2001:169).

The application of economic reforms in Poland could best be described using the claim made by David Strang and Meyer (1993) that theorists may become central conduits of diffusion. An example of this is the members of Harvard's Economics Department, who were active in promoting Keynesian fiscal policy and also helped to spread Keynesian policies throughout much of the post World War II world (while serving as experts) (Strang & Meyer 1993: 498). Therefore, it is probable that a similar role was played by Deputy Prime Minister, and respected liberal economist, Leszek Balcerowicz, who was closely associated with the Chicago School of Economics. Kowalik claims that the so-called *Balcerowicz's Plan* was first approved by the IMF and then put into action by the Polish Ministry of Finance. He refers to a document that stated, "The government will submit reform plans to [the] IMF which opens a door to the final stage of talks which will lead to agreement and approval by the board of IMF. This agreement will not only help to have access to international loans of IMF and the World Bank but also strengthen a position of Poland in negotiation with other creditors" (Kowalik 2000: 285).

Kowalik – who was consistently very critical towards neoliberal reforms and the notion of "shock therapy," – admitted that it was not wrong to cooperate with international economic experts, but that sending governmental documents to international organizations for approval must raise some doubts. Therefore, there was no need to use coercive pressure from the IMF or WB because the Polish government voluntarily implemented all demands of international organizations and imitated the institutional structure of the most developed countries. Thus, it is necessary to underline that in both a political and economic sense, taking a western direction with reforms was much more than a political choice. Yet, joining Western Europe was a clear goal for the first Polish governments, as was publicly declared by the first two prime ministers in their exposes to parliament. In a political sense, it was not a controversial move, either in terms of values or institutions, even if the latter were products of political bargaining between different political actors. In an economic sense, Poland adopted reforms approved by the IMF and World Bank (mainly) because of foreign loans. Poland had no choice but to imitate/incorporate the institutional structure of the most developed countries, and this process was very straightforward. It must also be highlighted that there was no need for coercive

pressure, because the Polish governments took these routes voluntary, with great assistance from IMF experts. However, it is also important to note that opening up to the West initiated a wide range of changes. Some of these changes were derived from institutions in the world polity, such as power sharing in a political system market economy.

Polish higher education under the communist regime

Just before the transformation had begun, Polish higher education contained a number of ideologically driven characteristics. Poland shared these characteristics with other Soviet bloc countries, but despite these ideological peculiarities there were striking differences between them in both structure and content. Even the process of employing academic ideology varied from country to country, but as Jan Sadlak noted, "higher education was made an integral part of the political system through subjecting essential decisions to the party's ideological and political objectives" (1991:402) After 1945, Polish higher education was caged in a form of political isolation that had an impact on higher education institutions. Yet it would be too far of a stretch to compare it with a concept of isolation of an *unknown island,* as proposed by neoinstitutional thinkers (Meyer et al 1997). In this context, the Polish higher education could be defined instead as part of an *isolated archipelago* that was placed on the periphery of world science and higher education, having only limited (and controlled by the Communist Party) contact with the world beyond the Iron Curtain. Scholars such as Tomusk (2003) tend to downplay differences between higher education in the Western world and the Soviet bloc, but his conclusions more accurately reflect his strong criticism toward recent developments in western higher education than those coming from comparative systematic studies. However, a number of systematic studies conducted in Poland by established scholars, such as Piotr Hübner (1992, 1994, 1997), Elżbieta Wnuk-Lipińska (1996) and Ireneusz Białecki and Joanna Sikorska (1995), leave little doubt as to the significant difference between higher education in the West and the Soviet bloc.

The postwar political indoctrinations were carried out through the presence of the Communist Party at the universities, which had a profound influence on almost all major decisions made at universities. Thus, university governance was driven by ideological ends. When referring to the notion of "governance," I will use Eurydice's (2008:12) definition, which refers to "the formal and informal exercise of authority under laws, policies and rules that articulate the rights and responsibilities of various actors, including the rules by which they interact." A number of comparative studies on higher education governance are based on very similar definitions (Clark, 1983; de Boer, et al., 2006; Eurydice, 2008; Leisyte, 2007). Wnuk-Lipińska (1996) claims that higher education institutions were the subject of centrally planned coercive changes in structure,

model of governance, management and purpose of existence. The communist system aimed at weakening universities by disintegration of research and teaching. The Polish Academy of Science was established in 1951 and is a prime example of higher education under this ideology, as it became part of a system in which research, innovations and education were separated from each other. Higher education institutions were primarily responsible for education with only minor emphasis on research.

The higher education system was operating under control of the communist party. This control was reflected in all levels of higher education governance. Limited autonomy of Polish universities was caused by an authoritarian/totalitarian communist regime, based on proletariat ideology and which kept a low number of students due to ideological motives. The socialist idea of university was meant to help support a specific model of society and to fit into the structure of a socialist state. In this way, higher education became an integral part of a socialist system subordinated to central political, economic and cultural plans. By enrolling students from working class and peasant families, they embodied the ideological principles of communist ideology and educating new social and political elite were important goals of higher education institutions, and in particular, of universities (Szczepański 1954). On an institutional level, the spirit of the regime was also present. Universities were stripped of their autonomy, or rather, stripped of the authority of self-governance. The university governance system was based on the power of individuals (deans, rectors) who were appointed, not elected. They also exercised greater power over the collegial bodies, such as the faculty, board or senate. However, Julita Jabłecka (1994:14) finds that that, during periods of time when the political line in the country became more restrictive, the power of deans and rectors increased the expanse of collegial bodies. Yet the members of the latter were appointed, not elected. In addition, the academic bodies (senates) were shaped by the central level (the minister) and professors were appointed by a higher authority. However, Wnuk-Lipińska (1996) claims that appointed deans and rectors were involved in double loyalty – to their appointers and to the academia of which they remained a part.

Professionally, ideological forces within the university did not manage to prohibit Polish academics from cooperation with their colleagues from the West. They tried to spend their sabbaticals in western universities and to take full advantage of western fellowships; but one should remember that access to these opportunities was very limited and fully controlled by the state. The state controlled academics by taking their passports and by grounding those who were

ideologically suspicious. Well-educated people were often seen as one of the most rebellious groups that could potentially destabilise the political system. Therefore, universities were seen as places of potential threats to the stability of the regime since they housed individuals who enjoyed a certain degree of professional independence.

To conclude, higher education in communist bloc Poland was shaped by the communist regime at all levels of governance. Universities enjoyed limited autonomy and were set to deliver ideologically-driven goals established by the authoritarian state. Therefore, it should not be taken as a surprise that establishing institutional autonomy (defined as self-governance) and lifting administrative barriers that limited access to higher education became major goals as Poland regained political independence.

Higher education and public policy

In western countries, the postwar order in higher education was created from a number of autonomous higher education institutions. This new direction was rightly identified by Michael Shattock (1996), who summarised the direction of change in British postwar higher education policy as a process of diminishing the individual approach to universities in favor of the systems of universities. Yet Shattock was not the only one who identified the growing pressure towards building national systems of higher education. Ivar Bleiklie (2007: 392) noted that "it has come to be regarded as a specific kind of activity but as a higher education system within which institution (university, college) should contribute to the successful operations of the system as a whole." This new direction was accompanied by political attempts to regulate all types of higher education institutions into one legal and administrative framework.

Most public policy of western countries focuses on creating an educational approach that works for a majority of higher education institutions. In other words, a university policy is often the result of a larger public policy system. Hence, incorporating higher education into the public policy agenda raised the importance of *macro steering* in order to increase efficiency in teaching and research. Another idea that has contributed to shaping high education policies is that national and international higher education regimes (should) increasingly shape and standardise the conditions under which universities operate in order to achieve political goals *(*Bleiklie & Byrkjeflot 2002, Kogan et al. 2006). The outcomes of incorporating higher education policy into a wider public policy agenda make the first more vulnerable to any political turbulence on the national and international level. In the 1980s, (and to some extent later) higher education in the West consisted of a number very different national systems that were structured and organised

according to various sets of rules. Kivinen & Rinne (1991) identified three main different models of higher education policy, and Polish scholar Maria Wójcicka (et al 2002) underlines that a great scope of diversity in European higher education policy was very typical in the 1980s. It is hard to sketch the western model of higher education and higher education policy, but at least the direction of reforms was similar. Reforms aimed to give up direct and administrative control over the processes of research and education, and instead worked to employ more gentle, indirect and effective instruments to evaluate the outcomes. This was supposed to help *get more for less* as political pressure grew for the public sector to become more effective, efficient and economic. Most European higher education systems were experiencing dynamic turbulence due to serious cuts in public spending and austerity plans (Scott 1995). These systems also had to respond to a liberal U-turn in public policy in the late 1980s. The postwar welfare state, with its own concept of higher education policy, was already a thing of the past; but the emerging entrepreneurial model of the evaluative state was still very much an incomplete project in the beginning of the 1990s (Enders and Fulton 2002). These reforms were conducted under different names, such as "managerialism" (Henkel 1997), "new public management" (Pollitt 1993), or *"the evaluative state"* (Neave 1988). Marek Kwiek summarises it as follows:

> The social conditions had changed considerably: the post-war social contract was related to an industrial economy in a period of considerable growth; the male bread-winner model of work was changing; closed, national economies with large national competition for investment goods, products and services were becoming internationalized; the marriage of the nation state and the welfares-state was under pressure, and so forth. The social agenda of the 1980s and 1990s changed radically; after the politics of the golden expansion, European welfare states have been shaped by what Paul Pierson (2001), a Harvard-based political scientist, termed 'politics of austerity.' (2005: 328)

The dynamics of change in western higher education were heavily contested by Polish academics, and hence reforms were introduced largely against the will and interest of the academic community. So, the process of westernising higher education had to be different from steps to westernise the political system and economy. Further, there are at least three major reasons suggesting that education indeed deserves a separate analysis.

(1) Great differences among the western systems of higher education and their dynamic of change made it very difficult to derive anything from "the script" as it remained a work in progress. A Vaira (2004: 488-89) states that "higher education institutions' task environment changed dramatically in last twenty years (…) for the more developed countries this has meant, since the '80s, a deep process of institutional and

organizational change of national higher education sector and organizations." By referring to higher education in the late 80s and early 90s, one can only find shared sets of values that underpinned the reforms.

(2) There were transnational agents that could put political and economic pressure on an individual developing country to incorporate/imitate a certain model (if one existed). The process of internationalising higher education took off (accelerated) in the mid-1990s when, asa part of public policy, and it became a subject of growing standardisation. Gary Room (2000: 105) refers to this process in the following way, that the globalisation of the higher education system is ensuing apace, and that standard-setting at the international level is becoming of major importance. It will thus be argued that, far from this international standard-setting being purely technical in nature, it involves political choices regarding the type of society in which today's young people live as citizens. International agents in the field of education (including higher education) were also associated with the UN, and as such did not exercise any political power. They were nothing more than statistical offices.

(3) In Poland, there was a lack of strong political actors in the field of higher education to plan and introduce deep changes at the policy and institutional level. The ministry of higher education was, and still is, a second-class department for politicians, and is often downgraded and divided into separate offices for research and education. There was also no political power at the top levels of higher education to determine its own policy agenda.

Despite these limits in the western European project in higher education, there was strong political will in parliament to take the best possible advantage of the European institutional settings and apply it in Poland. The most spectacular declaration was made by Senator Stanisław Dembiński (1994: 90) (also a professor of physics at university), who declared that both central institutions and individual higher education institutions should be in contact with Western Europe in order to use existing experience and to be aware of institutional arrangements. He further stated that Poland should also consider establishing an international program that would help to consult, advise and incorporate western reforms in Poland. Yet, when considering all of the limits mentioned above, a transformation in higher education must be linked with ideas rather than institutions. Particularly, two major ideas of European higher education were the most striking and visible from the Polish perspective (a) a mass system of higher education that consisted of (b) autonomy of higher education institutions. In the following two chapters, I will

examine how these ideas have been translated and placed in the context of the peculiar system of higher education in Poland.

5. Academics' translation of university autonomy

In the communist-based past, higher education intuitions were stripped of a significant part of their institutional autonomy. From the beginning of the transformation, the academic community expressed their requests for restoration of traditional university autonomy. They believed that the lack of the autonomy was the most striking difference between Polish and western European standards in higher education. For the academic community, it was absolutely the most important issue that also symbolised the aspiration of the academic community to make Polish universities a part of the West; but the idea of autonomy within a university has been always very broad and complex and remains as a part of academic discourse. Defining autonomy at the university level has also proven to be a problematic task – despite the fact that this is a fundamental aspect of university - because in different national, political and cultural contexts the understanding varies significantly. Regarding these circumstances, UNESCO (1997: 28) proposed a universal definition that describes autonomy as the "degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making by institutions of higher education regarding their academic work, standards, management and related activities (…) and respect for academic freedom and human rights." However - following Joseph Bricall university autonomy can also be *"distinguished from concepts it is often confused with, such as university self-management, collegial governance or academic freedom (…). An academic entity can be autonomous even if its internal decision making is not based on self-management procedures"* (2003: 59).

In the environment of Polish higher education, the autonomy of the university was meant to be a form of institutional guarantee of academic freedom and the complete independence of the academic community from the bureaucratic apparatus and communist officers. It should also be mentioned that traditional university autonomy has always been thought of as one of the key aspects of university tradition. However, it is more a part of academic myth than an element of legislative tradition. Stanisław Waltoś (2009) analysed the history of Polish national legislation in higher education and found that, during the 90 years that the law of higher education has been in place (first legal act passed the parliament in 1921), university autonomy has been limited or eliminated, by a refusal to democratically elect rectors, for as long as 53 years. Yet the myth was so deeply rooted in the community that restoration of university autonomy became a major postulate after the transformation kicked off. It was supposed to be the first major step in adopting western European standards in Polish higher education. During the 1980s, university

autonomy was restored and was largely taken away from the law of higher education. The Act of Higher Education, from 1982, directly dealt with issues of freedom of science and university autonomy in two separate places by saying (art. 2, ust. 3) "higher education institutions are run according to principles of freedom of science and art." Waltoś (2009), however, noticed that the legal act from 1982 did not mention freedom of education, but instead in the first article states that "higher education institutions are units of the state established to conduct scientific research, education and socialist upbringing according to the constitution of the Polish Peoples' Republic." In addition, one must bear in mind that *principles of freedom of science* were just empty words at this time because, during the communist era, each book and paper had to be authorised by the censorship offices (Waltoś 2009: 45). The legal act from 1982 (besides being just a facade) gave the minister responsible for higher education the following powers: (1) veto right (art. 41, ust. 4) if the "wrong" person was elected by the university community and (2) the opportunity to determine the level of enrollment (art. 24 ust. 3). Additional laws in 1985, and later in 1987, returned to the minister the right to appoint rectors of universities. It was only through the transformation of the Polish political system, which led to a quasi-democratic election, that autonomy was granted in the law of higher education; a ruling that was approved by the parliament on 12 September 1990.

However, it should be stressed that – in a comparison to most if not all western countries – university autonomy in Poland really meant self-governance and a ruling position of collegial bodies that were almost completely dominated by academic oligarchy (Clark 1983). The new legal act included the strongly-worded statement that "higher education institutions operate according to the principles of freedom of scientific research, art and education, though it has little value added in a democratic state." However, this legislation restored the power of academic communities to elect their rectors by saying the "rector is elected by collegiums of electors or by senate among people who have a professorship title or doctor habilitus degree, including those who are employed at this HEI" (Chapter 1, art. 60, para. 1). Initiators and authors of these legal changes were prominent representatives of the academic community. They were pushing the government and members of the lower and higher chamber of the Polish parliament to pass the new law of higher education as soon as possible and with total autonomy, which meant complete independence from the state. It is interesting to note that those who were involved in the process of writing a draft law faced heavy criticism from the academic community, who found these regulations insufficient in meeting their demands. One of the key members of the ministry – Tadeusz Popłonkowski (1996: 25) - noted that the academic

community expected to make university an autarkic institution and to protect it from the influence of external actors. The academic community referred to the utopian model of university autonomy as "the ivory tower" that was meant to be based on the power of collegial university bodies over individuals, such as deans or rectors. It also applied tenure for all the academics in higher education. Such a model of autonomy denied any external interference into the university, but such a radical and narrow understanding of university autonomy (as institutional self-governance) was typical for Eastern and central European countries (Canning, Godfrey, Holzer-Zelazewska 2007: 20). As summarized by Białecki and Małgorzata Dabrowa Szefler, "a substantial part, perhaps the majority, of the academic community believes also that the more autonomy for HEI and their staff, the better. In ideological matters, such as self-definition or definition of the institution's mission, autonomy is constructed as delegating all authority to collegial bodies" (2009: 197).

University autonomy was introduced *expressis verbis* to the Polish Constitution in 1997 (art. 70 ust. 5) and fulfilled the most important postulates of the academic community (Gałkowski 2007). The process of establishing autonomy illustrates how important it was for the Polish academic community, in particular for the academic oligarchy that was directly involved in lawmaking. University autonomy was of symbolic value for the advent of the new order. The idea of autonomy was derived from Europe but was translated into the national political context (the communist heritage) and fit into a heavily institutional environment. Due to lack of a strong political actor on the governmental side, followed by a lack of legitimacy of political actors, the process of translation was captured and monopolised by the academic community (or the academic oligarchy), and they were able to push their own meaning/translation of university autonomy. It helped to increase the position of the senior academics, as they were given authority and formal institutional power (majority in all collegial bodies) to run public higher education institutions.

Poland is not an exception in its approach to reforming higher education. The steps taken in Poland could be applied to many post-conflict societies. Torres and Daniel Schugurensky identified a very similar case in Latin America, stating that "a great deal of contemporary university restructuring is largely the result of conscious efforts of specific interest groups to adapt the university to the new era of flexible accumulation" (2002: 434). In conclusion, one can say that despite weak links to legislative tradition in Polish higher education and the lack of clarity as to the exact meaning, university autonomy was one of a few flagship ideas that

westernised Polish higher education. The concept of university autonomy that underpins the western university was incorporated in a very peculiar and narrow shape of *independence from the outside world* and *self-governance*. One can say that the concept of university autonomy was loosely translated to adjust to the national institutional context and – probably most importantly – to meet the demands of "translators."

6. Uncontrolled process of expansion of higher education

The process of massification in higher education is similar in a number of countries, and is especially high in countries linked to the global society. In Western Europe, it was inspired by postwar egalitarian values and ideology, and a feeling of great enthusiasm and solidarity upon which the welfare state was built. In most countries, the belief that higher education should have been defined as a public good and that nobody should be excluded from having access to it, was deeply rooted in society. In contrast to Western Europe, massification of higher education in the United States was based on the idea of private goods (investments) that could be a subject of private and public provisions. Whereas in Western Europe, higher education became a part of public (social) policy with its strong emphasis on egalitarian values, in the U.S., higher education was inseparable of part of a highly competitive and meritocratic (or credential) society. Therefore, American higher education could be characterised by a great institutional diversity and different quality of education. Despite all these differences in both the U.S. and Europe, during the postwar period they shared the trend of raising the number of students in higher education and transforming higher education from an elite model to a mass model (Trow 1973). In this perspective, Poland (similar to other countries in the Soviet bloc) was largely decoupled from the rest of the western world and the percentage of young people entering tertiary higher education – with an exception of 1970s – did not reach 15%; but the system was not very static. Between 1937 and 1990, the number of students in higher education multiplied eight times and the number of higher education institutions rose from 32 to 90. However, the growth of the number of students was disproportional to the demographic high that Polish society experienced during the referred period (Kluczyński 1986). In terms of Martin Trow's typology (1973), the Polish system of higher education before 1989 was defined as *the elite system*, in which less than 15% of each age group entered higher education. It was deeply believed that the expansion of Polish higher education was prevented by ideological principles. The national economy was dominated by heavy industry and mass production with little valued added and – as it happened in the 1970s when a number of students unexpectedly jumped – the economy found it very

difficult to absorb all the university graduates. Wnuk-Lipińska called this phenomenon *the great waste of young talents*.

The process of expansion of higher education that began in Poland in 1990 was very much uncontrolled, both in its dynamic and direction. The lack of steering stems from the fact that public policy in higher education took on a *policy of non-policy* that only responded to changing situations rather than setting and meeting its own goals. The uncontrolled *educational boom* was possible due to the following factors: (a) giving higher education institutions wide autonomy that expanded to university authority to set their own limits on enrollment (b) allowing private higher education institutions to be establish and charge tuition fees for certain education services and (c) allowing public higher education institutions to charge tuition and fees for providing part-time/evening/external education.

The expansion of higher education was possible thanks to legislative changes that lifted bureaucratic and ideological limitations. According to the 1990 Law of Higher Education (art. 15, ust. 1), private higher education institutions could be established by an individual or corporation on the basis of a license granted by the Ministry of Education, after approval from the General Council for Higher Education (art. 15, ust 1). The application should have proven the minimum level of resources in order to establish HEI (Rozmus, Ordon 2009: 61). The requirements were minimal and easy to meet, but nobody really expected a boom in private higher education because of a number of reasons, the primary reason being the miserable state of the Polish economy. Specifically, Sadlak (1991: 409) predicted that "at least 10 per cent of Poland's higher-educational institutions will be closed for such reasons in the next ten years." Yet the reality turned out to be completely different and the number of higher education institutions increased from 90 to 400 in 2005 to meet a skyrocketing demand for higher education. The number of students also increased, from 400.000 in 1990 to almost 2 million in 2005. This increase was truly a fundamental change. Some higher education researchers and social scientists, such as Bronisław Misztal (2000), claim that this extremely liberal higher education corresponded to the liberal, entrepreneurial spirit of the early stages of transformation in 1990. Therefore, a number of researchers, commentators and observers (Pawłowski 2004; Pomianek et al 2004; Misztal 2000, Thieme 2009) viewed this as an integral part of the wider cultural project of westernisation that translated the western values of individualism, entrepreneurialism and free market into higher education. Misztal noted the following regarding this trend:

Perceiving higher education as an investment good is a phenomenon that appears independently from the changes in the law of higher education in 1990, therefore independently from the mushrooming of private higher education institutions. It has direct link to opening Poland to the world outside (the western world) the arrival of foreign companies ready to gratify people for their actual input in work process. (2000: 28)

The growth of educational aspiration and the readiness to increase investments in higher education mirrors the spirit of capitalism and individualist values embraced by post-bloc Poland. This shift also led to the Polish educational boom from 1990-2005 and to the rocketing number of students in private higher education institutions (up to 381,000 in the academic year 2004/2005). Conversely, other researchers see this trend form much wider perspective. Białecki and Dąbrowa-Szefler (2009: 184) claim that the main elements of expansion are as follows: (1) strong growth in student numbers and age-participation rates; (2) privatization of higher education (3) commercialisation of studies; (4) diversification of education models (5) growing contradictions between the tendency for quantitative growth and the need to maintain quality standards are trends observed in Poland and are similar to those observed in other EU countries in the 1980s and even earlier (Clark 1998, Williams 2003). Nevertheless, it remains generally unquestionable that the direction of spontaneous processes had political and public support. For many, perhaps even for a majority, the expansion of the higher education system measured by a continuously growing level of scholarization became a *benchmark of a process of westernization of higher education.* Due to the relatively uncomplicated means of getting data, measuring and making comparisons, the high level of scholarization academia became the most often quoted indicator of the westernisation of Polish higher education and the measure of a flagship success. There was little concern of deteriorating quality, but due to deficits in other comparable data of higher education, the index of scholarization hit the front page. Therefore, according to Misztal, "such a rapid growth of a number of students and the emergence of a mass model higher education from publicly funded social services toward the industry of educational services paid by its users is the most revolutionist aspect of the post-communist transformation" (2000: 23). This quantitative development of higher education remains a symbol of success and shows that Poland is catching up with the rest of Western Europe until (a) the quality standards of teaching in higher education become publically questioned (b) the unemployment rate among the higher educated begins to rise and higher education degrees no longer protect from unemployment, or

(c) the first international university ranking are published showing that top Polish universities are far, far behind their western European competitors. All of these potential issues could raise serious doubts as to the development of higher education.

The expansion of Polish higher education was not the outcome of governmental policy; to the contrary, it was a consequence of a *policy of non-policy* (Kwiek 2008) that left higher education to largely uncontrolled social and economic processes. As Białecki and Dąbrowa-Szefler noticed, "what is needed here is policy direction from the state, up to now, a weak partner in the policy making process during the transformation" (2009: 198).

Similar to the idea of autonomy, the expansion of higher education came to Poland as part of the western European project or western European higher education. During the 15 years of transformation, demand for university graduates has fluctuated with almost no impact on the continuously growing demand for higher education. The lack of strong political actors on the state's side (and also a lack of financial resources) that could direct and control the process of expansion allow the idea of mass higher education to be translated through the spirit of early capitalism. Such a rapid development of the private higher education sector was an unknown phenomenon in the West, but also completely unexpected by both Polish and international experts and public policy makers. One would rather expect the fall of public higher education institutions than the birth of the private one (Bollag 1991: A45, A48). It is interesting to note that nearly every central government wanted to present the educational boom as its own success, the success that has been measured by indicator scholarization netto/brutto, which has been researched at a higher level than in most OECD countries.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to present the logic behind the changes in Polish higher education during the period 1990-2005. The analyses aimed to demonstrate that changes in Polish higher education during the post-communist transformation (1990-2005) did not come from the western European script because it was in a state of intensive change. In addition, the higher education reforms of the 1980s were introduced largely against the will and interest of the academic community. There were loose ideas that underpinned western universities that appear to be shared by most western European countries. The main ideas are the notion of university autonomy and the mass system of higher education, which became a driving force of changes in Polish higher education. Both of these factors were the subject of translation and interpretation,

though dominant values, interests of political actors were incorporated/imitated in a Polish institutional context. Neither university autonomy nor the expansion of the university system was the idea of the government, which over fifteen years remained static or even largely absent. Thus, the academic oligarchy was able to gain a foothold in greater society. Expansion of higher education was accidently sparked by the law of higher education and was subject to uncontrolled processes that either came from the spirit of capitalism or were diffused from western countries The private sector of higher education was an antidote to the collectivist, state owned, egalitarian and bureaucratic higher education system from the past.

The lesson from the Polish transformation is relatively simple but five-fold.

1. In the early 1990s, the western script in higher education was not clear enough to use as a template for setting the reform agenda in a developing country like Poland.

2. Unlike changes in the economy and political system, the transformation of Polish higher education from 1999-2005 was neither determined nor controlled by the state.

3. For almost fifteen years, the government was practically applying a policy of non-policy, leaving the development in higher education alone. As long as the only internationally comparable scale was the level of scholarization and number of students; both were spontaneously growing this kind of *policy of non-policy* was and were politically defendable for external stakeholders.

4. The lack (or weakness) of a state's political actor, which can determine its own policy goals, leaves higher education vulnerable to external pressure (cultural, political, economic) or to non-state actors, mainly interested groups such as academic oligarchy, trade unions or big business.

5. If loose ideas (from the outside) are an inspiration of changes in higher education, the important thing is who does the "translation" of these abstract transnational ideas and who puts them into the local institutional context.

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