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Special Issue on Central and Eastern Education

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Europeanisation and globalisation in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe: 25 years of changes revisited (1990–2015): Introduction to a special issue

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Michael Dobbins and Marek Kwiek

For most countries it is safe to say that higher education (HE) is the segment of the education system which has changed the most over the past 50 years. Expansion, massification, greater female participation, privatization, the diversification of programmes, and more recently internationalization and globalization processes have radically transformed national HE systems. In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), these processes of change have not only been much more abrupt and fast-paced than in the West, but have also run parallel to all-embracing political, economic and social transformations and, in many cases, nation-building. HE policy-makers in the region have been forced to tackle essentially all contemporary challenges confronting western HE systems within a much tighter timeframe and under much greater political and economic strain. HE reform has run parallel to the democratization of political institutions, the introduction of capitalism and, more recently, European integration. To complicate matters, CEE universities simultaneously struggled with the restoration of university self-governance and autonomy, academic freedoms, and the renewal of the academic profession. In numerous cases, HE was also at the apex of complicated national language and identity issues.

Due its turbulent history and present, CEE higher education displays a striking diversity, which reflect nations' diverging pre-communist and communist pathways as well as different contemporary sources of legitimacy. CEE is home to some of the most tradition-rich universities in Europe, including the Charles University of Prague (1348), Jagellonian University of Kraków (1364), University of Pécs (1367), and University of Vilnius (1578). Many others emerged during the era of nationalism and modernization in the eastern Slavic regions (e.g. the University of St. Petersburg, 1724; Lomonossov University, 1755). Nation building in the Balkans was also accompanied by the opening of numerous large universities in the 1800s (University of Belgrade, 1808; University of Iași, 1860; University of Bucharest, 1864; University of Sofia, 1888), many of which were inspired by Napoleonic notions of nationalism.

Characteristic of many CEE universities is their lacking historical continuity and struggle for survival amid territorial shifts. The University of Warsaw is a somewhat extreme example of this.

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Established in 1816 in the Duchy of Warsaw, a Polish state created by Napoleon Bonaparte, the University quickly saw itself in the midst of a struggle for Polish independence against Russian rule. The university was closed after many faculty members and students participated in the 1830 anti-Russian uprising. During a short period of liberalization, Polish academics created a smaller medical college in Warsaw, while departments for law and administration, philology, history and mathematics were added to the so-called *Szkoła Główna* (Main School) in 1862. However, it was once again liquidated during the 1863 uprising, before becoming the Russian-language Imperial University of Warsaw until 1915. The interwar period nation heralded the 're-Polonization' of the University and the establishment of new Polish language universities (e.g. Poznań and Lublin). However, the Nazi invaders explicitly destroyed Polish-language education, forcing Polish academics to operate in secrecy (e.g. 'Secret University of Warsaw'). Following the Warsaw uprising, the Nazi authorities killed scores of Polish academics and destroyed most university buildings (Duczmal, 2006; 935). The hardships continued under Soviet occupation, as the Soviet Army executed much of the remaining Polish intelligentsia during the Katyń massacre (Davies, 1997: 1004–1005).

Under Soviet influence, HE in Poland and all other countries in the Soviet sphere succumbed to the organizational constraints and ideological hegemony of communism. Under communism, the academic landscape became highly centralized and was subject to indoctrination and political repressions. Throughout CEE, research activities were largely removed from universities and transferred to science academies, while universities became chiefly teaching institutions. At the same time, communist regimes pushed to open higher education to working class children and established countless specialized training schools and institutions, often directly linked to factories. This model was perceived as the most appropriate for achieving large-scale industrialization.

In view of this history of conquest, revival, territorial shifts and extreme ideological exploitation of the university, post-communist academics viewed the restoration of universities as a crucial and urgent task for free democratic societies. Since the collapse of communism, policy-makers have thus pursued a myriad of strategies to not only rehabilitate the universities as cornerstones of democracy, but also sustain everyday operations and ensure their institutional survival amid socio-economic turmoil. In many cases, policies were directly aimed at reinvigorating pre-communist traditions and thus restoring historical continuity after the 40 to 50-year communist aberration (for the Czech case, see Dobbins, 2011). In other instances, state and university policy-makers aimed to abruptly eradicate their communist past by actively drawing inspiration from transnational policy platforms. These include, to mention a few, cooperation with the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and World Bank, which provided funding and guidance in the 1990s, while the Bologna Process became an important reform anchor in the 2000s (see Kwiek 2016a).

The fall of communism in CEE triggered massification processes that were accompanied by increasing hierarchical differentiation of HE systems. Specifically, a new institutional type emerged: private higher education. Much of the growth in the 1990s was absorbed by public and private second-tier institutions as well as by first-tier public institutions in their academically less demanding and less selective part-time (and fee-based) studies. Expansion in CEE took place predominantly in specific fields of study such as social sciences, economics, and law. These fields were especially popular as they were cheap to teach and did not require any additional infrastructure or investments. In the expansion period, credentials were more important than rigorous content. The popularity of soft fields was frequently related to their non-existence under communism. Academics from public institutions in soft fields were heavily involved in fee-based teaching in their institutions and in opening, running, administering and teaching in private sector institutions. However, due to declining demographics, the massification period (high and rising enrolment rates) and expansion period (rising student numbers) gave way to the current universalization period (high and stable enrolment rates) and contraction period

(declining student numbers): the increasing pool of prospective students from the past two decades has been shrinking (Kwiek 2013).

In terms of financing, the public sector in CEE is 'truly public' and the private sector, wherever it exists, is 'truly private' (as Levy (1986: 293) referred to Latin American cases), both being close to the public and private 'ideal types' (see Proteasa et al. in this issue). In the region, there is still a sharp divide between public and private institutions, publicly-funded and privately-funded students, public sector students and private sector students, and public and private sources of funding for institutions. The centerpiece of the post-1989 transformations from the public–private perspective was the emergence of the private institutions and the appearance of fee-paying students in the public sector. However, this has been consistently changing in the last decade.

Global assumptions about the ever-growing demand for HE (and constant growth in enrolments) and about the increasing financial pressure to privatize HE do not seem to hold in the region. The new public–private dynamics at work in such countries as Poland, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria suggest opposite processes: privatization has been in reverse, college-age cohorts have been declining for demographic reasons, the overall demand for HE has been declining and there are often more vacancies than candidates in public and/or private sector institutions (Curaj et al., 2015; OECD, 2015).

There are clear public–private distinctions in ownership and resources in CEE: private institutions receive almost exclusively private funding and public institutions receive predominantly public funding (and are entitled to charge fees in most cases to 'part-time' or 'second track' or 'out-of-quota' students; recently also to full-timers, on top of state-subsidized students, as in Romania, or all students, as in Bulgaria, see Andreescu et al., 2012; Boyadjieva and Ilieva-Trichkova, 2015; and Curaj et al., 2015). Increasing public funding is being channeled to the public sector for teaching, research, and infrastructure (especially structural funds for underdeveloped regions from the European Union). Although the volume and destination of public funding for HE (by sector) may change over time, currently it is high and channeled almost exclusively to the public sector. 'Sector-blind' funding is available mostly for research in which public sector academics excel. As prestige is concentrated predominantly in the public sector, the private sector has increasing problems with attracting top students and top scholars. In predominantly 'demand-absorbing' private HE institutions in CEE, the market favours public institutions (Nicolescu, 2007). The role of the 'semi-elite' private sector is restricted to a few institutions, in the midst of an overwhelming majority of demand-absorbing ones. Examples include the Central European University in Hungary, American University in Bulgaria and Uniwersytet Humanistycznospołeczny University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Poland (see Proteasa et al. in this issue on the complete absence of elite and semi-elite private universities in Romania, and Musiał, 2009 on semi-elites in Poland).

HE systems in CEE differ significantly, especially in their university governance traditions, but they all have been heavily influenced by their communist past (see Dakowska, Boyadjieva and Antonowicz et al. in this issue; as well as Dobbins, 2010 and Scott, 2007). Enrolment rates in the early 1990s were low as access was restricted under communism and public funding for educational expansion was not available after its collapse. The growth of the public sector through fees (internal privatization) and the emergence of the private sector (external privatization) was seen as the best approach to system massification under tight budgetary constraints (Kwiek, 2016b). The share of private sector enrolments in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Estonia about a decade ago was the highest in CEE – and in all of them, the private sector has been declining in nominal and proportional terms in the 2010s. Overall, in all four countries, both private sector enrolments and total national enrolments had their peaks in the 2000s; and in the 2010s both the private sectors and the national systems have been systematically contracting. The contraction of the private sector in the last decade has been most emblematic in Romania and Poland, the two biggest systems in CEE:

by 86% and 50% respectively; national systems have been contracting in Romania and Poland as well (by 33% and 28% respectively). Total enrolments in Bulgaria in 2015 declined by 8% since the peak in 2009 and in Estonia in 2015 by 26% from the peak in 2002). Higher education contraction is a rare phenomenon: in most low and upper middle-income countries globally, the dominant feature has been educational expansion (UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2016).

Not least due to the magnitude of the ongoing changes, HE in the post-communist world has been a goldmine for the social sciences. In recent years, *political scientists* have focused, above all, on the effects of Europeanization in the region (see Dakowska and Harmsen, 2015; Leisyte et al., 2015; Zgaga and Miklavič, 2011). In particular, the Bologna Process has functioned as an ‘ice-breaker’, attracting the attention of scholars to a diverse array of developments in the region. Dobbins and Knill (2009), for example, focused on the tensions between transnationally promoted policy models and historical roots of CEE universities and demonstrated that convergence towards market-oriented governance was more sluggish in countries historically more deeply embedded in the Humboldtian university tradition (e.g. Poland and the Czech Republic). These findings were underscored by Pabian (2009), who showed that processes of Europeanization were largely inconsequential for governance structures at Czech universities. Vukasovic (2014) and Klemenčič (2013) have also significantly enhanced research on the region with their focus on the Balkan countries. Vukasovic (2014), for example, shows how policy goals, normative ideals and policy instruments promoted by means of the Bologna Process are translated differently into national contexts depending on the clarity of European initiatives, the resistance of national veto players and the consequences of non-compliance.

Higher education reforms in the region have also been a goldmine for *sociology*. Koucký and Bartušek (2012), for example, examine the impact of socio-economic background on access to tertiary education in Western and Eastern Europe. In doing so, they assess to what extent inequalities are transmitted between parents and children seeking university entrance. While they show that inequality in tertiary admissions and educational attainment has decreased in Western Europe over the past 50 years, the development in CEE was diametrically opposite during some phases. Inequality in tertiary education attainment reached its lowest levels in the 1950s and 1960s, but increased in the 1980s and then peaked in the 1990s. CEE has seen a moderate decline in inequality since 2000, but still lags behind Western Europe in this regard.

Noelke et al. (2012) and Kogan et al. (2012) go a step further and address how new lines of vertical and horizontal differentiation as well as expansion and diversification in HE lead to unequal labour market chances among graduates. The authors show that the occupational specificity of university programmes accelerates the transition to first significant employment. Focusing on the increasing diversification of Ukrainian and Polish HE, Gebel and Baranowska-Rataj (2012) analyze the labour market outcomes of graduates from various programmes, in particular newly introduced tuition-fee programmes and programmes from private providers.

Central and Eastern European academics have undergone a transition from elite, highly bureaucratic and politicized HE systems to mass, more collegial and less politicized systems. Ever more students meant also ever more academics, traditionally less mobile, worse paid and more inbred than their Western European colleagues (Sivak and Yudkevich, 2015; Klemenčič and Zgaga, 2015; Kwiek, 2013). Perhaps the most salient feature of the academic profession in CEE countries was their involvement in the newly emergent private HE sector (from Russia and Ukraine to Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and Estonia), especially in the 1990s and early 2000s: academics, especially in cheap-to-run soft academic fields, were employed full-time in several institutions, public and private, which led to the declining research orientation of HE institutions (as opposed to the sector of academies of sciences in such countries as Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Hungary, often remnants of the communist period, where research dominated and no students were allowed).

As elsewhere in Europe, a tension between globally-connected research-focused ‘internationalists’, most often of younger generations, and teaching-oriented ‘locals’, most often of older generations, has been intensifying across the region, especially following European Union enlargement in 2004 and 2007 (Kwiek 2015a). There has been a series of reforms aimed at aligning HE and research systems towards more internationalized research collaboration and higher internationally visible academic productivity. The idea of ‘catching up with the West’ has been increasingly present in the region together with the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process) and the European Research Area, both used locally to justify mainly the performance-based direction of reforms, as in Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary and Czech Republic (Kwiek, 2016a; Andreescu et al., 2012; Dakowska and Harmsen, 2014; and Pabian, 2009).

The aims of this special issue

This special issue provides a comparative, panoramic overview of the tremendous efforts CEE countries have undertaken to transform their previously ideologically driven, overregulated, inefficient HE systems into innovative conveyers of human capital for the 21st century economy. The authors specifically elaborate on the tensions between internationalization and domestic exigencies, while covering a range of topics spanning the political economy and governance of HE, quality assurance, the transformation of the academic profession to the impact of international rankings and the Bologna Process. The contributions shed new light on previous findings of the past two decades and demonstrate that the saga of HE reform in CEE is still experiencing many new twists and turns. The papers in the special issue can be broken into three broader categories: *governance and internationalization*, *the evolution of the academic profession*, and *HE reform from a political economy perspective*.

Governance & internationalization of higher education

The contribution by Pepka Boyadjieva offers an excellent overview of the situation of Central and Eastern European universities for outsiders by addressing why they tend to be placed low in essentially all international rankings. She identifies numerous structural characteristics of CEE universities which are detrimental to their ranking performance. These include the inherited model of specialized HE institutions and academies of sciences, thus resulting in the weaker position of university research. This is compounded by a large number of small and specialized HE institutions, persistent underfunding and hence academic brain-drain. As for the rankings themselves, Boyadjieva argues that they fail to do justice to the crucial role that HE has played in post-communist societies. They neglect, in her view, some of the key achievements of universities in the region, such as improved access for students from traditionally underrepresented groups, contributions to community development and social justice and, above all, the facilitation of the transition from totalitarianism to democracy through critical thought. In short, she contends that rankings fail to consider the starting position of CEE universities and their key contribution to democratization, fairness and inclusion. Boyadjieva goes beyond viewing HE in CEE in the mirror of global rankings and explores what the absence of HE institutions from the region means for global ranking systems. The developments in HE in the region do not meet the global ranking criteria, especially consequential being those related to research performance as well as prestige and reputation. The author argues that universities in CEE have to build their reputations while struggling with their stigmatized image inherited from the communist past.

The paper written by Dominik Antonowicz, Jan Kohoutek, Rómulo Pinheiro and Myroslava Hladchenko explores how ‘excellence in higher education’ as a global script and policy idea has

travelled and been diffused and translated into various post-communist contexts. The aim for excellence, as declared in the EU's 2000 Lisbon Strategy, heavily draws on global comparisons and university league tables and implicitly defines research-intensive universities as the new global model of excellence. The authors show how these transnationally conveyed ideas and discourses clashed with local dynamics and belief systems in CEE, where large research-intensive universities have been the exception rather than the norm due to historical constraints (see Boyadjieva and Dobbins in this issue). Focusing on the Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine, they address how primarily governmental policy-makers have endeavored to institutionalize this model of excellence through legal tools, organizational instruments and financial instruments. In each case, the idea became entangled in domestic politics and faced resistance from the academic community. In the Czech and Polish cases, the originally promoted global scripts lost their focus and consistency due to academic resistance, while in Ukraine – with a weaker tradition of academic power – the lack of financial resources led to a mere rebranding of universities in line with the excellence rhetoric. Excellence became a fashionable and politically sensitive issue attracting strong media attention. In Ukraine, the change processes were bureaucratized and centralized, while in Poland and in the Czech Republic, the influence of the Humboldtian tradition of academic self-governance was stronger. In all three countries, the central government played a dominant role in promoting excellence.

Gergely Kovats, Balázs Heidrich and Nick Chandler examine the trajectory of HE governance in Hungary, which constitutes a valuable addition to the comparative case studies put forward by Dobbins (2011). Despite its relatively strong Humboldtian foundations, Hungarian HE now constitutes a special case to the extent that – in strong contrast to Poland and the Czech Republic – it has become much more state controlled in the past five to ten years. The authors speak of an 'illiberal U-turn' in 2010. Working with a series of clear-cut indicators reflecting the internal workings of universities (e.g. composition of decision-making bodies, stakeholder guidance, executive strength), the authors show that Hungarian HE has recently been strapped with an array of new state regulations governing university operations. In view of the emergence of national-conservative and populist movements in the region, the question arises whether Hungary is at the spearhead of a previously unanticipated trend away from both Humboldtism and marketization and back towards a steering tradition more prominent in the communist era. The paper can be read in parallel with two other papers dealing with international factors and external influences in HE policies and reforms in CEE (see Dakowska and Antonowicz et al. in this issue; Kwiek and Maassen, 2012).

The impact of international and European trends on academic institutions in CEE, and specifically in Poland and Ukraine, is discussed by Dorota Dakowska. The paper addresses the selective uses of the Bologna Process principles, of recommendations of the European Commission and of international organizations (UNESCO, Council of Europe, OECD, World Bank) in domestic policy-making. The paper also explores the (party) political dimension of recent HE reforms in the two countries and argues that it is important to take into account the national political configuration to examine the extent to which existing cleavages influence the domestic framing of international recommendations. Dakowska reassesses the (party) political factor in reforms and finds Europeanization and internationalization of HE to be neither uniform nor linear processes. She argues that external incentives for HE reforms do not exercise influence per se: they depend on domestic priorities and narratives and take different forms. On the one hand, external pressures provide opportunities to domestic reformers, while on the other hand changing political configurations need to be taken into account.

Viorel Proteasa, Liviu Andreescu and Adrian Curaj explore a specific phenomenon of HE de-differentiation in Romanian HE, focusing on the public-private divide. Specifically, they seek explanations for the complete absence of elite and semi-elite private universities in Romania, in contrast to Poland, Hungary or Bulgaria. The changing public-private dynamics in CEE are

particularly important given a general contraction of the private sector, following demographic declines in such countries as Poland, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria. HE ministers are identified in the paper as prime movers in HE reforms, and the role of their origins being public universities is emphasized. The authors stress the virtual absence of laypersons (that is, non-academics) on institutional boards, in buffer organizations and in various commissions tasked with strategic planning in Romanian HE. The answer to the main question about the absence of elite and semi-elite universities is that the HE system in Romania was institutionalized in ways that restricted systemic differentiation along public–private lines. Traditional universities, following the collapse of communism, stepped in to protect their roles and shares in the educational market using a normative model of the university; private institutions were condemned to an inferior status in the national HE system, following the requirements in newly emerged funding, accreditation and classification systems. As the authors argue, the barriers for private institutions were almost insurmountable and the processes of de-differentiation occurred through the agency of ministers of education and other influential policy- and decision-makers who came almost exclusively from traditional academia.

The academic profession

Maria Yudkevich, Elizaveta Sivak and Marek Kwiek explore changes in the academic profession in Russia and Poland respectively. Maria Yudkevich and Elizaveta Sivak examine the changing attitudes of Russian faculties in the country's two largest cities, St. Petersburg and Moscow. Drawing on two large-scale comparative studies of the academic profession – the 1992 Carnegie Study and the Changing Academic Profession Study (2007–2011) – they assess to what extent academics' attitudes have changed regarding several crucial HE-related issues, spanning the attractiveness of academic careers, the quality of training as well as the model of decision-making and control. Their analysis reveals a mixed bag of constant and changing attitudes. Russian academics still largely perceive the decision-making model as being centralized and lament increasing control by peers, direct superiors, and senior staff amid higher demands for performance. At the same time, the authors determine an increase in research-oriented staff as well as those who do not perceive academic jobs as a personal strain. While most academics still perceive academic careers as less attractive than private sector careers, the number of those regretting their choice of an academic career has changed little since 2012.

Marek Kwiek explores the generational divide in the Polish academic profession using a cohort (or cross-generational) approach: different academic generations – studied quantitatively and qualitatively – have to cope with different challenges, use different academic strategies and perceive the academic enterprise differently. The qualitative material reveals a major intergenerational dividing line between the 'internationals' and 'locals' in Polish academic research production. The all-pervading cosmopolitan/local tension in academia is related to the way research activities are conceived of, to academics' natural reference groups in research, to preferred or expected publication channels, types of conferences, books and journals. Internationalization in research as the centerpiece of ongoing changes started with the reforms of 2009 to 2012 has led to the increasing competition between academics and academic units based on the international dimension of academic work. The generational divide shows that age – or belonging to different academic generations, entering the HE system under different conditions – matters for research role orientation and academic productivity. In a highly criticized current academic world of uncertain norms, the hope for the future tends to be a system of objective measurement of individual research output, or what Kwiek terms 'a dream of meritocracy'. One of the strongest dividing lines reported in the paper is between juniors and seniors, or across academic ranks, and their roles in university governance (see also Kwiek, 2015a and 2015b). The conclusions for CEE are that national academic

recruitment and promotion policies increasingly matter for less research-oriented national systems wishing to catch up with Western European systems: who gets recruited and who is retained in academia (and especially their research attitudes and productivity rates) may define the future distribution of academic research production across Europe. This is highly unfavourable to CEE and reflected in global rankings (see Boyadijeva in this issue) and the distribution of grants from the European Research Council. The winners and the losers of current university funding and governance reforms in Poland, as they emerge in the paper, need to be differentiated to a much greater degree along their academic generations, with different implications for the political economy of HE reforms in different countries, Kwiek concludes.

The political economy perspective

Finally, the contributions by Silvana Tarlea and Michael Dobbins focus on the political economy of HE in CEE. In her comparative analysis of universities and skill formation in Poland and Hungary, Silvana Tarlea focusses on how governments have aimed to facilitate cooperation between employers and HE institutions and specifically how businesses and students are incentivized to invest in HE. Drawing on the 'varieties of capitalism' literature, she demonstrates that different models based on different coordination mechanisms have emerged, resulting in stronger labour market university coordination in Hungary than Poland. Hungarian governments have specifically attempted to build relationships with multinational enterprises to keep graduates in the country by providing them the required human capital through the university system. In other words, policy-makers have promoted 'fit-for-purpose' education in line with skills required by international firms, e.g. Audi. In Poland governments have instead incentivized students, rather than firms to invest in HE, resulting in more general skills tailor-made to the more liberal market economy. Tarlea argues that these strategies are largely the result of political parties catering to their own constituencies, in Poland this being the Civil Platform targeting the urban middle class. In Hungary, by contrast, Orbán's reforms aimed at limiting fresh graduates from working abroad through coordinated skill formation have resonated with national-conservative voters.

The contribution by Michael Dobbins reassesses developments in the governance of HE in Poland and Romania in view of the transformed political economy of CEE. Applying a theoretical framework based on institutional isomorphism and historical institutionalism, he shows that Romania and Poland initially took a markedly different reform path after 1989. Polish HE by and large returned to its historical model of 'academic self-rule' and has resisted pressures for a stronger marketization, even during the Bologna Process, while Romania has been characterized by the early and strong isomorphic orientation towards HE models primarily of Anglo-American inspiration. However, he argues that Europeanization is having a different impact on HE governance than some 10 years ago. He contends that new economic hierarchies in Europe, in which CEE countries are economically heavily dependent on western capital investments, technology and innovations, are compelling CEE countries to re-evaluate their HE governance models. He shows that Poland and Romania are now visibly 're-converging' towards a new hybrid governance model, which combines elements of Humboldtism, state-centrism and market-oriented governance. Specifically, the model aims to (re-)embed the research mission of universities to foster home-grown research and innovations and liberate themselves from economic dependence on the West.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Invisible higher education: Higher education institutions from Central and Eastern Europe in global rankings

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Abstract

The starting point of this study is the argument that not only rankings of higher education institutions (HEIs) are inescapable, but so is the constant criticism to which they are subjected. Against this background, the paper discusses how HEIs from Central and Eastern Europe countries (CEECs) are (non)represented in the main global university rankings. The analysis adopts two perspectives: 1) From the point of view of higher education in CEECs – what are the specificity, basic problems and perspectives of higher education in CEECs as seen through the prism of the global ranking systems? 2) From the point of view of the ranking systems – what strengths and weaknesses of the global ranking systems can be identified through the prism of higher education in CEECs? The study shows that most of the HEIs from CEECs remain invisible in the international and European academic world and tries to identify the main reasons for their (non)appearance in global rankings. It is argued that although global rankings are an important instrument for measuring and comparing the achievements of HEIs by certain indicators, they are only one of the mechanisms – and not a perfect one – for assessing the quality of higher education.

Keywords

Global rankings, Central and Eastern Europe countries, quality of higher education, research performance, criticism

Introduction

In its 2011 report on progress towards the common European objectives in education and training, the European Commission commented on the global rankings of higher education institutions (HEIs) and how European HEIs are ranked. After highlighting the European countries that present

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themselves best, including Germany, Great Britain, Holland and Sweden, the report devoted special attention to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and found that, out of the Central and Eastern European Member States, only Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia had universities in the top 500 (EACEA/Eurydice, 2011: 61). Underlying this comparison is a clear message: the HEIs of Central and Eastern Europe¹ are lagging behind and fail to be competitive, not only at the global level, but also at the European level. Seeking a deeper meaning in the comparison, we may find a long-expressed concern that achieving the goals of European Union (EU) policies in the field of higher education 'may also be particularly challenged by the concurrent enlargement of the EU with 10 new countries in Central and Eastern Europe' (Van der Wende, 2003: 15). There is no doubt that, in the global rankings, the 'old' Europe looks better than the 'new' one. Thus, the presence (or absence) of HEIs in the global rankings raises the obvious question: does higher education in the former socialist countries hold a useful potential for the development of the European higher education area, or does it represent a challenge, and even a threat, to that development?

Against this background, the present paper looks more closely at how HEIs from Central and Eastern Europe Countries (CEECs) are presented, or not, in the main global university rankings: *Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University*, *Times Higher Education World University Rankings*, *QS World University Rankings* and the *CWTS Leiden Ranking*. The paper adopts two perspectives and respectively asks two questions: 1) In the aspect of higher education in CEECs, what are the specificity and basic problems and perspectives of higher education in CEECs as seen through the prism of the global ranking systems? 2) From the point of view of the ranking systems, what strengths and weaknesses of the global ranking systems can be identified through the prism of higher education in CEECs?

The paper shows that most of the HEIs from CEECs remain invisible in the international and European academic world. It argues that these results not only outline the specificity and some of the problems of higher education in CEECs. They also raise some questions that are important beyond their relation to development of ranking systems, such as: How can, and should, quality of higher education be defined? How can the values of diversity, quality and social justice be simultaneously maintained in higher education? How can strategic thinking in higher education be promoted in the context of the daily struggle with financial constraints and bureaucracy?

The paper will proceed as follows. The next step will consist of reviewing the relevant literature on university rankings. Then data regarding the (non)appearance of HEIs from CEECs in global rankings are presented. After that follows a discussion of higher education in CEECs in the mirror of global rankings, and – vice versa – global ranking systems through the prism of higher education in CEECs. The final section of the paper offers concluding remarks.

Is there a paradox here? The inevitability of the highly criticized university rankings

In recent years, the rankings of HEIs, and especially the global rankings, have become an intensely discussed topic. On one hand, there is a generally shared conviction that 'rankings are here to stay' and there is 'nowhere to hide' from them (Hazelkorn, 2014: 23; Marginson, 2014: 45). On the other hand, rankings have been the target of constant criticism (Dill and Soo, 2005; Marginson, 2009; Marginson and Van der Wende, 2007; Teichler, 2011a; Usher and Savino, 2007; Van der Wende, 2008; Van Dyke, 2005). At first glance, this situation appears paradoxical. However, in view of the specifics of higher education and its developments over the last few decades, the appearance of ratings and their constant application is something inevitable, as is likewise the constant criticisms levelled at them.

'If rankings did not exist, someone would invent them'. These are the words of Philip Altbach (2011: 2), one of the best-known researchers of higher education and Founding Director of the Centre for International Higher Education, Lynch School of Education, Boston College. The growing interest in rankings of HEIs and the establishment of increasingly numerous and diverse rankings are an inevitable result of the radical changes emerging in the sphere of higher education in all countries of the world in the second half of the 20th century and especially in the beginning of the present century. The trends in question are (Boyadjieva, 2012; Teichler, 2011b):

- massification of higher education and the growing diversity of students in HEIs;
- the increased competition within national systems of higher education and at international level;
- the internationalization of higher education;
- the commercialization of higher education and the entry of market mechanisms;
- the diversification of institutions offering post-secondary education; and
- the change of status of knowledge in modern societies.

In these circumstances, the potential 'clients' of HEIs, such as students and their families and employers, are seeking information so as to make a better-informed choice amidst the diversity of offered programmes. For its part, every HEI needs common, objective criteria and indicators for measuring its performance in comparison with other HEIs and to ascertain its specific place on the market of education services amidst the numerous institutions that enrich the body of scientific knowledge. Not least, the need for a comparative view of how the different HEIs are functioning is deeply felt at policy level, when concrete higher education policies are grounded and elaborated. That is why 'railing against the rankings will not make them go away' (Altbach, 2011: 5).

Rankings are also linked to the specificity of higher education as an institution. Higher education is defined as a 'fertile ground for rankings', because it is a field in which it is very difficult to define quality, and there are no objective measures explicitly linked to the quality and quantity of its outputs. Thus, it is argued that 'rankings provide a seemingly objective input into any discussion or assessment of what constitutes quality in higher education' (Morphew and Swanson, 2011: 186).

Rankings have emerged as an instrument for the evaluation of HEIs within national systems of higher education. Today, most rankings are at the national level. With the massification of higher education, and especially the unfolding processes of globalization, the need arises for a common comparative assessment of higher education in all countries.

The first global ranking of HEIs was conducted in 2003 by the Institute of Higher Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. The next was that of Times Higher, published in 2004. In the following years, several other global rankings established themselves, including the Leiden University ranking; the Scimago ranking of institutions; the QS world ranking of universities; and the European ranking U-Multirank.

The different ranking systems are based on different kinds of information and data received from different sources. An in-depth comparative study of the six global rankings was published recently (Marginson, 2014). Simon Marginson's analysis shows that there is no perfect ranking, and each of the best known global rankings has its advantages and shortcomings. Nevertheless, the author believes that the practical issue is not how to get rid of university rankings – which is impossible in the foreseeable future – but how to develop rankings so as to minimize their negative effects and have them serve the general interest better in providing the best comparative information (Marginson, 2014: 47).

As soon as they appeared, the ranking systems were subjected to numerous criticisms by representatives of different social groups, and especially by the academic community. To generalize, we may say there are nine major arguments as regards the endemic weaknesses of rankings: (a) the vicious circle of increasing distortion; (b) endemic weaknesses of data and indicators; (c) the lack of agreement on quality; (d) 'imperialism' through rankings; (e) the systemic biases of rankings; (f) preoccupation with aggregates; (g) praise and push towards concentration of resources and quality; (h) reinforcement or push towards steeply stratified systems; and (i) rankings undermine meritocracy (Teichler, 2011a: 62–66). Very importantly, according to many authors, there is an accumulation of biases in rankings. Undoubtedly, global rankings favour research-intensive institutions with strengths in hard sciences, universities that use English, older institutions in countries with long-ranking traditions, HEIs in countries with steep hierarchies and with little intra-institutional diversity (Altbach, 2011: 3; Kehm, 2014; Teichler, 2011a: 67). University rankings are defined as 'unfair' – which is not due to the technique of measurement, but to their usages and the rationale for their existence. Rankings are seen as a driver of 'a market-like competition in higher education' (Marginson, 2014: 47) and as an instrument to 'confirm, entrench and reproduce prestige and power' in higher education (Marginson, 2009: 600).

Hence, not only rankings are inescapable, but so is the constant criticism to which they are subjected. This situation creates a need for careful scrutiny of how HEIs in CEECs present themselves in the world rankings, and especially how world rankings are used to reflect and evaluate, through a comparative perspective, the achievements and problems of HEIs in CEECs. The serious criticisms levelled at world rankings show that they create a somewhat distorted image of universities. Like distorting mirrors, they enlarge certain features, reduce others and make yet others crooked. However, they also allow us to see the situation from different angles. Thus, in most cases, the pictures drawn by rankings are not an occasion for complacency and calm contemplation but for serious reflection, which must not be postponed or underestimated.

The (non)presence of HEIs from CEECs in the global rankings: some facts

Systematized below are some facts about the (non)presence of HEIs from CEECs in the main global rankings, namely in the *Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University*, *Times Higher Education World University Rankings*, *QS World University Rankings* and the *CWTS Leiden Ranking*.

Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University

The Shanghai ranking is based on assessments of achievements in scientific activity using six objective indicators: alumni of an institution who have won Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals; staff of an institution who have won Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals; highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories; papers published in *Nature and Science*; papers indexed in the Science Citation Index Expanded and Social Science Citation Index; and per capita academic performance of an institution.

The analysis of the latest edition of the *Shanghai Ranking*, from 2015, shows the presence of the following universities in former socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (see Table 1).

The data show that the Czech Republic has one university among the top 300; Poland has two universities among the top 400; Serbia has one among the foremost 400; Hungary has two universities among the foremost 500; and Slovenia has one university among the top 500. Not a single university from the other CEECs is present in this ranking.

Table 1. HEIs from CEECs in 2015 Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

Rank	University	Country	Year of establishment	First appearance
201–300	Charles University in Prague	Czech Republic	1348	2003
301–400	University of Warsaw	Poland	1816	2003
301–400	Jagiellonian University	Poland	1364	2003
301–400	University of Belgrade	Serbia	1808	2012
401–500	University of Szeged	Hungary	1581	2003
401–500	University of Ljubljana	Slovenia	1595	2007
401–500	Eötvös Loránd University	Hungary	1635	2003

The ranking by separate fields – science, engineering, life, medicine and social science, which classifies the top 200 – does not include a single university in CEECs. In the ranking by separate subjects – mathematics, physics, chemistry, computer science and economics, and business – Charles University is in the top 200 for Mathematics (151–200) and Physics (101–150), Eötvös Loránd University is in the top 200 for Physics (101–150) and the University of Warsaw is in the top 200 for Physics (151–200).

Times Higher Education World University Rankings

Times Higher Education World University Rankings uses 13 indicators divided into five groups with the following weights: teaching (30%); research (30%); citations (30%); international outlook (7.5%); and industry income (2.5%). For the evaluation of teaching and research, this ranking uses not only objective indicators but reputation survey data as well. It should be kept in mind that the classifications of *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* do not include: i) HEIs that do not teach bachelor degree students; ii) HEIs that teach only one specialty; and iii) HEIs that published less than 1000 indexed articles in the period 2007–2011 (i.e. less than 200 per year).

The latest editions of *Times Higher Education* present only two universities from the CEECs:

- Charles University in Prague: placed 351–400 in the ranking for 2013/2014 and 301–350 for 2014/2015.
- University of Warsaw: placed 301–350 in the ranking for 2013/2014 and 2014/2015.

Times Higher Education has published the so-called *Reputation League Table 2015*. This table presents the 100 most prestigious universities according to the subjective opinion of university teachers and scholars. Despite the subjective basis of selection, these rankings are perceived as a very reliable because the surveyed respondents are reputed members of the academic community with high publication activity; they are assumed to be able to best assess the best universities. In 2015, not a single university from the CEECs appeared in the best 100 universities in this ranking.

QS World University Rankings

QS World University Rankings has been published every year since 2011 and is based on both objective and subjective data. The rankings classify 800 HEIs, while assessing a total of 2000. The

Table 2. HEIs from CEECs in 2015 QS World University Rankings.

Rank	Higher education institution
279	Charles University
344	University of Warsaw
400	University of Tartu
411–420	Jagiellonian University
451–460	Czech Technical University in Prague
501–550	University of Szeged, Vilnius University
551–600	Masaryk University, University of Ljubljana
601–650	Eötvös Loránd University, University of Debrecen, Tallinn University of Technology
651–700	Brno University of Technology, University of Bucharest, Warsaw University of Technology, Comenius University in Bratislava
700+	Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Corvinus University of Budapest, Lodz University, Nicolaus Copernicus University, University of Wroclaw, University of Belgrade, University of Zagreb, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Babes-Bolyai University, West University of Timisoara, Kaunas University of Technology, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Vytautas Magnus University, University of Latvia

rankings classify HEIs as whole institutions, as well as by separate disciplines and faculties. The ranking is based on six indicators which have the following weights: academic reputation (40%); employer reputation (10%); student-to-faculty ratio (20%); citation per faculty (20%); international faculty ratio (5%); and international student ratio (5%).

Table 2 indicates the HEIs in CEECs included in the 2015 edition of *QS World University Rankings*, together with their positions in the rankings.

The data show that Poland is represented with six universities; the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Lithuania each with four; Estonia with two; and Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Latvia with one each. As regards positions in the ranking, the best universities are those in the Czech Republic and Poland.

Leiden Ranking

The CWTS Leiden Ranking ranks universities worldwide. The 2015 ranking includes 750 universities, having the largest publication output in international scientific journals in the period 2010–2013; the ranking is based on data from Web of Science.

Table 3 presents the HEIs in CEECs included in the 2015 edition of the *Leiden Ranking*, as well as their positions.

The data in Table 3 show that Poland is represented with seven universities; Hungary with five; Czech Republic with three; Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Estonia with one each; and the other CEECs included in the analysis have no universities included in the ranking.

Higher education in CEECs in the mirror of global rankings

A mere glance at the data from the four global rankings makes evident that a very small share of the HEIs in CEECs are present there, and with a few exceptions, only in the second half or at the bottom of the rankings. These data show both the specificity of the development of higher education in these countries and the specificity of the rankings themselves. The latter are indicators not only, and not invariably, of the (relatively low) quality of higher education in CEECs, but above all,

Table 3. HEIs from CEECs in 2015 *Leiden Ranking*.²

Rank	University	Country
167	Charles University in Prague	Czech Republic
204	University of Belgrade	Serbia
269	University of Ljubljana	Slovenia
330	Jagiellonian University in Krakow	Poland
341	University of Zagreb	Croatia
461	University of Warsaw	Poland
568	Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań	Poland
584	University of Tartu	Estonia
611	Masaryk University in Brno	Czech Republic
651	University of Szeged	Hungary
658	Wrocław University of Technology	Poland
664	Warsaw University of Technology	Poland
671	University of Wrocław	Poland
691	Semmelweis University of Budapest	Hungary
698	Eötvös Loránd University	Hungary
708	AGH University of Science and Technology	Poland
711	University of Debrecen	Hungary
717	Comenius University in Bratislava	Slovakia
730	Palacký University of Olomouc	Czech Republic
745	Budapest University of Technology and Economy	Hungary

of some important structural characteristics related to the system of higher education in post-socialist European countries and of the problems these characteristics engender.

Recent transformations of higher education in CEECs

There is no doubt that the development of higher education in each of the CEECs has its peculiarities and occurs in different socio-political and cultural contexts,³ which should be carefully analysed and taken into consideration when discussing how HEIs from each of the countries are (not) present in the global rankings. Nevertheless, there are some characteristics which, although to a different degree, outline the specific picture of higher education in CEECs. Following the radical social transformations which took place in 1989 and the early 1990s, higher education in the countries of the former Eastern bloc appeared to be in a unique and highly complex situation. It had to go through two deep changes simultaneously, both of which had essential impact on national higher education systems. The first change was related to the general social transformation of the countries that had been under communist regimes and the concurrent profound change in the principles of functioning of HEIs and regulation of their relations with the state and society. In the same period, the higher education systems in almost all countries in the world underwent major and intensive innovations in response to globalization, internationalization and the increasingly wide dissemination of higher education. As a result, the following significant innovations were introduced in the higher education systems of all CEECs, which caused qualitative changes in their character: i) emergence of the private sector; ii) introduction of new structural elements, such as the three-cycle degree system (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degrees), the credit system and university quality assurance systems; iii) restoration of university autonomy and academic freedom;

iv) the encouragement of mobility of students and staff; and v) introduction of competitive research funding and tuition for students. In all CEECs, the expansion of higher education has led to a transformation of their higher education systems from elitist and unified to diversified systems with broad enrolment. However, the diversification and liberalization of higher education have followed different patterns: Poland and Estonia introduced very liberal rules for establishing new HEIs; Slovakia stuck to more conservative legislation; whereas Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovenia adhered to a more balanced policy (Boyadjieva, 2007; EACEA/Eurydice, 2012; Kwiek, 2013a; Simonová and Antonowicz, 2006; Slantcheva and Levy, 2007).

The qualitative transformation of higher education in CEECs has been accompanied by significant quantitative changes in education. In line with the worldwide trend (Schofer and Meyer, 2005), and driven by political and economic opening and liberalization (Cerych, 1997), higher education has been expanding in all CEECs. The expansion has taken place in a context of underfunding of the old public institutions and the emergence of new private institutions opening their doors to hundreds of thousands of new students (Kwiek, 2013b). Despite the general trend of expansion, the countries differ in the speed of expansion of higher education. Thus, Slovakia is the country with the highest growth of the absolute annual number of graduates per 1000 population for the period between 2000 and 2008 (14.1% per year), followed by the Czech Republic with a growth of 11.1%. In Bulgaria and Hungary, this share is the lowest – 2.0% and 0.7% respectively. For all other countries, the growth achieved for this period is higher than the EU 27 average of about 4.5% per year (EACEA/Eurydice, 2011: 66). In terms of the Europe 2020 target for tertiary educational attainment in the age group 30–34, Hungary and Slovenia are the countries in which the percentage of graduates in the age group 30–34 almost doubled between 2000 and 2010. Notwithstanding the high speed of expansion in the period between 2000 and 2008, in 2010 Slovakia had the lowest share of graduates among those aged 30–34 (22.1%). The increase of the share of higher education graduates in this age interval in Poland was almost threefold. While in 2000, the share of graduates was only by 12.5%, in 2010 it amounted to 34.8%. In Bulgaria and Croatia, the increase was relatively modest. In 2010, 27.7% of people aged 30–34 in Bulgaria had a higher education degree, as compared to 19.5% in 2000. In Croatia, this growth was respectively from 16.2% to 24.5% (Ilieva-Trichkova and Boyadjieva, 2016: 213).

Structural characteristics of the higher education systems in CEECs

The fundamental qualitative and quantitative changes that took place in higher education in CEECs, and the social-economic context of these changes, were connected with and, in turn, influenced the formation of some specific structural characteristics of the higher education system. We are referring to traits that are directly related to how these HEIs are present or absent in the global rankings, namely: i) the place of research within higher education; ii) the inherited model of specialized HEIs; iii) the existence of a large number of small and specialized HEIs; iv) the persistent underfunding of higher education; and v) the brain drain of academic staff and scientists.

The place of research within the higher education system of a given country is very important, inasmuch as in all global rankings, the indicators related to scientific production are of leading or even unique importance. However, in many CEECs (for example, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia), there is a continued reproduction of the division, inherited from the time of the communist regimes, between research institutes united in academies of sciences, and the sector of higher education. Although to a lesser degree, the separation of teaching and research is still prominent in countries which emerged from former Yugoslavia (Vukasovic, 2016: 112). Despite the evident continuing trend of integration between teaching and research in higher education noted by Peter Scott (2007: 437), this trend is uneven (most pronounced in the three Baltic

countries due to the radical transformation of their academies of sciences) and ‘the place of research within higher education continues to be unstable in contrast to the better-understood and accepted relationships between research and teaching characteristics of Western European and North American systems’. One of the results of this division is the concentration of researchers in research institutes and a sort of decreased scientific potential and capacity of HEIs. The effects of this division should be assessed against the background of the differences in research capacity within CEECs and between them and the other countries as shown by the evaluation report of the FP7 and Horizon 2020 Programme (European Commission, 2015).

It is well-known that the network of HEIs in CEECs developed in the communist period included only state institutions and was characterized by significant institutional specialization. The model of the specialized HEIs (also called polytechnics or professional HEIs) emerged in the beginning of the 20th century, but was established as a dominating institutional model in most CEECs after 1944 when socialist/communist parties came to power. This model was perceived as being the most appropriate one for the implementation of the political goals of the communist parties and their ideological ambitions to achieve mass industrialization. After 1989, gradual changes were introduced in the structure and status of these specialized HEIs in all CEECs. In Hungary, mergers to create larger institutions were encouraged. In Bulgaria, many of the specialized HEIs legally acquired university status. Although this process was accompanied by real changes, in some cases, behind the displayed labels of full, multi-faculty universities, these HEIs continued to function (mainly due to the lack of qualified faculty) as specialized institutions offering specialized education in the old-fashioned disciplines and poor-quality education in the newly established ones (Boyadjieva, 2007). As a result, ‘the survival of many “Soviet-era” specialized HEIs and the comparative weakness of what might be called the “generalist” university tradition have influenced the form of restructuring in Central and Eastern European higher education systems’ (Scott, 2007: 437).

The expansion of higher education in the CEECs has been realized mainly through a significant increase in the number of HEIs. If we take into account the size of the population in these countries, the number of HEIs in each one of them is really impressive. According to the relevant ministries and national agencies for accreditation and quality assurance, there are 51 HEIs in Bulgaria, 50 in Croatia,⁴ 50 in Slovenia, 89 in Serbia, 24 in Estonia, 39 in Slovakia, 74 in Czech Republic and 460 in Poland. In the perspective of global rankings and inclusion in those rankings, an important fact is that most newly created HEIs are small in size, narrowly specialized and offer training only in a limited number of specialties; and some of those schools have very limited scientific research activity. Thus, although there are significant differences between countries, as a rule the average size of HEIs in CEECs is much smaller than in Western Europe or North America (Scott, 2007: 427). Consequently, a considerable proportion of HEIs from CEECs prove to be uncompetitive; but even by definition, they cannot figure in the global rankings as they do not meet, for instance, the criterion of the *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings to include at least two large academic fields and to publish at least 200 indexed articles per year.

The presence (or absence) of most HEIs from CEECs in the global rankings is also influenced by the chronic underfunding of higher education and ‘brain drain’ of researchers and academic staff, inasmuch as these are directly related to the quality of research and the publication activity of HEIs. The chronic underfunding of higher education in CEECs is clearly evident from statistical data, regardless of whether funding is measured as the percentage of GDP devoted to higher education, as the percentage of GDP devoted to research or as funding per student (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2012; European Commission DG EAC, 2014a, 2014b).

Data show that the emigration rates among tertiary-educated people tended to increase in the period between 1990 and 2010 in all CEECs, the highest increase being in Bulgaria, where it was

eightfold (from 1.53% to 12.22%). As of 2010, the emigration rate among the tertiary-educated is highest in Romania (20.36%) and lowest in Slovenia (9.59%) (Brücker et al., 2013). The migration of highly skilled professionals from CEECs to the Western parts of the European Union has additionally increased after the financial crisis (Nedeljkovic, 2014). It is acknowledged that ‘all Central and Eastern European higher education systems have suffered from “brain drain” to the West, currently estimated to be 15% of teachers and researchers’ (Scott, 2007: 434) and that one of the fields in which the brain drain has created specific shortages in CEECs is science and research (Ionescu, 2014).

While the global rankings make visible some important structural characteristics of the higher education systems in post-communist countries, they also highlight the basic problems in the development of higher education in CEECs. That is why they are often used as an external reference point in policy debates. For instance, the debates on the quality of education in Poland present a case in which the rankings are perceived as a feature of modern higher education as opposed to the undesired communist legacy, which lends them credibility (Erkkilä, 2014: 97). The generally unsatisfactory performance of Polish HEIs in the global rankings has proved to be an important motor for reforms in higher education, inasmuch as ‘[t]op decision-makers explicitly state that their objective is to give Polish universities a decisive push to improve their position in leading international rankings’ (Dakowska, 2013: 109). The use of global rankings as an external reference point is fixed in basic strategic documents that outline the policies and directions for reform of higher education in Poland (Dakowska, 2013; Kwiek, 2016). The absence of Bulgarian HEIs in the global rankings was also one of the arguments adduced both by members of the academic community and by journalists in the debates surrounding the adoption of the new Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Bulgaria (Boyadjieva, 2012). It should also be pointed out that in CEECs ‘there is no “obsession” with rankings at any institutional level’ (Kwiek, 2016: 167). The causes of this can be sought in the lack of confidence of HEIs from the CEECs that they can be competitive in the global academic area (Kwiek, 2016: 167), and also in the perception that the global rankings are unfair with regard to HEIs from post-communist countries. The feeling of unfairness is born out of the strong connection between the position of HEIs in global rankings and their budget, while HEIs from CEECs have been underfunded for entire decades; the feeling is also due to the fear that global rankings may contribute ‘to the brain drain and to a further marginalization of the Central and East European academic space’ (Dakowska, 2013: 120, 126).

Global ranking systems through the prism of higher education in CEECs

The analysis of the ways in which HEIs from CEECs are present, or absent, in the global rankings defines a specific perspective for considering and distinguishing the important problems related to the development of higher education, but also concerning the rankings themselves as monitoring instruments. The most important problem is related to defining the concept of quality of higher education.

Meaning and measuring of quality of higher education

Comparative studies on rankings, of which the largest-scale ones are those of Nina Van Dyke (2005), Alex Usher and Massimo Savino (2007) and Simon Marginson (2014), have definitely shown that the ranking systems differ in their goals, scope, methodology and the kind and reliability of data used. These differences are so large that no two systems are alike, and between some

systems, there is not even a single coinciding indicator (Usher and Savino, 2007: 28). Most importantly, the systems are based on different concepts of quality of higher education. All classifications claim to rank HEIs by quality – ‘the best universities’, ‘top 100 universities’, ‘top 500 universities’. But not a single ranking gives a definition of quality of higher education, and there is no generally shared understanding on this concept. Looking at how the indicators used are related to the concept of quality of higher education, we can identify the following trends:

- 1) Although to a lesser degree than the other rankings, the global rankings include indicators related to the conditions, prerequisites and results of quality education. For instance, they include the following: the amount of research activity, citations of publications, awards won by teachers, the number of students per teacher, the proportion of international students, the proportion of international teachers, the income of teachers, the funds for research and the prestige of the institution among the academic community and employers.⁵
- 2) All global rankings employ indicators for measuring research activity, and its measure is present in all rankings; moreover, it is given very great importance, and in some cases, is the only indicator used.
- 3) Unlike the national rankings, the global ones have no indicators based on the opinion of students involved in the teaching process.
- 4) The global rankings use no indicators that directly reflect the quality of education results, whether this can be assessed by an external, independent assessment of the knowledge and skills of graduates or by a consideration of professional realization. The only exception to this feature is found in the Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, which includes as indicators the alumni of an institution who have won Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals.

In recent years, through the project ‘Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes’ (AHELO) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an attempt was made to achieve some form of unified measuring of knowledge and skills of graduates, similar to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey of students in secondary education (Tremblay et al., 2012). The OECD, which followed the feasibility study that was conducted and evaluated in 2012, envisaged a full-scale implementation of the project, which was to be realized in 2015. The assessments obtained by the feasibility study are rather contradictory, and many scholars have defined it as a failure. According to Philip Altbach (2015), ‘it seems highly unlikely that a common benchmark can be obtained for comparing achievements in a range of quite different countries’. He also raises the question, ‘Who is to determine what the “gold standard” is in different disciplines across institutions and countries?’ and argues that, because courses and curricula vary significantly across countries, ‘AHELO would be testing apples and oranges, not to mention kumquats and broccoli’. Some of the most prestigious universities were strongly opposed to AHELO. For instance, the presidents of leading US and Canadian universities, in a letter to the OECD, pointed out that ‘AHELO fundamentally misconstrues the purpose of learning outcomes, which should be to allow institutions to determine and define what they expect students will achieve and to measure whether they have been successful in doing so’ (Husbands, 2015). In turn, the supporters of AHELO feel that:

[i]nstitutional opposition to AHELO, for the most part, plays out the same way as opposition to U-Multirank, it’s a defence of privilege: top universities know they will do well on comparisons of prestige and research intensity. They don’t know how they will do on comparisons of teaching and learning. (Usher, 2015: 1)

The intensive discussion about the attempt at elaborating a higher education equivalent of the PISA and the rejection of this idea by part of the universities holding top places in the league tables, which led to the failure of AHELO, have once again clearly demonstrated the difficulties arising in defining and measuring quality of higher education, as well as the fact that the ranking systems do not represent a neutral technical instrument, but are part of and the basic mechanism for the affirmation and redistribution of positions in higher education.⁶ These positions have a great symbolic significance, and they provide an advantage in the competition for attracting high-quality academic staff and new material resources.

Drawbacks in the global rankings from CEECs perspective

The way in which HEIs are present or absent in the global rankings provides further proof for the basic criticisms levelled at those rankings.

The rankings neglect the diversity of HEIs in terms of their mission, goals and structure. As a rule, all the ranking systems, and especially the global rankings, take certain kinds of HEIs as being the norm – these include research universities that stress natural science. Thus, they enhance the prestige of some institutions at the expense of others. An example of this are the technical and professional HEIs that, in countries like Germany (Fachhochschulen), Finland, Switzerland and France, have long traditions and are among the most prestigious HEIs (Marginson and Van der Wende, 2007: 58). This also applies to polytechnics and HEIs for professional education in CEECs and to the faculties which in countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia have independent legal status (Bojanić et al., 2016: 4). When they do not take into account the differences in mission, goals and social context of each HEI, ‘rankings provide a rather narrow definition of quality or performance on the basis of a “one-fits-all” measurement by using the same set of indicators for all institutions’ (Kehm, 2014: 104).

Ratings affirm a limited understanding as to the public benefit derived from higher education. In attaching the greatest weight to indicators connected with research productivity, faculty publications and citations, the global rankings legitimize higher education simply with respect to its contribution to the production of new knowledge. Thus, they leave entirely out of the picture the role of HEIs as a source of critical sensitivity in democratic society – a role that was especially prominent in the years of transition from totalitarianism to democracy in the CEECs. This role refers not only to the active participation of students and teachers in the crucial political events of the years following 1989, but also to the revival and affirmation of basic founding principles of the university as institution: autonomy and academic freedom certainly have social importance, since academic autonomy provides the function of questioning the almightiness of the state (Boyadjieva, 2000). Also, the global rankings entirely disregard the benefit yielded by higher education in promoting goals such as improved access of students from traditionally underrepresented groups, increased affordability of high-quality post-secondary education, contributions to community development or social justice (Pusser and Marginson, 2013). These goals of higher education are especially relevant in CEECs. As Marginson (2011: 23–24) convincingly argues, there are two perspectives in which social equity in higher education has been recently conceptualized: *fairness* and *inclusion* – the first one focuses on the proportional distribution of student places (or graduations) between different social groups, whereas the second one on growth in the absolute number of people from hitherto under-represented socio-economic groups. Analyses have shown that although expansion of higher education in CEECs is inclusive, there are still great differences in its fairness; that is, in the chances children of different social and educational backgrounds have to attain higher education (Arum et al., 2007: 28; Ilieva-Trichkova and Boyadjieva, 2014).

Global rankings are susceptible to the 'halo' effect. Two of the global rankings – *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* and *QS World University Rankings* – work with reputational indicators. It is considered that studies measuring the prestige of HEIs only reproduce the already established prestige of HEIs, regardless of actual achievements. The already reputed universities produce the halo effect. A curious example of this is given by one survey of students in which the respondents tended to classify Princeton as one of the 10 best universities in the field of law, whereas there is no law faculty in that university (Marginson and Van der Wende, 2007: 59). As Marginson puts it (2014: 46):

[r]anking reinforces the advantages enjoyed by leading universities. It celebrates their status and propels more money and talent towards them, helping them to stay on top. It is difficult for outsiders, emerging universities and countries to break in. Rankings are not 'fair' to competing universities. The starting positions are manifestly unequal.

Other authors also argue that global rankings privilege older, well-resourced universities, whose comparative advantages have accumulated over time (Hazelkorn, 2015).

A mere glance at the performance of HEIs from CEECs in global rankings shows that the highest scoring universities are also some of Europe's oldest universities – Charles University in Prague (1347), Jagiellonian University in Cracow (1364), Vilnius University (1579), University of Tartu (1632), University of Ljubljana (1595), University of Szeged (1581), University of Belgrade (1808) and University of Warsaw (1816). Yet it is also evident that not all the universities in CEECs with a long history have found a place in the global rankings, and some are at the bottom of the ranking – for instance, the University of Wrocław (1505), Palacký University (1573) and the University of Pécs (1367). The conclusion is clear – universities that have been included in the global rankings have a long and well-established history, but this is not enough to guarantee presence in the global rankings.

Global rankings do not take into account the 'value added' achieved by the HEIs. They do not take into account the different starting positions of HEIs. Most importantly, they do not reward the development, the degree and speed of improvement and performance. Nearly all HEIs in CEECs have started out at low positions or have yet to succeed in being included in the rankings. So, it is important for them to have as an incentive a measure of the value they add to their performance, even if they might fail to find a place in top-ranking positions.

Conclusion

HEIs from CEECs find themselves in a strongly competitive academic environment. Global rankings are a result of increased competition between HEIs at the European and world level and at the same time are instruments that reinforce and further stimulate competition. Despite the numerous and constant criticisms of rankings, coming from the academic community and from the public at large, there is a growing conviction that the purpose of this critical attitude towards ranking systems is to perfect them, not to reject them (Marginson and Van der Wende, 2007; Van der Wende, 2008; Van Dyke, 2005). Under these conditions, it is not a matter of choice whether a university will or will not be included in the international scope of competitive comparisons. As a rule, global rankings use indicators, the data on which are contained in international research platforms or in international studies. This means that all HEIs, including those from CEECs, are subject to global ranking. It is obvious that for the most part they are not present in the rank lists; however, this does not mean they do not participate in the global competition and classification, but that their results by the indicators in question are not good enough to make these institutions easily, or at all, recognizable.

The present analysis shows that the achievements and the problems of HEIs from CEECs should not be interpreted one-sidedly and in a simplified way, but from different perspectives and by different dimensions, thus viewed as interconnected. Foremost, the fact that a considerable part of HEIs from CEECs cannot appear in the global rankings clearly demonstrates that their development does not meet the global ranking criteria. Although this does not necessarily show that the quality of higher education in CEECs is unsatisfactory or poor, it does point to the existence of concrete problems in the functioning and the performance – especially regarding scientific research – of those HEIs from CEECs. The HEIs from CEECs which have the highest positions in the global rankings are those with high scientific achievements. There is also a distinct problem regarding the level of prestige and the reputation of HEIs of the former communist countries. It is well known that reputation is one of the most important intangible organizational assets – one difficult to build and easy to lose (Morphew and Swanson, 2011: 191). In this respect, the challenges facing HEIs from CEECs are all the greater inasmuch as they have to build a reputation on the basis of achievement while often struggling with their stigmatized image inherited from the past, their past image of ideologically bound institutions in which change is difficult.

The presence of HEIs from CEECs on global rankings no doubt reflects the specificity of the development of higher education in these countries. As leading researchers on higher education have recognized:

[h]igher education in the region has had to be reconstructed on a scale, and at a speed, never attempted in Western Europe. Adjustments that have required long gestation in the West have had to be accomplished within four or five years. For example, in the West complex issues such as the relationship between universities and other higher education institutions and between higher education and research have been managed by a lengthy process of reform and negotiation stretching over several decades; in Central and Eastern Europe, such issues had to be immediately resolved after 1989. (Scott, 2007: 436)

An important criterion fused in global rankings are the research results measured mainly by number of publications indexed in world research platforms and by number of citations; this raises the urgent issue regarding the conceptual framework on which the national higher education policies in CEECs are based and in which they develop. These conceptual frameworks should offer a clear answer to two basic questions: What is the place of research in higher education? What kinds of HEIs figure in the concrete national system of higher education and how are they defined in terms of the performed research? In formulating their stances on these questions, policymakers and the academic community in each country should well have in mind the opinion of leading researchers that '[un]evenness in research performance is inevitable, if not necessary to creativity itself' (Marginson, 2011: 32). But they should also take into consideration that '[e]xperience indicates that it is not possible to create several world-class universities (with prospects for a sustainable future) in any one country without investing in the national higher education system as a whole' (Yudkevich et al., 2015: 415).

The examination of global rankings and the indicators they use, through the prism of the positions held by HEIs from CEECs in those rankings, makes all the more visible their specificity and limitations. This analysis enables us to formulate new arguments in support of the need to improve the methods, and field of application, of rankings. Global rankings are certainly an important source of information and an instrument for measuring and comparing the achievements of HEIs by certain indicators. But they are only one of the mechanisms – and not a perfect one at that – for assessing the quality of higher education. A great challenge for policymakers and for the academic

community is to strengthen and use global rankings to stimulate, not to penalize, the development of concrete HEIs and national systems of higher education.

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Notes

1. Different authors and different organizations designate different numbers of countries with the term Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). In this paper, we refer to the following countries: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and three countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia – Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia. These countries have at least one HEI included in at least one of the global rankings.
2. The ranking includes all sciences and is size-independent; that is, the performance of a university does not depend on the size of its publication output.
3. For the specificity of the socio-political context and the development of higher education in different CEECs, see: Boyadjieva (2007); Dobbins and Knill (2009); Kwiek (2013a); Vukasovic (2016); Zgaga and Miklavič (2011); Zgaga et al. (2013).
4. In Croatia and Serbia, the constituents of universities (faculties, research centers) are legal entities and are defined as HEIs (for the specificity of the structure of higher education systems of these countries see Vukasovic (2016)). In this paper, faculties are not counted as separate HEIs.
5. Such is the character of a number of other indicators used in national and regional rankings: the number of books in libraries, the size of lecture rooms, the number of students graduating on time, the number of teachers, the material facilities for training, the material conditions, the performance of students before enrolment in the school, the selectivity of admission.
6. This is especially evident in the extreme views of supporters and opponents of AHELO: 'Let's drop a bad and expensive project' (Altbach, 2015: 3) and 'The opposition of top universities (and their associations) to AHELO is shameful, hypocritical, and self-serving' (Usher, 2015: 1).

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The roads of 'excellence' in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to explore the impact of excellence as a powerful policy idea in the context of recent and contemporary developments in three selected Central and Eastern European countries, namely, the Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine. More specifically, we explore how excellence as a 'global script' was translated by policy makers into local contexts with institutionalized practices. It shows that the translation of the idea of excellence involved the rise of a series of novel policy measures such as long-term strategic funding and the establishment of various pertinent schemes (e.g. flagship universities, centres of excellence). By doing so, the analysis – which is comparative by nature – focuses on exploring major differences and similarities in the conceptualization and implementation of the idea of excellence in the three local contexts of science.

Keywords

Higher education, excellence, institutional theory, flagship universities, CEE countries

One of the prevalent features of the changes sweeping across higher education (HE) in Europe in the last decade or so has undoubtedly been the importance attributed to the need to become globally competitive, substantiated by 'world class' and 'excellence' discourses (Cremonini

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et al., 2014; Ramirez and Tiplic, 2014). Such imperatives have been taken on board by a variety of stakeholders, policy makers, institutional managers and planners, and other external stakeholders (e.g. industry and regional governments) with vested interests. In short, the political concept of *excellence* has become a prevalent feature surrounding the 'Europe of Knowledge' discourse (cf. Pinheiro, 2015). Few studies to date have looked in detail at how such discourses have impacted developments at the national level in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries.

The aim of the article is to explore the impact of excellence as a powerful policy idea in the context of recent developments in three selected CEE countries, namely, the Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine. More specifically, we explore how *excellence* as a 'global script' (Meyer et al., 1997) has been translated by policy makers (Pedersen, 2007) into local contexts with organizational forms and institutionalized practices. The article shows that the local translation of the idea of excellence involved the rise of a series of novel policy measures such as long-term strategic funding and the establishment of various pertinent schemes (e.g. flagship universities, centres of excellence). Theoretically, we focus on three major explanatory factors associated with contextual dimensions affecting the local infusion of meanings into the abstract concept of excellence in HE and its generic organizational template of research university (Mohrman et al., 2008). First, following historical institutionalism, we assume that paths of political and economic transformation (e.g. speed of integration with the European Union) have had a prevailing impact on the dynamics of transnational diffusion of world polity ideas and concepts, and hence allowed transnational organizations to act as agents of world society. This has increased the pressure on national governments to follow hegemonic models. The rationale for selecting the three case countries is largely due to their common socialist past, from which they have joined (or have declared their intentions to join) the European integration process, and to the fact that these HE systems have experienced considerable change in the last two decades or so. The article highlights the historical legacies of the three HE systems and their distinctive (institutionalized) academic traditions, which are the basic foundations for adaptation and implementation of 'excellence' and its organizational embeddedness into specific institutional environments. What is more, our cases are representative of the various influences of the Napoleonic (Ukraine) and the Humboldtian (Czech Republic and Poland) tradition and thus the notion of *equal but different* higher education institution (HEI) (Nybohm, 2003). Last but not least, the article looks at the size of the country as an important variable in accounting for the ways in which the concept of 'world class' and the notion of 'research university' were locally translated and implemented. Size matters, both as regards the number/type of HEI and their internal (formal and informal) organization, accounting for the overall complexity of the system as a whole. Therefore, the article, which is comparative by nature, explores major differences and similarities in the conceptualization and implementation of the idea of excellence across three specific geographic and political contexts.

The article is organized as follows: next, we sketch out the core elements underpinning our conceptual framework which is centred on the notion of 'travelling and diffusion' of hegemonic policy ideas embedded in or resulting in specific 'policy logics'. We then investigate the historical contingencies or path-dependencies associated with the development of the three national HE systems based on a shared communist legacy. The following sections of the article are dedicated to presenting and analysing our empirical findings. In so doing, we pay attention to three key aspects or phases: political drivers; key actors and diffusion mechanisms; and institutionalization. Finally, the article concludes by providing a critical account of the empirical findings, linking these to the existing literature, and reflecting on possible policy and research implications going forward.

Conceptual backdrop

Policy transfer logic

There is a widespread consensus regarding the salience of hegemonic ideas in processes of policy change. Earlier studies suggest that global ideas and practices spread across national contexts and policy portfolios, particularly so when these ideas are aligned with the normative positions or value orientations of certain stakeholders (e.g. policy makers) and/or are laden with external support or legitimacy (Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón, 2005; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008). Institutional scholars have long advocated that the adoption of common practices within the realm of a given organizational field or sector of activity results in homogenizing pressures, which are termed in the literature as ‘isomorphism’ (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2008; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This phenomenon is particularly salient in situations characterized by increasing environmental ambiguity, volatility and, thus, uncertainty. When faced with unprecedented and unforeseen external forces – socio-economic, political, cultural, etc. – as in the recent global financial crisis, organizations tend to assess their fields (i.e. the actions of dominant players) in the search for ‘solutions’ on how to respond adequately. More often than not, however, they do so in a rather ritualistic manner without necessarily engaging in a systematic assessment of the pros and cons, i.e. without learning about *what* works, *why* and under which circumstances, or *how* (Geschwind and Pinheiro, in press).

The process of policy transfer and/or learning is surrounded by a multiplicity of aspects, ranging from comparative analysis of the risks and potentials of different strategies and processes of learning (Toens and Landwehr, 2009); the (various) ways in which decision makers learn from epistemic communities responsible for knowledge generation and diffusion (Dunlop, 2009); and the complex relationship between systemic (globalizing) forces and the increasing scope and intensity of policy transfer activity (Evans, 2009), among others. Policy transfers are often conceived from the prism of a learning process (cf. Dunlop, 2009), involving a multiplicity of agents and intrinsically embedded in particular spatial-, temporal- and social-related (networks) dimensions (Stone, 2012). Proponents of the so-called ‘policy diffusion’ literature argue that policy change occurs by osmosis, i.e. something that is contagious rather than chosen, thus connoting the spreading or dispersion of hegemonic models or widespread practices from a common source or origin (Stone, 2012: 484). Institutional scholars have long contended that ‘ideas travel’ (Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón, 2005) and that, when faced with particular local contexts or geographies, they are ‘translated’ in accordance with local dynamics belief systems and institutionalized practices (Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008). The widespread (local) adoption of hegemonic ideas such as ‘world class’ or ‘excellence’ is, to a large degree, associated with what organizational scholars term ‘environmental determinism’ (Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1985) or what Olsen (2007) refers to as the TINA (‘there is no alternative’) syndrome. In contrast, the adaptation of abstract ideas to specific local circumstances is associated with ‘strategic agency’ (Oliver, 1991) where actors translate or edit these ideas – and the values and norms associated with them – in the light of historical circumstances, but also their strategic agendas and imperatives (cf. Pinheiro and Stensaker, 2014).

While investigating shifts in public policy, it is worth taking into account the role of dominant *policy logics* (Maassen and Stensaker, 2011) informing and/or legitimating such shifts. March and Olsen (2006) make a distinction between decision-making processes that are inherently ‘rational’, i.e. based on the assessment of risks and opportunities (‘logic of outcomes’), from those that are primarily ‘cultural’ in nature, where rule-following and symbolic behaviour play a central role (‘logic of appropriateness’). The latter is often associated with isomorphic activities exercised in the form of ‘fashion-following’ (Geschwind and Pinheiro, in press).

Those individuals and organizations that pick up ideas have been depicted not only as acting according to a logic of appropriateness but more specifically as fashion followers. The word ‘fashion’ here points to the temporal and social logics of processes of adoption ... Fashion guides imitation and the attention of actors to specific ideas, models and practices, and fashion identifies but also creates what is appropriate and desirable at a given time and place. This leads organizations to adopt, but also to translate, these ideas, thus changing both what is translated and those who translate.

(Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008: 222)

Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón (2005) point out that local actors involved in transfer and translation processes tend to focus on particular accounts and materializations of a specific idea or practice rather than the (transfer of the) idea or practice per se. For example, Huisman et al. (2002) found out that, over time, it is the meanings associated with certain labels (e.g. the ‘entrepreneurial university’) that change rather than the labels themselves. Similarly, Greenwood and Hinings (1993) refer to the fact that archetypes (e.g. ‘the modern organization’) only exist in a stylized or abstract form, and thus in order to be of practical use, they require translation or localization, i.e. the embodiment of the abstract idea into a particular organizational form; or, in our case, a set of policy measures and their subsequent instruments.

The concept of excellence and its organizational embeddedness

The pursuit of excellence has always been at the heart of scientific exploration and investigations, but it was largely individual with a strong reference to self-motivation and professional accountability to the academic community (Clark, 1995). It was less explicitly exposed on the organizational level as universities traditionally were depicted as communities of scholars enjoying high levels of autonomy. This is at odds with a new understanding of excellence in HE which became an utterly political concept linked to an increasingly instrumental conception of the role of HE in society/economy.

The shift from the traditional to instrumental uptake on excellence was reinforced by the rise of a quality assurance regime. Over time, quality assurance of HEIs has displayed a strong external accountability orientation (Stensaker and Harvey, 2011), which was induced by politically motivated assumptions of accountability checks for legitimacy (Harvey and Newton, 2004). Quality monitoring manifested itself in the form of the adoption of simplistic comparative measures (bibliometrics, rankings, etc.) both nationally and internationally. Under such developments, excellence became highly politicized and emerged as a policy instrument or tool to engage HEIs in the economic (and political) arms race for global position and reputation-building that have become pivotal factors in the comparative advantage of a country/region in the global knowledge economy (Peters, 2007; Temple, 2012).

In the pan-European context, this political shift was officially declared by the 2000 Lisbon Strategy (Pinheiro, 2015a). Gradually, it led to the growing role of global comparisons in the form of university league tables or world rankings (Hazelkorn, 2011). Supranational organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD, whose predominant vision of excellence in HE reflects their contribution to the economy, play an increasingly predominant role. Stated differently, the idea of excellence was institutionalized through the framework of transnational comparisons since ‘international rankings form an important input and stimulation in this positional competition for “world-class” status in times of global educational expansion and global interconnectedness of higher education’ (e.g. Enders, 2014: 155). Research outputs in global bibliographic databases, as a measurable proxy of research intensiveness, became associated with international excellence. Although scientific publications have traditionally been considered

significant for academic prestige and career promotion (Musselin, 2007), under the newly scripted global excellence discourse, they became a significant carrier of the institutional(ized) notion of 'world class' status.

Thus, the rather ambiguous and complex nature of excellence in HE/science was narrowed and seen mainly through the prism of the criteria of global rankings which offered simplistic but ready-to-use metrics for comparison. This has had a profound impact on the way the idea of excellence is depicted, defined, measured and legitimized. It distinguishes winners from losers, largely based on measurable academic outputs as part and parcel of the diffusion of the 'excellence script'. National governments across the globe (from China to Germany) started adopting proxies of excellence from the global rankings and often use them as guidelines for devising national performance measures (cf. Hazelkorn, 2011).

The selection of a simple set of indicators favours a specific type of HEI, i.e. the research intensive university, therein making a substantial contribution to the construction of a 'global script' (Meyer et al., 1997) for excellence in HE. By prioritizing and favouring certain types of organizational features linked to research intensity and performance, the script endorsed the Anglo-Saxon model of research intensive university that emerged in North America in the second half of the 20th century (Kerr, 1991) that has become the 'envy of the world' (Khator, 2011) and a template to be emulated by others, notably, Europe (Aghion et al., 2008). Mohrman et al. (2008) characterize it as the Emerging Global Model (EMG) of 21st-century research university which emphasizes 'the international nature of a small group of institutions that represent the leading edge of higher education's embrace of the forces of globalization' (Mohrman et al., 2008: 6). The authors identify eight basic characteristics that describe a top stratum of research universities worldwide, namely, a global mission, new roles of professors, diversified funding, worldwide recruitment, increasing complexity, new relationships with government and industry, and global collaboration with similar institutions. Furthermore, this new type of university is focused on measurable outcomes of publication performance, in addition to engagement in worldwide competition for scarce resources like academic staff, talented students, reputation and funding. This legitimized model has become a benchmark/role model for so-called 'world class universities', 'flagship universities' or 'elite institutions' that diffused rapidly worldwide through specific policy measures centred on the concentration of scarce resources, i.e. people and funding (Hazelkorn, 2007; Salmi and Saroyan, 2007).

[g]lobal comparisons are made most prominently in relation to one model of universities, the comprehensive research-intensive university. This university model, most prominently developed in the leading U.S. American research universities,¹ lends itself to the formation of a single global competition constructed in the rankings that build on established notions of what constitutes a 'world-class university'.

(Enders, 2014: 162)

This narrow and instrumentalistic concept of excellence in HE and its global endorsement carries such a normative force that it makes any governmental policy hard to resist. In the particular context of CEE, this notion of excellence appears to be distant from a long-standing HE tradition based and the very specific institutional environment resulting from the communist historical legacy (Dobbins, 2011).

This section delved into two important conceptualizations (policy transfer logic and excellence) in light of the research question posed at the outset (how the idea of excellence has been translated by policy makers into local contexts with organizational forms and institutional practices). Given the importance attributed to path-dependencies, as alluded to earlier, we now turn to the historical contingencies shaping the dynamics within each of the three case studies.

Historical contingencies

Before the 1990s, HE in Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine was embedded in a rather similar environment. Ukraine was part of the so-called 'Soviet model' (Árnason, 1993) that spread throughout the Soviet satellite countries like Poland and the former Czechoslovakia (Connelly, 2000). It was characterized by tight state control, bureaucratization and the role of communist ideology in the governance of HE affairs. The system of HE in independent Ukraine inherited features from the Soviet model, such as the division between primarily teaching-oriented HEIs and the research institutes of the Academy of Sciences without teaching obligations. A similar institutional division can be found in other countries in CEE. In general, the system was centrally organized with research activities predominantly conducted in the Academy of Sciences as well as (sectoral) institutes for research and development (R&D centres).

In all three countries, HEIs were assigned to perform teaching functions and fuel the needs of a centrally planned economy with a well-educated workforce (Pabian, 2010; Szczepański, 1963). Research activities at HEIs were not completely absent prior to 1989, but they were not the chief priority, as ideological pressure and control were exerted on scientific work in the humanities and the social sciences in particular (cf. Connelly, 2000; Roskovec, 2006). The notion of excellence had never been a political issue, although one might argue that concentrating research in the Academy of Sciences may have, unintentionally, played a key role in establishing isolated centres of research excellence. And indeed, the most intensive and advanced research in all three countries, largely within the natural sciences, used to be conducted under the institutional umbrella of the Academy of Sciences.²

The democratic revolutions in the late 1980s/early 1990s brought major shifts in public policy formulation, but excellence in science (HE and research sectors) was not among the top priorities. In Poland and the Czech Republic, the injection of a 'democratic spirit' entailed liberalization, significant political autonomy and the return of the Humboldtian model of the university based on the teaching-research nexus (Dobbins and Knill, 2009). The latter model held symbolic meaning for the academic community, as it referred to the ideal model of university in the Weberian sense and glorified a historical myth. Put succinctly, after decades of tight scrutiny and control by the authoritarian regime, HEIs enjoyed the freedom to conduct research without political interference. The stipulations of the HE Acts of 1990 (Czech Republic and Poland) were predominately about confirming academic rights, freedoms and university autonomy (Hübner, 1992; Pabian, 2009). In Ukraine, after 1991, the state regulation in HE was also weakened, but to a lesser extent than in Poland and the Czech Republic (Zgurovskyi, 2005). Yet, similarly to the latter countries, research and education were not priorities for local politicians (Kvit, 2013).

In short, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the newly established democratic governments prioritized freedom and autonomy. The various legal acts were, first and foremost, meant to liberalize student admissions, reinstate academics' and students' rights and freedoms, remove the ideological bias from the curricula and enhance institutional autonomy (Antonowicz, 2012; Cerych, 1997). This posture was due to three key factors: (a) the authoritarian past; (b) the scarcity of resources to conduct any meaningful policy; and (c) the non-existence of independent sectoral HE policies (Antonowicz, 2015; Sadlak, 1995). Research and HE were not identified as political priorities in CEE countries at the time. On the contrary, science was often seen as an activity that, even though it was heavily underfunded, caused the least social harm.

Method: analysing ‘excellence’ in the Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine

Fostering excellence is not a straightforward or linear process. Like many other changes in this field, it involves a variety of actors, and dynamic and complex interplay between them, in addition to the use of a wide range of political instruments and economic mechanisms. The analysis undertaken here pays special attention to three key aspects associated with the dissemination of excellence in science in the three chosen countries. First, it explores the set of political *drivers* responsible for cross-national dissemination of the idea of excellence, including a closer look at politicization mechanisms that serve to legitimize excellence as an integral part of a much wider and politically significant socio-economic transformation, i.e. the phenomenon of Europeanization (Olsen and Maassen, 2007). This is followed by an attempt to identify the main *actors* promoting excellence as well as the diffusing mechanisms allowing those same actors to transfer the latter concept into the local political agenda and action. Last but not the least, we examine the various *means of institutionalization* of excellence by shedding light on a number of policy instruments devised to promote (diffuse) excellence across the board. The structure of the analysis, by phases or analytical segments rather than on a country by country basis, helps us to identify commonalities and variations, in addition to complex interactions (e.g. tensions and overlaps) between transnational trends and national processes. Our analysis is largely based on secondary data sets such as the extant literature on the topic which covers book chapters and journal articles. They are most often published in local languages (Czech, Polish and Ukrainian) as a wider part of policy discourse or simply domestic politics. However, the strongest focus was placed on official policy documents issued by public authorities which mark political initiatives, outline strategic goals and also shed light on wider political contexts within which the goals are located. Each of the analysed countries has its own ordination of policy documents which are deeply embedded in local political contexts. The analysis also covers national legislation, which has a direct impact on defining and measuring excellence in HE. The analysis covers legal documents of a different rank, both major legal acts approved by national parliaments – and their numerous amendments – but most often lower ranking regulations (ordinances) which have an immediate and direct impact on HE. In addition, the analysis covers key insights gained by the authors as a result of their direct involvement – as researchers, policy advisors, local committee members, etc. – with issues pertaining to HE and science policy in the countries in question.

Political drivers for excellence

Worldwide, the pursuit of excellence in the realm of HE/science entered the public policy imagination as a result of growing transnational competition in both research and teaching (Marginson, 2004; Rust and Kim, 2012). It entailed an instrumentalist approach to science (cf. Pinheiro, 2015a) and was primarily aimed at fostering international recognition and the global competitiveness of national economies (Cremonini and Antonowicz, 2009). Yet, in a number of countries throughout Europe, excellence stood at odds with the well-established Humboldtian tradition that conceives of universities through an egalitarian prism, i.e. *equal but different* institutions (Nybom, 2003). It is undeniable that the transnational embodiment of political drivers, including within the European Union (e.g. the Lisbon Agenda), played a crucial role in the pursuit of excellence in science (see Geschwind and Pinheiro, in press). That being said, it should be emphasized that, from a global perspective, excellence was narrowly defined as referring to research endeavours only (as the most prestigious part of the academic profession), with an

immediate impact on university reputation. It is worth noting that in all three countries there have been attempts to stimulate quality in teaching, which has become a serious challenge in the ever-expanding systems of HE. All three governments have undertaken measures to increase quality in teaching, largely through the implementation of a system of accreditation and evaluation ‘inspired’ or simply adopted from the pan-European template. However, these initiatives have been much less politicized when compared to excellence in research and thus have had little impact on public policy (Tutko and Naumov, 2014).

Particularly in CEE countries, it is hard to overestimate the role of political mechanisms in initiating, endorsing and leading change in the public realm. Overall, political involvement in the design and implementation of public policies has widely been found to be significant for transforming policy sectors within the context of CEE countries (Beblavy et al., 2012; Meyer-Sahling, 2008). Almost any socio-economic transformations resulting in organizational re-adaptions, wide-scale monetary redistributions and new policy design creations are likely to take place under political interventions, i.e. politicization (cf. Neuhold et al., 2013). In this case, excellence was framed into a political discourse centred on fostering economic efficiency, resource efficiency and global competitiveness. In all three countries, excellence came to the fore in the second half of the 2000s as a result of the internationalization (i.e. Europeanization) of HE (Enders, 2004). It was then followed by a major political shift in the EU (Gornitzka, 2007) introduced by the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000), which catapulted science to the centre stage of economic growth and development in Europe. It entailed an instrumental and utilitarian understanding of excellence as a means to achieve ‘smart growth’ (Rusu, 2013). Thus, the emerging national policies to support excellence were not a pro-active political choice per se but, instead, a form of reactive response to the changing environment marked by the growing impact of supranational dimensions (Kwiek, 2014). Overall, it was part and parcel of a much wider political and economic trend of ‘catching up’ with Western European countries that were miles ahead in terms of R&D expenditure, labour productivity and the visibility of research outcomes.

The political drivers for excellence took a different route in each of the three countries. In the case of Czech HE policy-making, excellence, along with the quality of academic activities, was made one of three overarching policy priorities in *the Strategy for Higher Education for 2006–2010* (MŠMT, 2005). This policy logic reflected a ‘fit for purpose approach’ encompassing support for the priority areas spelled out by the HEIs themselves. However, through the 2000s, the R&D policy, emerging in parallel with HE policy, increasingly emphasized the issues of productivity gaps, limited research effects on Czech society/economy, as well as support for mediocrity to the detriment of excellence, not least due to the failing organization of R&D funding streams. In Poland, the turn towards excellence took place in the early 2000s with the emergence of global university rankings in tandem with wider political debates on the underperformance of Polish academics in attracting EU funds (Supel, 2007). These two aspects, seen as highly important to key political figures, became major drivers, hence sending a strong signal across the sector that Polish universities had descended into mediocrity, with the idea of excellence easily conquering the public and policy debates (Antonowicz, 2015). This shift was reflected in the *2008 Green Paper* (MNiSW, 2008) explicitly referring to excellence as a major policy priority, as the mediocrity in R&D became a politically sensitive issue in the context of the new challenges set by the Lisbon Strategy (cf. Pinheiro, 2015a).

The situation was only slightly different in Ukrainian HE, as the idea of excellence was then presented (in 2010) in the form of ‘flagship universities’ of a national and research character (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2010a). It was also highly politicized. The government hoped that awarding elite status would stimulate privileged HEIs to take higher positions in global university rankings (Hladchenko et al., 2016), promising additional funding to research universities. However, the Ukrainian case stands out from the remaining two because the government expected beneficial

economic results from knowledge transfers (rather than discovery) and third-party funding (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2010). Excellence seemed to be a perfect policy answer for addressing the panacea of heavily underfunded universities. This peculiar interpretation, aligned with the neoliberal approach to HE (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997), can be explained by the scarcity of state funding for research. International excellence was far beyond the reach of Ukrainian universities, but the idea of 'institutional excellence' was adapted to local circumstances in the form of domestic university rankings (Kvit, 2013).

It is worth pointing out that the idea of excellence came largely from outside the CEE region, whereby the political process of Europeanization was a major driver in the diffusion and legitimization of excellence throughout Europe. Being a champion in science and HE was imposed on national political agendas through the Lisbon Strategy (Pinheiro, 2015a), while the notion of excellence was simultaneously diffused via the EU research framework programmes (FPs). The dominant notion across the three countries was that centres of excellence and/or research universities would be in a position to attract external competitive funding as the CEE countries suffered from low R&D investments. However, in retrospect, the strategic opportunity for obtaining funds through FPs was largely missed as the CEE countries in general underperformed in the EU research programmes for a variety of reasons. Hence, the overall structure of research funding was largely unchanged. Despite missing this opportunity, the CEE countries were 'compensated' by newly devised EU-funded programmes (late 2000s onwards) open to the new EU member states, including Poland and the Czech Republic. Despite the ineffectiveness in absorbing funding through the EU's FPs, the major policy drivers remained strong and were underpinned by the hope that only excellence could bring significant systemic change.

Behind the contagiousness of the idea of excellence, there were also dynamic changes in the political and economic environments of the three countries which, in turn, entailed a fundamental restructuring of their respective HE systems, including finding an adequate balance between mass (open) and elite status (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2010). Each country tried to respond to this changing environment by, *inter alia*, addressing the problem of mediocrity (in science) among their publicly run and funded universities, research teams and individual academics. The idea of excellence was conceptualized (locally translated) through the lens of global research rankings with the EU's FPs geared towards excellence in science as its core policy instrument. In short, there should be little doubt that the Lisbon Strategy provided a strong inspiration and legitimization for fashioning excellence, while global university rankings and FPs acted as its major drivers.

Main actors and diffusion mechanisms

The idea of excellence in science and HE across the three countries was predominantly politically driven and had a profound impact on universities and research institutions. Some key political figures pushed strongly for hands-on, top-down administrative measures in order to select a set of elite institutions. Excellence became a fashionable and politically sensitive issue attracting strong media attention. In Ukraine, this process was rather bureaucratized and centralized, while in Poland and the Czech Republic more indirect measures (mostly through competitive mechanisms allocation of research funding) were undertaken so as to strengthen excellence in science. In addition, in Poland and the Czech Republic, the influence of the Humboldtian tradition of academic self-governance was stronger and to a large degree still is an important part of academic identity (Dobbins and Knill, 2009), implying that political (external) attempts to structure the university system faced strong resistance by internal stakeholders (cf. Olsen, 2007). In all three countries, the central government played a dominant role in promoting excellence despite the fact that it was confronted by strong resistance from the academic community while attempting to initiate deep structural reforms.

In the Czech Republic, the functional remit and responsibilities of actors involved in the formulation of the national R&D policy, namely the Ministry of Education and the R&D Council, was set in the *Act on Research, Experimental Development and Innovations* (2002). Ukraine stands out because of its centralist policy-making tradition, while in the Czech Republic and Poland the state can only initiate change, yet its ultimate success (implementation) is largely dependent on the academic community, which still has a strong veto position. The idea of excellence therefore needs to be *adapted* (Beerkens, 2010) in order to fit specific local circumstances, including deeply institutionalized academic values and traditions.

In post-Soviet countries, any top-down initiatives in science became highly politicized and thus met with strong resistance from academics. The strong tradition of *self-governance* compelled the central government to mobilize other societal actors in an attempt to diffuse the idea of excellence indirectly, as a means of ‘soft governance’ or steering from distance (cf. Kickert, 1995), through a number of low-profile policy actions. Stakeholders such as the Foundation for Polish Science, intermediary or advisory bodies such as the Czech RD&I Council, and/or prominent individuals played a critical role in this respect (diffusion and legitimation phase). In Ukraine, prominent figures such as the Rector of the National Technical University (Kyiv Polytechnic Institute) were among the powerful advocates for excellence and also among those who initiated the local translation of the idea of the research university into policy actions.

In general, the governments tended to translate the concept of excellence into a number of incremental and indirect measures that helped to shape conditional funding for research. In Poland, a political move to support excellence in R&D was diffused through the establishment of autonomous research funding agencies such as the National Science Center (NCN) and National Center for Research and Development (NCBiR), which allocate research funding through competitive mechanisms. They became key actors in the process and the new apostles of R&D excellence. In addition, after failing to establish flagship universities, the Polish government came up with the idea of National Research Centers for Excellence (KNOW) and a financial scheme to provide block grants for a very few select faculties or other scientific units. This led to the concentration of research funds in a handful of selected universities (for example, in 2015, a fifth of research funding distributed by NCN went to the University of Warsaw and Jagiellonian University). This was not a typical top-down political initiative, but rather was a form of ‘translation’ of institutional excellence in the post-Humboldtian institutional environment. This was still a controversial policy measure, but was legitimized by similar initiatives across Europe, like the German *Excellence Initiative* (Kehm and Pasternack, 2009). Finally, in the Czech case, the most effective way to disseminate excellence was through the design of the underlying assessment methodology that brings together research results, awards a certain number of points to each result according to its worth (‘real or perceived’)³ and, on that basis, remunerates it financially. This methodology has had a significant financial impact on the level of allocation of institutional R&D support (Mahieu and Arnold, 2015).

To summarize, the central government turned out to be the dominant actor in pushing for excellence, but in comparison with Ukraine, in Poland and the Czech Republic (due to historical traditions) the state tried to engage various stakeholders to legitimize and disseminate it through different channels into academia. Striving for excellence in scientific policy is a political idea and serves predominately economic and political purposes, and thus is associated with increasing instrumentalization of the sector in the light of regional and domestic political agendas (Olsen and Maassen, 2007; Pinheiro, 2015b). Therefore, it should be no surprise that the political actors played the key roles and that the policy mechanisms adopted were specifically devised to promote excellence.

Institutionalization

The empirical analysis provides evidence that drivers, actors and diffusing mechanisms are important, but what really matters is how and in what form the concept of excellence is translated into institutionalized academic practices. We identify three main types of instruments for institutionalizing excellence across all three countries: (a) legal tools; (b) organizational instruments; and (c) financial instruments. In general, science is vested in the state, which therefore still exercises its authority to define and promote excellence, mainly through national regulations which apply to institutions (e.g. research assessment) as well as individuals (e.g. criteria of academic professional development).

Legal tools aim to operationalize excellence and establish new rules to encourage both organizations and individuals to change their academic practices. In Poland, it was primarily the Act of the Principles of Financing Sciences (2010) that laid the ground for policy direction to promote excellence, although the operationalization of excellence together with measures applied are based on legal acts of lower rank (ordinances). Similarly, in the Czech Republic, the R&D Act and its 2009 Amendment, together with the HE Act of 1998, set the framework to promote excellence. As stated in the above section, the definition of excellence cannot be seen as isolated from transnational processes, as both Poland and the Czech Republic (as members of the EU) are members of the European Research Area (ERA), which also has a strong say in defining and measuring excellence in science. This contrasts with the situation in Ukraine, in which the impact of national regulations is by far the strongest due to its academic roots in the Napoleonic (rather than Humboldtian) tradition (Bakhrushyn, 2013), and weaker political connections with the Western world. Thus, the system still remains closed (compared to Poland and the Czech Republic), making it very vulnerable to changing national regulations. That said, it remains largely open as regards: (a) how to support the institutionalization of excellence through legal instruments, and (b) how legal changes devised at the system level translate into individual academic practices (dos and don'ts).

Institutionalization through legal tools

In all three countries, there has been an observable shift towards international publications, in particular in journals indexed in internationally respected databases, a measure that has been strongly supported (or 'forced') by state regulations. Initially, the influence has grown through international professional networks, especially within the natural sciences that are deeply embedded in the transnational body of knowledge. The corresponding policy designs adapted the definition of excellence calculated by the bibliometric measures from Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus and insert them into formal criteria of academic professional development, but also institutional evaluation of research performance. This was due to the traditionally strong position occupied by the natural sciences on the one hand, and the transnational hegemonic position of the aforementioned bibliographic databases on the other (Paasi, 2005). In all three countries, this notion of excellence spread across all scientific fields. The transnational character of these databases provided them with the needed legitimacy to define excellence and the tools to measure it, despite being a subject of mounting and vociferous academic criticism. The adoption of 'metric-based' R&D assessment methodology has stirred up deep concern. The reasons are as follows: a reduction of the complexity of performance to an overly simple category of outputs; an exclusive focus on the immediate outputs to the detriment of wider societal relevance, including the quality of doctoral studies; a lack of consideration for disciplinary and institutional differences, treating all institutions in the same way; and not taking into account national long-term R&D priority areas (Mahieu and Arnold, 2015). The

definition of excellence was largely adopted from the transnational arena and legitimized by the hegemonic position of international journal databases and their specific bibliometric means of measuring excellence.

Institutionalization through organizational instruments

The institutionalization of excellence is taking place through the adoption of *organizational instruments* as a means of top-down restructuring of the HE sector, albeit in different ways depending on the local context. Both in the Czech Republic and Poland, the central government has proposed top-down diversification in order to select elite institutions. In both countries, these initiatives have largely failed. The idea of elite institutions is very controversial but also politically alluring, particularly in big countries, due to the ambiguous nature (institutional hierarchies) in which many HEIs make a self-claim towards their elite status. The Polish government twice tried to institutionalize the idea of excellence through flagship universities, the first time in 2008 and later during 2015. The latter attempt took place through the *Program for HE and Research Development* (MNiSW, 2015), which proposed three different types of HEIs depending on their profiles: research-oriented, research-teaching-oriented and teaching-oriented. This idea stirred up massive criticism from the academic community and, as a result of domestic political turbulence, it was abandoned at least for the time being. Establishing some form of elite institutions is clearly in fashion (Schwartzman et al., 2015; Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009) and in both Poland and Ukraine, political attempts have been made to select 'national' and 'research' universities. This contrasts with the Czech Republic, where there is no relevant policy discourse (past or present) around differentiation, and the selection of 'flagship', 'elite', 'research' universities is not really an issue. Even the widely criticized 2009 *White Paper on Tertiary Education* has no reference to flagship universities, not least due to the unchallenged positions of Charles University and Masaryk University in the national HE landscape. In Ukraine, a centralist (top-down) diversification policy was initially developed, but failed to be implemented because of the lack of financial resources. Starting in 1994, when the first three Ukrainian flagship universities were awarded the status of 'national' institutions, an attempt was made to stimulate the remaining prominent universities to strive for this status. At that time, there were plans to establish 51 national universities. However, domestic politics overtook the logic of excellence as Ukrainian presidents generously tend to award many different statuses before elections and there were ultimately 117 national universities instead of the initial plans for 51 (Stadnyi, 2013). At first, the government declared that national universities would acquire additional funding, yet due to the fragility of the Ukrainian economy there were problems with the allocation of funds. Despite the initial failure, the idea of elite institutions returned to the public debate in 2007, embedded in the hegemonic idea of the 'research university' (Mohrman et al., 2008). However, during the process of local translation, the key figures in the government kept on changing and they interpreted the 'research university' in different ways; the economy was in constant crisis and the government did not aim to build a knowledge economy and, as a result, the idea of 'research university' gradually hollowed out (cf. Hladchenko et al., 2016).

Institutionalization through financial instruments

HE in CEE is characterized by considerable underfunding in comparison to Western European countries, but analogous to them it relies heavily on public funding. Both these features make the domestic HE systems particularly vulnerable to new financial opportunities linked to *strategic agency* (Oliver, 1991) and changing rules for the allocation of financial resources or *resource dependencies* (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). As EU members, both Poland and the Czech Republic

make strategic use of the EU's Operation Programmes aimed at strengthening *European centres of excellence* and various forms of regional R&D centres. EU funding was invested in research infrastructure and, in principle, it was allotted through competitive mechanisms (in separate fractions for each country). That said, at least in Poland, the topography of local political interests inevitably played its role in the allocation of funds. For both countries, the infrastructure revolution was probably the most effective way to let the leading research centres catch up with the rest of the world. However, the long-term financial stability of these centres might be in danger, as maintaining cutting-edge, modern research infrastructure requires a steady supply of adequate funds in the future.

To sum up, all three types of policy instruments have been utilized to embed or institutionalize excellence in HE/science. Clearly, in all the countries, *legal regulations* have played a leading role as science is deeply embedded in the public realm and thus relies on public support (cf. Amaral et al., 2010). The central government, supported by various stakeholders, defines not only excellence but also the means of measuring it either at the institutional level (e.g. institutional research assessment) or at the individual level (e.g. academic degrees are awarded according to criteria set in national regulations). This policy posture lends credibility to the thesis of *coercive isomorphism* long advocated by institutional scholars (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). As regards *organizational instruments*, there have been serious political attempts to institutionalize excellence in the form of elite (world class) institutions. What seemed to be the political short-cut to excellence became a 'wicked problem' (Churchman, 1967). In this context, clear differences emerged, with Poland and Ukraine making several attempts to restructure HE from 'the top down' while such attempts were largely abandoned in the Czech Republic. Small countries tend to have a well-established hierarchy of HEIs with elite institutions in 'the academic lore', as demonstrated by a recent study into the Mathew effect in Czech HE (Šima, 2013). By contrast, Poland and Ukraine turned out to be more vulnerable to university rankings, and, largely due to the size of their national HE systems (450 HEIs in Poland and 277 in UKR), the organizational restructuring of mass HE in the form of 'elite' institutions made some sense. In countries of considerable size, rankings also fuel aspirations of local political elite who see them instrumentally as a source of prestige of regions and magnets for knowledge-intensive investments. Hence, they often tend to over-emphasize the role of rankings and attach great importance to formal statutes of HEI. Finally, one of the most effective mechanisms to promote excellence are *financial instruments*, which reflect the steering-at-a-distance approach (Kickert, 1995). New actors and mechanisms such as funding agencies, intermediate and advisory bodies are becoming engaged in supporting the institutionalization of excellence in science. In heavily underfunded systems, such as those in most of the CEE countries, dependence on resources is strong, and the most effective way to institutionalize excellence is thus through the supply of additional (external) research funding in the form of competitive mechanisms. Poland and the Czech Republic, in particular, are beneficiaries of considerable amounts of EU structural funding (totalling billions of euros), a large part of which is specifically focused on promoting excellence through the development of research infrastructure. Furthermore, both countries are members of the ERA, which also has an impact on shaping notions of excellence through setting up criteria for competitive mechanisms regarding research funding programmes like Horizon 2020.

Discussion and conclusions

Across Europe, the idea of excellence in science and HE arrived as a consequence of the internationalization of HE (Stensaker et al., 2008) on the one hand, and the increasingly significant role of the sector in the context of a global knowledge-based economy (Temple, 2011) on the other. In the broader European context, this change was marked by the 2000 Lisbon Strategy that not only declared a shift in economic policy for the region, but also put science and HE at the forefront of political

initiatives (Olsen and Maassen, 2007). It probably would not be an exaggeration to state that the drive towards excellence was reflected in an isomorphic response (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) to a fast-changing (and increasingly nested) local, national, regional and global environment in which governments, but also universities and other scientific organizations, operate. In such circumstances, actors tend to follow, sometimes un-reflexibly, the actions of other legitimate actors, thus resulting in imitative behaviour or convergence (Pinheiro et al., 2014).

The highly politicized and narrowly defined concept of excellence invoked a multiplicity of political responses. Among these, the first and somehow most natural reaction to growing international expectations to support excellence was through the establishment of elite or 'flagship' universities. Fuelled by political aspirations, this policy posture fit perfectly with the institutional race for glory (rankings), which managed to attract substantial attention worldwide, thus becoming a popular proxy for excellence (Hazelkorn, 2011). Seen from the perspective of neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), the adoption of this policy logic was drawn from the legitimized backdrop of global solutions or 'best practices' (Salmi, 2009) which, in turn, allowed governments to domestically legitimate their actions while attracting additional external resources (EU funds) to support them. However, this strategy largely stood at odds with a deeply embedded university tradition of *equal but different* universities and the notion of academic self-governance (Antonowicz and Jongbloed, 2015). In both Poland and the Czech Republic, the Humboldtian legacy is still alive, although largely as a myth as empirically demonstrated by Kwiek (2012). Yet, the role of the academic community was considerably more prevalent in these two EU countries when compared to Ukraine where both the Napoleonic ('centralist') tradition and the Soviet ('bureaucratic') model were found to have a critical impact in both the process of local translation and consequent diffusion (institutionalization).

In all three countries, the idea of excellence came from outside academia and was promoted by either government or prominent actors, even in Ukraine where the idea came from rectors who spoke as members of the political establishment rather than the academic community. An instrumental approach to science and HE was contradictory in terms of the long-lasting and deeply institutionalized academic traditions. In Ukraine, the local translation of the idea of excellence became embedded in the notion of 'research universities' as an inseparable part of the knowledge economy, implemented in a centralized, top-bottom fashion. In the Czech Republic and Poland, by contrast, the idea of excellence was not a comprehensive concept implemented top down by a single body. Instead, a wide range of actors were involved in adapting the idea of excellence to local environments and this obviously caused some political confusion as the different actors approached excellence from a different perspective. The plurality of actors and their roles in the policy-making process increased the overall complexity of translating/adapting the idea of excellence locally. Although there are always ministers responsible for overseeing the whole system, a number of actors involved in the policy process often caused confusion, misinterpretations, misunderstandings, misconceptions or even delays in policy implementation (Gornitzka et al., 2005). This further suggests that governing within a corporate-pluralistic model associated with the rise of the stakeholder society (Neave, 2002) is a complex issue to say the least (cf. Pinheiro, 2015b).

The power game of translation was visible in the Czech Republic and Poland in which the position of the academic community was considerably stronger (i.e. their position to promote their own understandings of excellence was robust) when compared to Ukraine. Various advisory and representative bodies acting as political actors tended to concentrate on their specific and narrowly defined goals and, thus, presented very different, sometimes contradictory, approaches towards policy articulation or operationalization as in the case of excellence. Thus, the policy lost its focus and consistency. In Ukraine, which has been less influenced by the Humboldtian tradition, the academic environment is less institutionalized, and adaptation appears to be a more

straightforward political process. The lack of sufficient financial resources allows the government to re-brand institutions and enhance their formal status, yet everything else seems to have remained the same, i.e. no change in actual behaviour or capacity. Nevertheless, the government, with the support of prominent academic figures, acted directly by imposing regulations and organizational changes, while in the Czech and Polish cases it is more *steering from a distance* (Kickert, 1995) through a number of intermediate bodies (e.g. research funding agencies, evaluation bodies) and financial instruments. Both countries also used considerable amounts of EU structural funds to support excellence through unprecedented investments in research infrastructure that were also allocated through a competitive mechanism that per se supports excellence.

In all three countries, the academic community put up significant resistance to the imposition of bibliometric measures of excellence as a part of the institutionalization of excellence in science. But in this case, both political drivers and actors were too strong for the academic community to resist isomorphic pressures. It resulted in: (a) an uncritical acceptance and rather narrow understanding of excellence as a form of research performance, and (b) bibliometric measures were adopted to calculate or assess research outcomes. Regardless of distinctive differences between the three countries, they all relied on the same international databases that index publications, mainly the WoS and Scopus. Despite all the criticism levelled against it, such assessment methodology impacted institutional strategies and individual behaviour following bibliometric rules and the 'publish or perish' academic logic. Not only did the three governments build the system of institutional and individual research evaluation on bibliometric measures, but they then linked them directly to resource allocation and professional career development. In all three countries, this development was supported by the privileged position of the natural sciences, which were legitimized by their internationally recognized performance (cf. Brzeziński, 2016; Jurajda et al., 2015). Above all, they strongly rely on citations and impact factors which seem to proxy excellence to the extent that in Poland and Ukraine the names of these databases have been inserted in policy documents and even legal acts. At the end of the day, as research publications are key to academics' and HEIs' prestige and individuals' career advancement, the utilitarian perception of excellence takes precedence.

Scopus data for the period 1996–2015 show that the Czech Republic increased the number of journal publications by 340% (from 5000 to 22,000 articles annually). The figures for Poland show a 233% rise (from 12,000 to 40,000), with Ukraine having a more modest 66% growth (from 6000 to 10,000).⁴ Put succinctly, there is a substantive difference between the growth of research outputs defined as a central part of the 'excellence script' in both the Czech Republic and Poland in comparison to Ukraine. It could be concluded that the trajectory of socio-economic transformations has had a profound effect on the diffusion, translation and institutionalization of the political concept of excellence in HE. The rapid development of close and strong ties to the Western world, combined with the financial resources behind 'excellence' initiatives, turned out to be pivotal factors not only in strategic decisions to redesign priorities in HE policy but also to disseminate its particular account among elements of the academic community. Hence, it is not surprising that only three institutions are part of the top 500 in AWRU rankings,⁵ namely, Charles University (Czech Republic) and Warsaw and Jagiellonian Universities (Poland).

The analysis shows that although the academic community understands and shares enthusiasm towards excellence, it also shows some resistance towards such a narrow understanding of making it a top political priority, which legitimizes rapid and deep structural changes in HE. Thus, a number of actors engaged with the use of indirect political mechanisms, helping the government to adapt the concept of excellence to the local environment and institutionalizing it into individual practices. This means, however, that what the government wants to see as the 'motorway' to excellence sometimes becomes a 'bumpy road' laden with crossroads and roundabouts.

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Notes

1. In particular, Harvard University and Stanford University (despite striking differences between them) serve as symbols of success.
2. The leading position of the Academies of Sciences is best seen through the Nature Index, which tracks the affiliations of high quality scientific articles published in the most prestigious journal in the field of hard sciences.
3. For journal articles listed in Scopus or the Web of Science (WoS), the score is calculated from the journal's impact factor. Special rules apply to conference papers listed in Scopus or WoS. In the case of books, books chapters and acknowledged scientific journals published in the CR, the score is set by a subjective stand of a panel assessor (though general guidelines for quality recognition and point attribution exist).
4. The data have been obtained from Scival software that covers Scopus.
5. Information obtained through the website <http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2015.html>.

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The pendulum strikes back? An analysis of the evolution of Hungarian higher education governance and organisational structures since the 1980s

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Abstract

Higher education in Central Europe has been scrutinised from many different perspectives during the last 30 years. In our analysis, we focus solely on Hungary and specifically on two key areas: governance and organisational structure. Using an analytical model proposed by Leisyte (2014), we analyse how the governance and organisational structure of institutions have changed between 1985 and 2015, and consider what the driving forces might be behind these changes. Through our analysis, we found that the pendulum effect observed in organisational culture and leadership in Eastern Europe (Bakacsi, 2014) in periods of transition could also be identified in the governance models in Hungary. Despite evidence of a convergence of higher education policies in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and the Czech Republic (Dobbins, 2011) towards the market-type model of higher education governance, we found that in Hungary the model is much more state-controlled and there is already an apparent move away from foreign-inspired ideals and models. It is suggested that Hungary is ahead of the apparent trend in other countries where they have yet to experience a swing in the opposite direction.

Keywords

Structure, governance, pendulum, higher education, Hungary, Central Europe

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Introduction

Higher education in Europe has changed considerably over the last 30 years. Changes such as internationalisation and globalisation, technological development, new knowledge producers and the transformation of institutions into capital producers have all led to the increasing complexity of higher education. Higher education now has to face what Barnett refers to as a 'supercomplex' situation going beyond increasing demands with limited resources and involving the selection of narrative frameworks as well, since 'we can no longer be sure as to which framework we are to inhabit' (Barnett, 2000: 415). All of these changes have resulted in a continuous reform of governance and funding: the rise and reconsideration of 'evaluative state' (Neave, 1998), 'steering from distance' (De Boer et al., 2006), and the 'new public management' movement (Broucker et al., 2015). Complexity is further enhanced by variations affecting institutional autonomy and accountability, tuition fees, and output- and performance-based allocation mechanisms, to name but a few.

One notable attribute of post-socialist countries is the apparent bottleneck for these developments. While these processes took place gradually in Western European countries from the 1980s onwards, in post-socialist countries all the reforms started simultaneously after the change of regime (within considerably unstable legal and normative frameworks). Although post-socialist higher education systems have different roots, communism standardised them. The resulting Soviet system can be considered an extreme version of the Napoleonic model (Charle, 2003; Karády, 2005). This model has the following characteristics: a strong focus on practical needs and professional training; the separation of teaching and research; highly specialised institutions; a low level of institutional autonomy; state-funded and state-controlled enrolment; and elite higher education, with only a small percentage of the relevant age cohort attaining higher education (Kwiek, 2014).

After the change of regime, the allure of European integration put many post-socialist countries on a similar path, even if the pace of change was different in some countries (Dobbins and Knill, 2009; Leisyte, 2014). Referring to this common path, Scott (2006) aptly commented that 'even after communism ceased to exist, it continued to promote homogeneity' (Scott, 2006: 430). Later on, however, the consonance of post-socialist countries started to gradually disappear because of different historical traditions (Leisyte, 2014) or differences in political development. This is evident in the case of Hungary, which for a long time followed a similar path to countries of similar Humboldtian roots, such as the Czech Republic or Poland, but changed course after the 'illiberal' U-turn that was taken in 2010.

In this article, we would like to analyse the changes in external and internal governance structures – as well as organisational structures – over the last 30 years in Hungary. The external governance structure refers to the relationship between the state, various other external stakeholders and the institution. Internal governance refers to the decision-making structure of institutions and the involvement of internal stakeholders (Eurydice, 2008).

While there is plenty of comparative research on university governance (e.g. De Boer et al., 2010a; Dobbins and Knill, 2009; Estermann and Nokkala, 2009; Estermann et al., 2011; Eurydice, 2008), the literature and research concerning the organisational structure of higher education institutions (HEIs) in general is sparse, with just a few exceptions (Lombardi et al., 2002; Taylor, 2006). Organisational structure describes the division of work and spheres of authority among different academic and administrative units, and the applied coordination mechanisms. In spite of the magnitude of changes that have occurred on an organisational level, there is a significant lack of research focusing on how institutions have responded to change (Leisyte, 2014). Aside from a handful of case studies (e.g. De Boer et al., 2010b), we found no comparative research on this issue for the Central European region. As a result of these apparent deficiencies, we focus on the emergence of new management units and positions (such as the vice rector responsible for strategy and

development), the transformation of their function, changes in the relations between departments/faculties and central administrative units (centralisation versus decentralisation), and the transformation of the academic (faculty/departmental) structure.

Within this context, we wish to answer the question of how the external and internal governance structure and the organisational structure of institutions changed between 1985 and 2015, and what the main driving forces of these changes have been. We have used 1985 as the starting point of our analysis because a new law on education was passed in that year which deviated from the prevalent Soviet model.

Our main thesis is that Hungary, in contrast to many other post-socialist countries in the region, started to swing back to a state-dominated system. In the next section, we will provide an analytical framework, followed by an analysis of the evolution of five governance mechanisms: competition; state control; managerial and academic self-governance; and stakeholder guidance (Leisyte, 2014).

An analytical framework

To present how the governance system of the Hungarian higher education has changed over the given period, we use three ideal types suggested by Dobbins (2011): the state model; the market model; and the academic self-governance model. In the state model, institutions are run by the state. Therefore, many aspects of their operation (structure, funding, admission, curriculum, personnel and selection of executives) are highly regulated and directly influenced by state authorities. The authority of management is given, as well as limited, by the state. Academic self-governance is curtailed. The academic self-governance model is built on 'a state-university partnership' (Dobbins and Knill, 2009: 403), where institutions have their autonomy in professional matters (therefore academic freedom is secured), and the state provides funding and regulates institutional processes. The outcome of this is the curtailment of the importance and authority of institutional management. In the market model the state does not protect institutions from market forces. Its role is to create fair competition in the higher education market and to promote social interests by implementing financial and other incentives. Institutions are forced to compete and diversify their funding bases. Survival requires strong management which limits academic self-governance and, sometimes, academic freedom as well.

For analytical purposes, these models must be operationalised. Indicators used in the Autonomy Scorecard (Estermann and Nokkala, 2009; Estermann et al., 2011) can be useful for characterising different models, comparing higher education systems and/or analysing their evolution over time. For example, Dobbins and Knill (2009: 408) analysed the evolution of four Central European higher education systems and took into consideration similar indicators, i.e. who sets strategic goals, who controls/evaluates institutions, how funding is allocated, how executives are selected and how external stakeholders are involved.

In our analysis, we use a framework suggested by Leisyte (2014) as a starting point. In her summary of the transformation of Central and Eastern European university governance, Leisyte (2014) described academic and quasi-market rationale or 'logics' as a particular configuration of five governance mechanisms (Leisyte, 2014: 101). Competition describes the necessity and intensity of a fight for resources (funding, students, prestige, etc.), usually in a state-regulated environment. The level of state regulation shows the extent to which the state intervenes directly or through prescriptive regulations in institutional matters. Academic self-governance and managerial self-governance describe the importance of collegial/managerial actors and decision-making practices in internal governance, while stakeholder guidance shows how external stakeholders are involved in decision-making processes. Leisyte (2014) provides a configuration of academic and

Table 1. The characterisation of three ideal institutional logics/ideal types.

Governance mechanism	Logic of state regulation (state model)	Academic logic (academic self-governance model)	Logic of quasi markets (market model)
Competition for resources	Low	Low	High
State regulation	High	Low/Medium	Low
Managerial self- governance	Medium	Low/Medium	High
Academic self- governance	Low	High	Low
Stakeholder guidance	Medium	Medium	High

Source: Adapted from Leisyte (2014: 102).

quasi-market logics and, based on Dobbins and Knill (2009), we added to that the description of state regulation logic. We paired these logics with the ideal types, as shown in Table 1.

In the following sections, we review the evolution of each governance mechanism and the forces that affected them.

Competition for resources

Expansion: from elite to mass higher education

Following the change of regime, one of the major changes in the Hungarian higher education system was the growth in the number of students. As a consequence, student needs and educational programmes became more heterogeneous. This phenomenon in itself is nothing new as other Central and Easter European (CEE) countries underwent similar changes (Reisz 2003), as well as all over the world. Aniol (2015: 48) describes Polish universities as becoming:

[d]iploma-producing factories and conglomerates of mass occupational education rather than excellence centres shaping top class knowledge and culture, ones also capable of educating humanists to the highest levels, who cannot be substituted by managers, bankers or engineers, no matter how talented and well-educated, even if the best in class.

However, in Hungary, the number of students has quadrupled since 1990. This was primarily due to the growing popularity of ‘atypical’ (mostly evening and distance learning) forms of education, and to a lesser extent the growth in full-time education. After the introduction of tuition fees in 1996, the number of fee-paying students increased as well and they accounted for half of the total number of students by the middle of the 2000s. However, following a reversal of this trend between 2004 and 2006, not only the number of fee-paying students started to decline but there was also a decrease in general in the number of students entering higher education. Although demographic trends contributed to the decreasing number of students after 2005, educational policy had a stronger influence on this decrease (e.g. the reintroduction of fees in 2008 and the changing allocation of state-funded places).

With the increase in demand, the content of educational programmes also changed significantly. Student preferences leaned towards social sciences and business, which resulted in a growing number of institutions starting to offer programmes in these fields. The diversity of educational programmes also increased as new levels of education appeared, such as higher-level vocational training, specialised postgraduate education and PhD programmes. The growth in the number of students and training programmes facilitated not only the evolution of more complex HEIs but also an increase in the number of faculties (see Table 2).

Table 2. Institutes, faculties, teaching staff and student numbers in Hungary 1990–2015.

Year	Number of institutions	Number of faculties	Number of full-time students	Number of students	Number of teachers
1990/91	77	117	76,601	102,387	17,302
1995/96	90	138	129,541	179,565	18,098
2000/01	62	155	176,046	295,040	22,873
2005/06	71	172	217,245	380,632	23,188
2010/11	69	184	218,057	318,019	21,495
2015/16	66	n.a.	210,103	295,316	21,668

Source: Central Statistical Office (2016).

The transformation of the network of institutions

In the 1980s, Hungary had a highly fragmented higher education system with many specialised institutions. Although the drawbacks of this situation were realised in the 1980s, changes were initiated only in the 1990s when comprehensive institutions (*universitas*) were preferred. Such institutions were created in 2000 through forced mergers on a wide scale. This was followed by a handful of voluntary mergers. After 2010, however, the government split institutions through demergers either to operate them separately, harking back to the specialised institutions of the Soviet era, or to merge them with other institutions. The splitting of institutions and fragmentation seems to echo the past. Back in the 1920s, Kuno Klebelsberg, Minister of Education in Hungary, was unnerved by the existence of many parallel institutions and many small institutions, which he called ‘dwarf colleges’ (Ladányi, 2000: 25). Again, we see that Hungary appears to be swinging back to earlier times, despite age-old concerns about the inefficiencies incumbent with a fragmented system.

The type of institutions also changed in this period. Until 2005, the higher education system was binary having only universities and colleges, but the two types gradually converged into one another, known as ‘academic drift’. Colleges became increasingly similar to universities in their operation, organisational structure and culture. Between 2005 and 2011, steps were taken towards a unitary system, making it possible for colleges to become universities if they met certain criteria. In 2011, the division of universities and colleges was reinforced, and in 2015, a new type of institution (university of applied sciences) was created, with a focus on meeting social-economic demands and the utilisation of knowledge (EMMI, 2015: 42). All colleges (except for two small institutions) became universities of applied sciences in 2016.

In summary, over the last 30 years a very heterogeneous system of higher education has developed from the point of view of size and profile. The central role of Budapest (having around 45% of students) remained strong for the whole period.

The level and allocation of funding

Following the change of regime, the institutional expenditure-to-GDP ratio in the Hungarian higher education system was between 0.8% and 1.1%. Considering that GDP has risen to 150% since the change of regime, the expenditure of higher education in real terms has also gone up by almost the same amount. However, the number of students has quadrupled and this has led to a significant drop in the cost-per-student ratio. This in turn has led to increased cost-efficiency, but at the same time has increased the potential of endangering the quality.¹

Table 3. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP.

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2012
Czech Republic	0.9	0.8	1.0	1.2	1.4
Estonia	1.1	m	1.1	1.6	1.6
Hungary	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.2
Poland	0.8	1.1	1.6	1.5	1.3
Slovak Republic	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.0
Slovenia	m	m	1.3	1.2	1.2
Austria	1.2	m	m	m	1.7
Germany	1.1	m	m	1.2	1.2
OECD average	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.5
EU21 average	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.4
Post-Soviet EU average	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.3

m = missing data.

Source: OECD 2013 (data for 1995); OECD 2015.

According to the OECD statistics, the higher education expenditure-to-GDP ratio is slightly lower than the expenditure of other, similarly developed post-socialist countries (such as Poland or Estonia), and they, in turn, are considerably lower than the 1.3–1.5% OECD average. Thus, Hungary spends proportionally less on the operation of HEIs than the majority of developed countries, as can be seen in Table 3:

In the 2000s, the proportion of direct state support was almost 50% of revenues, and about 25% came from other public sources (e.g. the National Health Insurance Fund). Tuition fees were introduced in 1996. As in most post-socialist countries, students performing well in entrance examinations are granted state-funded places, meaning no tuition fees and a high level of financial support from other sources. The others have to pay tuition fees and they are not entitled to any other support, except for government subsidised student loans (OECD, 2008). The introduction of universal tuition fees was attempted twice. However, these attempts were either short-lived (the succeeding government abolished them in 1998) or they were overthrown by a referendum (in 2008). The number of fee-paying students steadily increased from its introduction until the middle of the 2000s, and in 2004 it even exceeded the number of state-funded students. Afterwards, however, the trend reversed, and in 2015/2016 the proportion of fee-paying students was only 37% (Eurydice, 2016: 41).²

As public statistics are not available regarding the revenue from tuition fees, we can only estimate that fees account for 5–10% of institutions' own revenues (Expanzió, 2011; Polónyi, 2012), even if until 2011 institutions were allowed to set tuition fees themselves, unlike Western European universities (see Estermann and Nokkala, 2009: 41). As the proportion of corporate commissions was around 5–7% in the 2000s (Polónyi, 2012), we can conclude that 70–80% of institutional revenues came from public sources.

The allocation of direct state funding is also critical in determining the level of competition. Until 1996, state subsidies were distributed in a negotiation process with the ministry, which was based partly on the budgets of previous years and partly on the planned budget of the institution. In 1996, this scheme was replaced by formula funding, where funding was tied to input variables such as the total number of state-funded students or of lecturers. However, the formula was changed quite frequently (Polónyi, 2012), suggesting that institutional lobbies had tried to bend the formula

to suit their interests, and the role of negotiation processes was still significant. Before 2005, state-funded places were allocated to institutions and educational programmes by the ministry. In 2005, a competition-based allocation of undergraduate places was introduced where the ministry determined the number of state-funded places for each field of education, and within these, the students were ranked on the basis of their secondary school leaving exam results. The institution to which the student had been accepted received the subsidy for state-funded students.

In 2007, three-year performance contracts were introduced, but they were abolished in 2011. The year 2011 was a general turning point in higher education funding. Public funding was significantly reduced. According to the EUA Public Funding Observatory, direct state support of higher education was 30% lower in 2015 than in 2008 (inflation adjusted), but in 2014 the reduction was 46%.³

The competition-based allocation of state-funded undergraduate students was abolished in 2012 and replaced by quotas set by the ministry restoring the allocation system existing before 2005. One notable example of state intervention is that state-funded places in 16 educational programmes (law, economics, business administration and some other disciplines highly sought by students) radically decreased due to higher entrance requirements, forcing the majority of students wishing to study in these fields to pay tuition fees. In sum, in the new funding regime, 'the normative state support of higher education has basically been terminated and replaced by a kind of mixed system of historic budgeting and earmarked state support, which is heavily manipulated: it is non-transparent for the institutions and cannot be foreseen in the long run' (Berács et al., 2015: 7).

Lakner (2013) concludes from a qualitative study of 'key actors' in Hungarian higher education that a withdrawal of direct funding from the so-called 'institutions and faculties with dubious scientific and professional quality' (Lakner, 2013: 212) pushes such institutions towards the private sector. Fee-paying students and a lack of government funding thus become the driving forces towards converting public institutions into private or municipally run institutions.

In summary, how has competition in the higher education sector developed in the last 30 years? The dependency of institutions on public sources has remained very high over the whole period. Between 1996 and 2011, competition-enhancing tools were gradually introduced, e.g. tuition fees, performance-based contracts, formula funding and the allocation of state-funded study places. The introduction of these tools were milestones in a process that was tempered by the abundant number of students. After 2011, public funding and the number students decreased considerably leading to increased competition. However, the competition became less transparent – as with the allocation mechanisms, Hungary seemingly returned to the early 1990s with its historic and earmarked budgeting.

External governance: the changing relationship of the state and the institutions

In the 1980s, a researcher explained the crisis of Hungarian higher education as a transformation of institutions from autonomous institutions into the cogs of public administration. As a result:

[i]nstead of universities we have to talk about a peculiar formation, the 'higher authority-university complex', if we want to remain loyal to reality ... In our opinion, supervisor and supervised organisations have blurred into one big state machine ... Different levels of organisational hierarchy – from departments to the rector – function primarily as the link in a chain of a control system rather than the central point of substantial activities (Forintos, 1989: 637).

For this reason, it was not surprising that the 1990s was an era of extensive reinvigoration of Humboldtian ideals even if there were competing ideals (such as entrepreneurial and neoliberal higher education). The Humboldtian ideal places the freedom (and unity) of education and research in the spotlight. This is provided by the state through guaranteeing the autonomy and academic freedom of HEIs. As these were highly limited under the communist regime, the fulfilment of the Humboldtian ideal meant the transcendence of the Soviet model and a return to the national model. The foundation of Humboldtian higher education reached its peak in the higher education law of 1993. In the meantime, in 1989, it was inserted into the constitution that ‘only scientists are entitled to decide in questions of scientific truth and to determine the scientific value of research’ (Article 70/G). Humboldtian higher education in Hungary meant that even if the supervision of higher education became the sole responsibility of the ministry of education (instead of many different supervisory ministries and authorities), any means of allowing direct interventions, such as appointing rectors, were not used by the ministry. The ministry basically played a passive legal supervisory role.

In practice, institutions regained a high level of autonomy in appointments and in setting the content of educational programmes. Self-regulation became more significant not just on an institutional level but on a sectoral level as well. The appearance and significance of buffer organisations reflected this trend. For example, quality was controlled by the independent (but state-funded) Hungarian Accreditation Committee (Hrubos, 2016). On the other hand, institutions remained part of the state budget, which restricted their financial, organisational and HR possibilities (e.g. staff remained public servants; the requirements of public procurements; cutting or freezing institutional budgets during the year). In addition, general governance processes were regulated by the state, such as the composition of decision-making bodies, and therefore the dependence of institutions on the state remained high.

From 1998, the government became more proactive and efforts to control and make institutions more accountable gradually increased (Kozma and Rébay, 2008). This trend was highlighted by the mergers enforced by the state in 2000 and the attempt to introduce governing boards responsible for strategy and general supervision in 2005. Many additional indirect means of control were introduced. Some of these, however, were successfully resisted, such as when the Constitutional Court rejected the introduction of boards.

From 2011 onwards, the state became more interventionist and institutional autonomy decreased radically. The government of 2010 developed the so-called Széll Kálmán Plans which described higher education as a sector with a ‘deformed structure’. The image of needlessly large and deformed higher education is reflected in the goal that ‘higher education should not motivate anybody to spend their young years in happy idleness’ (Ministry of National Economy, 2011: 25). To solve these problems, ‘the state has to return to the world of education’ (Ministry of National Economy, 2011: 24). Regulations on funding, forced mergers, the introduction of new supervisory boards and state-appointed positions (such as the chancellor or financial inspectors) provided more opportunities for the state to directly influence the behaviour of institutions. Even the constitution was changed in 2013 and it now declares that:

Higher education institutions shall be autonomous in terms of the content and the methods of research and teaching; their organisation shall be regulated by an Act. The Government shall, within the framework of an Act, lay down the rules governing the management of public higher education institutions and shall supervise their management (Article X paragraph 3).

This process was accompanied by the withering of buffer organisations. For example, the ENQA-membership of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee had to be reviewed because its

independence was questioned, or some of the privileges of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in relation to allocating research funds were transferred to a state authority.

Managerial self-governance

Three topics will be discussed in this section: the selection of executives, the differentiation of central administration and the role of the rector.

The selection of executives

Institutional autonomy in the selection of executives increased in the 1990s and 2000s. In the 1980s, even heads of departments could be appointed only with the permission of the relevant ministry. From the mid-1990s, it was only the head of institute (rector, director general) whose selection had to be approved by the ministry before appointment. This process was formal, however, and it was generally limited to supervision of the legality of the selection procedure. Institutional autonomy also gradually increased in the selection and appointment of administrative and financial executives. From 2011, however, the situation changed considerably, and the government started to intervene in all selection and appointment processes more actively, and in many cases institutions were deprived of these rights. For example, between 2011 and 2014, it was not the rector who appointed the chief financial director and the internal controller, but the minister responsible for the budget. This system was fully in place following the introduction of the chancellors who were responsible for all administrative matters in the institution, and they must be considered a leader of the institution in administrative and financial issues (Berács et al., 2015; Kováts, 2015). The rector's responsibility covers only academic issues. This dual executive leadership system is not unheard of in higher education. It was widely used in Germany, for example, although in the last decade German chancellors have transformed from an 'agent ... mediating between the university and the state' into 'a functional member within an expanded university leadership' supervised by a president (Blümel, 2016: 18). This is not the case in Hungary, where chancellors are frequently seen as agents of the government (Kováts, 2016). In more positive accounts, chancellors may break the unfavourable status quo of academic oligarchy and they can provide some additional competences that may be lacking in management. In addition, unlike Germany, in Hungary chancellors are appointed by the prime minister without even consulting the institutions (Kováts, 2015), which is a source of tension.

This highlights one of the peculiarities of Hungary in relation to other countries when it comes to reforms of governance in general: there is a tendency, at least in recent years, towards what some authors describe as unorthodoxy. Hajnal (2014: 36) sees the current direction as follows: 'a movement towards a Weberian bureaucracy is underway, being more respectable, morally good – more trustworthy and fair – and calculable but at the same time rigid and lacking innovation'.

The differentiation of central administration

The decision to introduce chancellors was justified by an inefficient administration encumbered by a high level of debt after 2012 (when state support decreased significantly). Administration has become increasingly complex since the 1980s. The evolution and differentiation of administration started in the 1980s, but it was notable in 1990 with the appearance of many new units. Mergers fuelled this process, as institutions became so large that expanding central administration and creating centralised services seemed to be a reasonable possibility both from a managerial point of view and in terms of economies of scale. As a response to the student-exchange and lecturer-mobility

opportunities taking off at the time, offices managing international relations and organising student-exchange programmes appeared and the departments managing international affairs were extended. In order to exploit the possibilities offered by tenders, offices for Tendering, Grants and Project Management were established (Kováts, 2011).

Since the 2000s when the rate of enrolments stagnated, offices offering value-added services (such as educational and psychological counselling, career support, organising internships, and alumni organisations) as well as PR/marketing departments and corporate relations have appeared in an increasing number of institutions. Even organisational units responsible for corporate relations have been created in a few places. Offices for resource management (HR, quality management, management control) have also been set up. In 2012, units responsible for strategic planning could be found in seven institutions. Nowadays, most of these organisational units can be found in almost all institutions, and they have been created for three reasons: first, to comply with legislative requirements; second, to provide for various consolidating and accreditation-related tasks; and third, as a result of state and EU funding (Kováts, 2011).

The growing number of faculties and the increased pressure to centralise services increased the tension stemming from the question of which activities should be (de)centralised in the institution. Two general models evolved in Hungarian higher education. In the case of the decentralised model, the centre is responsible for only a few functions, and the majority of activities are operated and carried out at faculty level. Regulations, as well as the systems ensuring accurate accounting of the services provided by faculties and their shared use of resources contribute significantly to harmonisation. A typical problem of decentralised models is the frequent lack of competence because 'centralised decision-making was the norm in the past and the institutions did not have to deal with planning and long-term thinking' (Lakner, 2013: 210).

In more centralised institutions, faculties may only carry out certain tasks independently. The extreme examples are the multi-faculty colleges caused by organic development, where faculties are essentially responsible for only teaching and research and all administration is centralised. In these institutions, the dean has no responsibility for operative management (this is the task of the rector), but he/she primarily has academic duties. In reality, many institutions adapted mixed models which are a major source of tension (Kováts, 2012).

Shared leadership and the strength of executives

In 1980 Pálvölgyi argued that 'the authority of executives of higher education institutions is limited by several circumstances: a) orders and regulations of higher authorities supervising the institutions; b) the number and complexity of tasks which forces executives to delegate part of their spheres of authority; c) the structure of the organisation which is characterised by relatively wide participation in decision-making and preparations, the traditional strive for consensus, the formal and informal influence of academics and their groups; d) rotation, that is, leadership appointment is only temporary; and e) the shared leadership, that is, legal norms which define the decision-making authority of the main body of the institution' (Pálvölgyi, 1980: 95–96). In addition, he also emphasised that the chief executive (i.e. rector) is not elected by the main decision-making body, but he/she gains his/her office from the supervising authority.

Between 1985 and 2011, the problem of shared leadership worsened. Although the direct interventions of the government decreased, complexity and decentralisation increased. Moreover, the consensual organisational culture as well as the rotation of executives remained unchanged. Executives were usually selected from within, which increased conflict-avoidance. With the increase of institutional autonomy, the number and weight of issues in the competence of the senate/university council increased (Polónyi, 2006), while the dependence of the rector on the senate/council

increased. It is the President of the Republic who formally appoints the rector (following the minister's proposition), but until 2011, the ministry rarely intervened in the selection process.

The lack of managerial and financial competence of academic leaders and the decision-making bodies is also worth mentioning. Mergers were enforced in 2000 when institutions were incorporated into other institutions as faculties, thereby raising the role of faculties. Since institutional management was not delegated clear powers, the rector remained dependent on the senate, comprised of faculty representatives competing for their own faculty's interests. In 2005, the government attempted to reinforce the role and position of rectors by making them more accountable. This was achieved by weakening the position of the senate and delegating part of its power (including the selection of rectors) to a new board consisting of the representatives of external and internal stakeholders. This attempt was prevented by the Constitutional Court, which referred to a breach of institutional autonomy (Barakonyi, 2009). As a result, the weak management position of rectors as well as their dependence on the senate/university council remained.

The introduction of the chancellor system in 2015 made the relationship between the rector, the academic bodies and the administration much more complex, because rectors were weakened further – especially in institutions with heterogeneous profiles. The chancellor system has the potential to overcome the difficulties stemming from the lack of competence, provided chancellors get on well with the rector and other academic leaders. The exclusion of institutions from the selection process, however, has undermined the trust towards chancellors and their legitimacy, and provides an opportunity for government to intervene directly.

Managerial self-governance could not gain supremacy in the studied period. Although in the 1980s the rector was independent of the institution, in the Humboldtian period it became a weak position. Attempts to strengthen the position in 2005 failed. After 2011, with the appointment of many executives by the state, they achieved some independence from institutional stakeholders.

Academic self-governance: the internal governance structure of institutions

The composition and operation of decision-making bodies and other committees

After the change of regime, the composition of the major decision-making bodies (university council/senate, faculty council) changed from apparently democratic to the true representation of (internal) interests. First, several representatives of external social actors (representatives of the Communist Party or the ministry) were forced off the committees, or in other cases (representatives of unions or young communists) they were replaced by representatives of internal stakeholders. Second, in the 1980s, many council members were members in-officio, who were appointed to their position by the rector (in the 1980s the approval of the ministry was also necessary). After the change of regime, most of them were replaced by elected members.

Academic leaders played a significant role in nominating members to different bodies in the 1980s (Pálvölgyi, 1980). This decreased after the change of regime. As a result, the influence of rectors on councils decreased and these bodies could become more independent of the rector, thereby becoming truly able to counterbalance the rector.

In 1984, in a collection of reports on higher education, it was written that 'on large faculties the number of members in faculty councils is quite high, exceeding 70–80 persons, which makes procedures cumbersome' (Pálovecz, 1981). Pálvölgyi (1980) also mentions the problem of large councils. In 2012, the number of members in the senate was around 30–40 in most cases (Kováts, 2012). In the past, decision-making bodies were rarely proactive (Pálvölgyi, 1980). There is no empirical evidence concerning their current role, but based on our own experience, we assume that this has not changed

since that time. The strength and the ‘bottom-heavy’ (Clark, 1983: 132) nature of institutions are clearly represented in how the number and structure of faculty changed over time.

The change in the number of faculties

Before 1990 there were a lot of specialised institutions and therefore the number of faculties remained low. Between 1987 and 2009, a growth in the number of faculties was a perceivable trend (from 66 to 135). The number of faculties started to increase after 1990. This was fuelled by a number of drivers: the increasing autonomy of institutions to shape their internal operational structure; the process of mergers where many institutions joined the new institution as faculties; the expansion of the system resulting in the differentiation of programmes; and other intra-organisational reasons such as branding. After 2008 (and to a greater extent after 2011), the number of HEIs as well as faculties started to decrease because of a falling number of students, changing regulations and governmental intentions, as well as the crisis in general. In many institutions faculties were abolished (often enforced by the ministry), and departments also merged into larger institutes, resulting in a quasi-faculty structure. As the number of academic staff increased only by 30% during the studied period, faculties became more fragmented in terms of the number of staff. In 1987, an average of 175 academics worked at a faculty, which dropped to 127 in 2009 (Kováts, 2012).

A similar state of fragmentation can be seen in basic academic units and was a cause for concern even as far back as the 1970s and early 1980s. For example, Pálvölgyi wrote that:

[t]here is a medium sized college where on average six to ten full-time academic and three to five administrative staff work per department ... but there is also a department employing 14 full-time academics. At large universities in addition to basic units with six to ten academics there are departments with 2–4 and 30–40 persons as well (Pálvölgyi, 1980: 33).

In addition to the establishment of larger departments or groups, other steps were taken to reduce fragmentation such as not allowing the establishment of new academic units without the approval of the relevant ministry in the 1980s.

In 2010, practices in Hungary still seemed to be rather ambiguous (Kováts, 2012). At that time, the number of organisational units per faculty was between 2 and 20 with an average of 7.5, indicating both concentrated and fragmented systems. The number of academic staff ranged between 2 and 101, with an average of 16.4. Faculties of law, where the number of organisational units is high, but the number of academics is below average, characteristically operate in a fragmented fashion. Faculties of art and faculties of science, where numerous institutes and departments operate, also have a more fragmented and complex structure.

Our main message here is that the structure of institutions did not just become more complex, but also more fragmented and thereby more difficult to manage. This is possible when central management cannot prevent the proliferation of new units or even help this process by using internal organisational politics (e.g. to overcome other interests by dividing and conquering). This suggests a weak position for the rector and the strength of academic governance. This trend was partly counterbalanced after 2011 when the administration became less dependent on departments, faculties and academic management.

Stakeholder guidance

In the 1980s, external stakeholders (represented by the party, the ministry, young communists, etc.) were removed from university councils. Until 2005 it was not compulsory to establish advisory or any other type of committee which represented external stakeholders. In 2005, the

government attempted to establish boards with some decision-making power. Fewer than half of the members would have been appointed by the government. After the rejection of the board by the Constitutional Court, the Financial Committee was institutionalised as an advisory body. Its membership was fully determined by the institution, and later the maintenance of the body became optional.

In 2015, a new supervisory body was established, the consistory. It has veto power regarding the budget and the strategy and five members: the rector; the chancellor (appointed by the state); and three members appointed by the ministry (institutions may advise candidates). The combination of a small-sized body and a less transparent selection of its members makes it difficult to represent all external interests. Its authority and responsibility dictate its actions as being more controlling and less as a stakeholder guidance body.

Conclusions: back to the future or the empire strikes back?

Major periods in the evolution of the Hungarian higher education governance

Four education laws (1985, 1993 2005, 2011) and over 100 amendments in the last 30 years highlight the pace of change and lack of stability. But is it possible to break down this period and make sense of it? Dobbins and Knill (2009) used the change of political regimes and joining the Bologna process to divide the period. From our perspective, however, major governance approaches adopted by the state seem a better way forward in breaking down the period.

Similar to the Czech Republic and Poland, the Hungarian higher education system is rooted in the Humboldtian tradition. After the advent of communism, however, the higher education system in Hungary followed the Soviet model (Rüegg and Sadlak, 2011). The change of direction away from the Soviet model started well before the change of regime. In the 1980s, many characteristics of the Soviet model (especially the lack of institutional autonomy) were regularly questioned, and significant changes were accepted in the education law of 1985. This led to a higher level of institutional autonomy for schools and HEIs (Derényi, 2009; Ladányi, 1999; Polónyi, 2006). It is true, however, that these changes were only truly fulfilled after the change of the regime (1989–1990), specifically as a result of the Higher Education Law of 1993.

The start of another transition period occurred around 1998, when state institutions were forced to merge by the government. This reflected a new approach of governmental policy focusing on tighter control and greater accountability of institutions despite significant resistance, as in the case of the introduction of boards. This was the period when a new law on higher education was accepted (2005), Hungary switched over to the two-cycle system (2006), and a competitive student allocation system (2005) and performance contracts were introduced (2007).

After the elections and a change in government, a new law on national higher education was passed in 2011. This also meant a major turning point in higher education policy, as the new government adopted more centralised and direct control (e.g. historical and earmarked funding, chancellor system, etc.). Based upon our findings, we suggest dividing the analysed period into the following four sections:

- before 1985: the Soviet era, characterised by a Soviet-type higher education system;
- from 1985 to 1998: the restoration of the Humboldtian system and an increase in institutional autonomy;
- from 1998 to 2011: a transition period dominated by indirect control mechanisms and periodic efforts to increase governmental control;
- from 2011 to the present day: back to the future, that is, steadily increasing governmental control and decreasing institutional autonomy.

Table 4. The evolution of Hungarian higher education governance.

Governance mechanisms	Time periods				Institutional logics / ideal types		
	Soviet era (before 1985)	Restoration of Humboldt (1985–1998)	Transition period (1998–2011)	Back to the future? (2011–)	Logic of state regulation / state model	Academic logic / academic self- governance model	Logic of quasi markets / market model
Competition for resources	Low	Low	Medium	Medium / Low	Low	Low	High
State regulation	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	Low / Medium	Low
Managerial self-governance	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low / Medium	High
Academic self-governance	Low	High	High	Medium	Low	High	Low
Stakeholder guidance	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Dominant logic / model	State model	Academic self- governance	Market / academic self- governance	State / academic self- governance	–	–	–

The change of governance and structure in Hungarian higher education

Based on the analytical framework proposed earlier and the division of periods proposed in the previous sub-section, we have summarised our analysis in Table 4.

The Soviet era shows much similarity with the state-controlled model. The restoration period resembles the academic self-governance ideal type, and it differs only in the aspect of stakeholder guidance. In Hungary, external stakeholders were not required to be involved during that period, resulting in a 'low' value. The transition period is between the quasi market and self-governing ideal types, as there were many attempts to push the system in a more competitive direction. Finally, it failed, and culminated in the 'back to the future' period, which resembles a hybrid of the state model and self-governance model. It differs from both in some areas, however. In the state model, academic self-governance and competition have less significance, and external stakeholders have stronger representation than in Hungary. The latter could happen, however, if the number of members in the consistory were increased and the selection mechanism altered in favour of external stakeholders.

The difference between the 'back to the future' and the academic self-governance ideal type is the level of state regulation, which ideally should be less intrusive and interventionist. The level of academic and managerial self-governance also differs. In Hungary, this governance is limited/ provided by the quasi-independent chancellor, and the state-influenced selection of rectors. Competition also differs because in academic self-governance the regulations of the state are justified by the funding they provide. The lack of resources undermines this justification and necessarily increases competition.

One of the most spectacular changes from the transition period to the 'back to the future' period is the growing significance of state regulations. How can this development be evaluated from an international perspective? In the UK, for example, the government started to actively intervene in higher education in the 1980s by creating regulations, powerful agencies (e.g. HEFCE) and incentive mechanisms (e.g. RAE). Other Western European countries applied one of the continental models and so the state remained a powerful actor. Is it possible that the Hungarian 'back to the future' phenomenon is simply a return of the state 'to the world of education' as it was phrased in the Széll Kálmán Plan? In our opinion, this is not the case because recent developments in Hungary are built upon the notion of a zero sum game, where increasing institutional autonomy necessarily weakens the authority of the state. In Western Europe, however, states are able to preserve their strength even if they increase the autonomy of institutions. In the 1990s, the

increasing heterogeneity and complexity of higher education acted as drivers for a change in the role of the state ‘from government to governance’ (De Boer et al., 2010a: 20), that is, from directing (regulating) institutions through bureaucratic means to coordinating systems through incentive mechanisms, referred to as ‘steering from a distance’.

Despite the lag caused by the communist legacy and slow expansion, this change also started in most Central European countries – including Hungary. For example, Leisyte concludes that ‘in the new millennium, state control has returned in some areas by regulating university life via intermediary agencies and accountability mechanisms’ (Leisyte, 2014: 113). However, the weakening of buffer organisations and other agencies as well as the decreasing financial and organisational autonomy of institutions in Hungary suggest a turn away from this path. It remains a question, however, as to where the hybrid state of the ‘back to the future’ period will evolve going forward. The answer lies in either a move towards a state-controlled model with direct interventions of the state, or towards academic self-governance with academic freedom and limited institutional autonomy.

Understanding the Humboldtian model in Central Europe

As shown in Table 4, the logic of academic self-governance played a crucial role in the evolution of higher education in Hungary (and perhaps in other Central European countries that also followed the Humboldtian tradition). Academic self-governance is a major characteristic of the Humboldtian model, and this seems to be the key to understanding the process.

Hungary had a Humboldtian higher education tradition before the communist takeover in the 1950s. The Humboldtian ideal places freedom (and unity) of education and research at its core. These were heavily limited under the communist regime, resulting in the transcendence from the Humboldtian to the Soviet model and in many Central European countries, including Hungary, to the return to the national model. Western European universities were generally identified as belonging to this model in the 1990s. This resulted in the belief that the institutionalisation of the autonomy and independence of the university would guarantee the modernisation of Central European universities and the chance to catch with Western higher education (Kozma and Rébay, 2008; Neave, 2003).

The reinvigoration of the Humboldtian model resulted in ambivalent expectations regarding the role of the state: the post-Soviet legacy implies the desire for academic freedom which is difficult to secure in market-dominated circumstances without the necessary competence coupled with a high level of institutional autonomy. It is the state which can provide protection from the vulnerability of market relations, but the communist era has taught us that the state cannot be trusted in restraining itself from intervening in institutional and academic matters. Therefore, we see a state of cognitive dissonance where the desire for and refusal of a provident state co-exist. Similar to the Czech and Polish higher education systems, institutions in Hungary want the best of both systems: the funding and protection of the Soviet system and the academic freedom of the Humboldtian one (Dobbins and Knill, 2009).

The adherence to academic self-governance is rooted in the idea that the protection of academic freedom cannot be expected either from the state, or from the market. The former is hindered by a lack of trust (reaffirmed in recent Hungarian developments), while the latter is hindered by a lack of capability, such as competence, courage and institutional autonomy.

Therefore, the attitude towards the Humboldtian model in Central and Eastern European higher education is different from that in Western higher education:

[a]t the very moment higher education in Central Europe successfully called upon the ghost of von Humboldt to cast out the demons of Party and Nomenklatura, so their colleagues in the West were

summoned to exorcise the spectre of the same gentleman, the better to assimilate Enterprise Culture, managerialism and the cash nexus into higher education (Neave, 2003: 30).

Thus the Humboldtian model can be considered as a correction of the overcentralised Soviet model as well as the inhibitor of the transformation processes taking place in Western Europe, facilitating a more significant social participation of institutions. In this way, the Humboldtian ideal simultaneously becomes a progressive notion as well as one hindering progress.

The era of restoration was dominated by the effort to distinguish the new regime from the old. The legitimacy coming from this distinction led to a permissive/supportive interpretation of the state and thereby the rise of the Humboldtian model. Although Europeanisation was important in this period, it became definitive in the transition period. The Bologna process was not only about the introduction of a two-cycle system, but about the modernisation of the entire higher education system, which included the reform of funding and governance (Kozma, 2014). International models upheld by experts and international organisations played an important role in both periods. In the ‘back to the future period’, it is less clear if there is any international model which Hungarian higher education followed. The political project of this period seems to be the regaining or reinforcement of national sovereignty by concentrating decisions on those officials who are elected by and accountable for citizens. It is hard to decide to what extent this is rhetorical.

The pendulum effect

Following Dobbins and Knill (2009), the development of governance can be sketched in Clark’s triangle and, combined with our findings, can be portrayed as follows:

Through our analysis of higher education’s governance systems in a wider context, it has become clearer that the pendulum effect observed in organisational culture and leadership in Eastern Europe (Bakacsi, 2014) during the transition period could also be identified in the governance models in Hungary. Moreover, from a longitudinal perspective and bearing in mind the later crisis period, the pendulum swung back to a well-accepted, more autocratic leadership style with more centralised higher education governance models.

The question of whether these findings can be generalised, at least for CEE countries, appears at first glance to be unlikely. In cultural studies, Hungary has been found to be an exception to geographical clusters with the surrounding countries, and likewise in this case, Hungary seems to have bucked a localised trend. Dobbins and Knill (2009) investigated the convergence of higher education policies in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and the Czech Republic. They observed a converging trend towards the market-type model of higher education governance for these countries with common pre-communist legacies. We have also found this to be the case in Hungary, with the Humboldtian model of university governance. Leisyte (2014) drew similar conclusions stating that ‘it is possible to argue that the quasi-market logic is increasingly shaping higher education management and governance in CEE countries, although at the same time academic logic is still guiding the governance of higher education in many countries’ (Leisyte, 2014: 113).

However, we have seen that the model is much more state-controlled in Hungary and there is already an apparent move away from foreign-inspired ideals and models. The pendulum has swung away from academic self-regulation thereby reducing the power of academia, to resisting change initiated by the state. However, our key finding of the pendulum affect still stands. It may be that Hungary is ahead of the trend and other countries such as those investigated by Dobbins and Knill (2009) have yet to experience the next swing in the opposite direction.

The idea of a pendulum effect in this study is one that requires further research and raises many questions. The potential for higher education policy and governance running in a cyclical manner

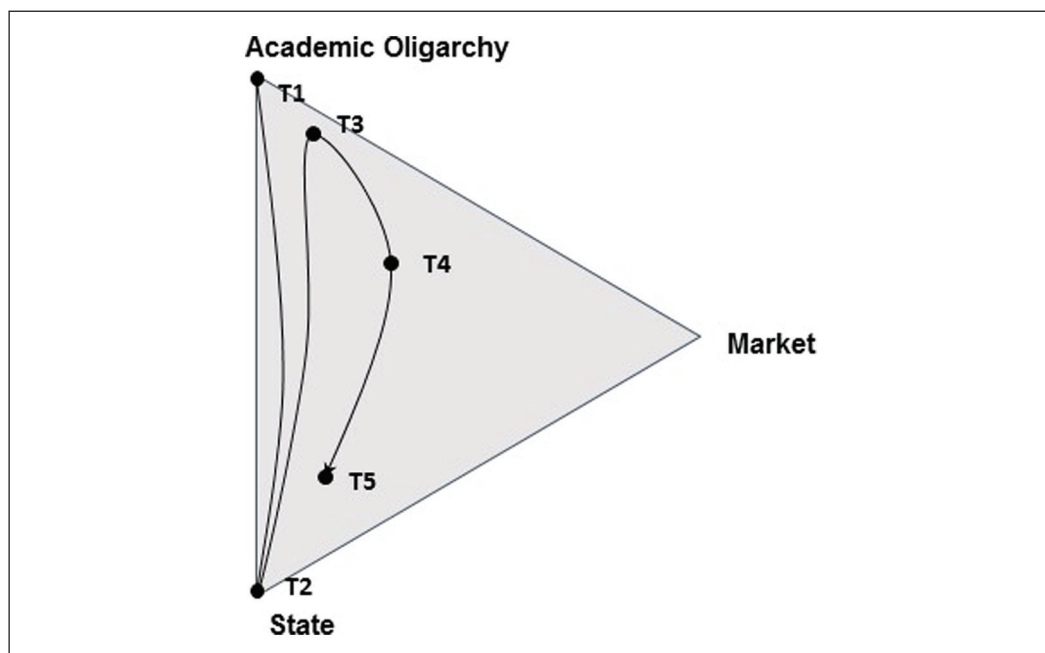


Figure 1. The evolution of Hungarian higher education governance in Clark's triangle.

Legend: T1 = pre-communist era, T2 = Soviet era, T3 = restoration of Humboldt, T4 = transition period, T5 = back to the future?

seems feasible, although if we consider Clark's (1983) model indicating three ideal types, then a single pendulum effect needs further consideration. Although Hungary currently appears to be an exception to models of CEE countries, further research may indicate that there is no reason to assume the swing of a pendulum related to governance in higher education should be synchronised across countries. As a final consideration, the swinging back of the pendulum in Hungary could also have the potential to affect surrounding countries with the same effect as Newton's cradle.

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Notes

1. By 2004, the expenditure per student had decreased to 73% of the expenditure of 1995 (OECD, 2007: 192). There was a slight (11%) increase between 2005 and 2010 (OECD, 2013: 179), which – with huge fluctuation – overall remained constant until 2013 (OECD, 2016: 197).
2. Currently the tuition fee is around 1300 EUR (first cycle programmes) and 2600 EUR (second cycle programmes) (Eurydice, 2016: 41).
3. www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/eua-online-tools/public-funding-observatory-tool.aspx

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Competitive universities? The impact of international and European trends on academic institutions in the 'New Europe'

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Abstract

This contribution examines the domestic reinterpretations of international and European recommendations in Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). It asks under what conditions these institutional recommendations, but also global processes such as the university rankings, affect domestic public policies. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which have experienced a far-reaching reform process since 1989, have been particularly affected by new standards promoted at the European and international level. The article shows that the combined external and domestic pressures affect higher education institutions (HEIs) in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. Based on the Polish and Ukrainian cases, it reassesses the (party) political factor in the reorientation of higher education (HE) reforms. It shows that Europeanisation and internationalisation are neither uniform nor linear processes. Ultimately, the announced diversification of HEIs appears as a longer-term process whose outcome remains uncertain.

Keywords

Higher education, reforms, Central and Eastern Europe, Europeanisation, Poland, Ukraine

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which have experienced a far-reaching reform process since 1989, have been particularly affected by new standards of public sector modernisation promoted by European and international organisations (IOs). The criteria of EU accession have reinforced these trends.

This contribution examines the domestic reinterpretations of international and European recommendations in Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), with a particular focus on the

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Polish and Ukrainian higher education (HE) systems.¹ I consider under what conditions these institutional recommendations, but also global processes such as university rankings, affect domestic HE policies and governance. Commenting on the academic profession in Central and Eastern Europe, Philip Altbach stated that 'there is no other world region where higher education is as much in turmoil' (2003: 389). More than a decade after he made this observation, the HE systems of CEECs have undergone extensive reforms linked to their integration into the Bologna Process (Dobbins and Khachatryan, 2014). In the educational sector, CEECs have been subjected to the assistance programmes of various international organisations, including ones with a mandate to monitor educational policies (UNESCO) and others that have progressively gained authority in this area (Council of Europe, OECD, World Bank).²

This article analyses the selective uses of Bologna Process principles, of recommendations of the European Commission and of the above-mentioned IOs in domestic policy-making. It will focus on issues relative to HE governance and structure, diversification of HEIs and funding, but also on national qualification frameworks, as all these elements have been considered as important preconditions for quality improvement. In both the Polish and Ukrainian cases, the reform and modernisation of higher education were considered as indispensable elements to improve the position of the domestic system on the global educational market. The idea according to which universities should be competitive acquires a double meaning. First, it refers to the global academic competition for students and academic rankings (Erkkilä, 2013). Secondly, it triggers pressure among domestic universities, which have to fight more fiercely to attract students (and fees) in a context of demographic decline and to gain a better position in the domestic academic categorisation/rankings, which may be vital for their funding.

The article shows that combined external and domestic pressures affect HE systems in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. On the one hand, European processes such as the building of a European Higher Education Area provide opportunities to domestic reformers. On the other, the Polish and Ukrainian case studies remind us that the political configuration should be taken into account at the domestic level. Ultimately, the announced diversification of HEIs appears as a longer-term process whose outcome remains uncertain. In sum, Europeanisation and internationalisation are neither uniform nor linear processes.

Poland and Ukraine differ in their socio-political background. Both countries have followed different historical trajectories (as satellite or member of the Soviet Union) and their democratisation processes have varied in timing. Poland deliberately turned to the West after 1989 (ultimately joining NATO and the EU), whereas Ukraine's geopolitical situation has remained more complex. Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has been marred by political instability, with several governmental crises followed by a serious economic crisis in 2009. More dependent on the Russian market, Ukraine finally signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, albeit at a very high political cost, as the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in the separatist eastern territories followed the Maidan 'revolution' triggered by president Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Agreement. These differences notwithstanding, the Polish and Ukrainian cases exemplify the impact of external recommendations and of domestic political power relations in HE policy-making.

Despite their heterogeneous research and HE systems, it is possible to identify three rough patterns that go some way towards explaining the potential receptiveness of CEECs to external advice (Dakowska and Harmsen, 2015). First, they share a Communist past, with a high degree of centralisation, ideological structuration of higher education curricula and a Soviet-inspired distinction between research and teaching. Yet, these systems differed in many ways, for example regarding access to HE. Some countries, like the Czech Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia) or Poland, were able to rely on their interwar democratic experience and their acquaintance with the Humboldtian model of research university autonomy (Dobbins, 2011).

The second pattern is the shared experience of post-Communist transformation, increasing these countries' receptiveness to foreign assistance and international recommendations. The 1990s were a time of exposure to neoliberal reforms applied to the economic sector, but also to sectors such as education or health, leading to a far-reaching privatisation of the public sector. A third development that affected countries in the region unequally is the process of EU accession. In this respect, a distinction must be made between the countries which have completed the negotiation process and accessed the European Union and those which have stayed out of it. The timing of the Bologna Process launch (in 1999) explains why many policy-makers from the new EU member states tended to consider its successive recommendations as part of a more general EU package. The EU accession process – involving conditionality and the allocation of financial resources – has had a noticeable impact on HE policies.

This contribution argues that the transformation process supported by international and European organisations has affected HE institutions. I investigate how definitions of the university objectives promoted by international and European organisations in terms of 'competitiveness' and 'internationalisation' are used in domestic contexts. While this trend has been well documented in Western countries, in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe it has taken a distinct form due to the limited timespan of the implementation of reforms and the differential perceptions of Western academic models.

Instead of reducing complex HE reforms to a unilateral adaptation to an external constraint – in line with the literature on Europeanisation and diffusion (Börzel and Risse, 2000) – I propose to apprehend the relations between the European institutions and national academic spaces in their reciprocity. I therefore follow a sociological-constructivist approach of the European political field (Georgakakis, 2012; Guiraudon and Favell, 2011) as it interacts with domestic political arenas. The first added value of a European political sociology is to shed empirical light on actor configurations and power relations in the construction of public 'problems' (Rowell and Mangenot, 2011). The second contribution of this approach is to seize the relationship between external and domestic actors in their dynamics, through the political uses of European recommendations (Woll and Jacquot, 2010).

The article is structured as follows. In the first part, I discuss the relationship between internationalisation and Europeanisation from a theoretical perspective. I propose an analytical framework that pays attention to the temporalities of HE reform and their domestic context. In the second part, I apply this framework to the Central and Eastern European countries and discuss the main policy responses to external recommendations in terms of diversification of HEIs and regarding the issue of fees. In the third part, I shed light on domestic actor configurations and show how policy entrepreneurs used European but also other external models, based on the Polish and Ukrainian cases.

Higher education internationalisation and Europeanisation revisited

The term 'internationalisation', used in both academic and applied policy analysis, can be defined in various ways. In view of the 'resurgence of internationalisation', Altbach (2007, p. xi) describes the 'international imperative' as 'growing international forces that are influencing higher education'. However, the question remains open as to how and by whom this 'imperative' is voiced, and in which conditions it materialises and leads to direct consequences. Jane Knight defines internationalisation as 'the process of integrating international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight, 2003: 2). She notes the polysemy of the term, which may relate to international practices (mobility, partnerships, research programmes), the integration of an intercultural or global dimension into curricula, or

the commercial trade of HE services (Knight, 2011). The author suggests adopting a combined bottom-up and top-down perspective to analyse the processes which take place at the national and institutional level. While top-down implementation studies focus on 'refractions, failures or deficits in policy implementation', 'bottom-up studies recognize the inevitability of mediations by professionals' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009: 53). Combining both approaches may be useful to shed light on the mechanisms of the globalisation of Europeanisation without taking them for granted (Dale, 1999). A political sociology approach provides a useful way to seize both the top-down and bottom-up dimensions of HE reform through the domestic uses of external recommendations.

The European factor under debate

In the past decade, academic debates have largely focused on the relative importance of the European Commission vs. governmental representatives in HE coordination at the European level. Some authors have presented the Bologna Process as an example of 'resisting the EU' (Muller and Ravinet, 2008). Critical scholars have, for their part, drawn attention to the structuring role played by EU institutions and processes such as the Lisbon strategy in promoting a market-based logic in various public sectors, including higher education (Bruno et al., 2010; Garcia, 2007). A number of authors tend to agree that European educational initiatives constitute an 'EU policy' (Walkenhorst, 2008) increasingly dominated by the Commission (Croché, 2010; Keeling, 2006; Serrano-Velarde, 2015) and structured by the 'open method of coordination' (OMC) (Normand, 2010; Alexiadou et al., 2010). My own research shows that the Commission has been a vital player of European HE policy coordination since it became a member of the Bologna follow-up group (BFUG) Board in 2003. Due among other things to the EU programmes and funds earmarked for HE, it is difficult to consider the Bologna Process and other exclusively EU initiatives as entirely distinct. Although the Bologna Process has been 'presented as an intergovernmental process', 'supranational agencies played an important role in the preparations for the meeting in Bologna' whereas 'the European Commission has developed its own higher education strategy, building upon the Lisbon process but skilfully bringing on board elements of the Bologna Process' (Huisman et al., 2012: 84).

The Commission supports most of the Bologna Action lines, e.g. through initiatives ranging from the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) label (promoting transparency of qualifications) to the 'Erasmus Mundus' Programme (fostering the attractiveness of European higher education on a global scale). These measures, which are part of the overall EU approach to educational matters, and the – geographically wider – Bologna process reinforce each other, improving the chances of the genuine implementation of declared objectives across the various higher education systems. Such synergies are illustrated, for instance, by the impact of EU mobility actions on the call for more transparency and recognition of qualifications in Europe. The latter, in its turn, supports the EU's broader reform agenda under the Lisbon strategy.³

Clearly, the 'power of the purse' of the European Commission (Batory and Lindstrom, 2011) makes a difference in HE templates and reforms in the CEECs, where the EU funds were an especially welcomed resource in a context of shrinking public funding. Beyond this EU-centred debate, the international dimension of the Bologna Process and of the European HE reform agenda is manifold. Policies coordinated at the European level have deeply influenced HE systems on the European continent and elsewhere. The process is based on the idea of tertiary education harmonisation and thus on a transnational comparison of HE systems, which entails the principle of competition.

While acknowledging the increasingly competitive orientation of the HE international market, many experts from CEECs consider that their country should fully participate in the Bologna Process to earn a better position in this field.⁴ Still, it is difficult to isolate the effects of the Bologna

Process, which has built on circulating trends and instruments promoted by international and supranational organisations such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the European Commission, including diploma recognition, student and staff mobility facilitated by a credit transfer system, as well as quality assurance, to name just a few (Jorge de Melo, 2013). This relationship between European and international factors of change requires further research.

The complex impact of international incentives

Regarding the international dimension of HE reforms, several authors have pointed out the need to consider the education system within a broader international context (Dale and Robertson, 2009; Rizvi and Lingard, 2009; Zgaga et al., 2013). Scholars have heralded the emergence of a ‘global educational policy field’, in which the extent of the autonomy of public policies implemented at the domestic level depends on the ‘strength of specific national capitals’ (Lingard, 2006: 288). In the case of CEECs and their situation on the margins of the European Union, we may ask whether their relatively weak resources – compared with Western European countries – make them more dependent on international pressures.

While internationalisation seems to be an all-encompassing term, its academic definitions and considerations vary. Altbach (2007) describes the Bologna HE harmonisation approach as a regional version of the globalisation process (re)discovered in the 1990s. He acknowledges the power of the Western model as the American university ‘so influential worldwide, [that it] constitutes an amalgam of international influences’ (Altbach, 2007: 25). Influential global players in the field such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) fuel the economic dimension of HE transformation. Thus, HE internationalisation mirrors the inequalities linked to the economic globalisation process, such as the domination of dependent peripheries by northern academic production centres (Altbach, 2007). According to Rizvi and Lingard (2009: x), ‘globalization cannot be viewed as a generalised phenomenon, but rather needs to be seen as a dynamic phenomenon expressed in particular histories and political configurations’. This approach is useful to avoid reifying globalisation and to analyse the mechanisms and agency of this process, which may be understood through its practice, ideology and social imaginary (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009).

While some authors trace back the increased activity of international organisations in education policy-making to the early 1990s and consider them as ‘new arenas of education governance’ (Leuze et al., 2007), others suggest a more refined historical perspective. According to Karen Mundy (2007), educational multilateralism developed in the aftermath of the Second World War, in several phases: firstly, ‘embedded liberalism’ marked by Keynesian policies and the promotion of the right to education by UNESCO in the Cold War context; secondly, starting in the 1960s, the growing role of the OECD, its Development Assistance Committee, but also its Annual Review of member countries’ educational performance; thirdly, neoliberal policies calling for privatisation and the limitation of state intervention in which the World Bank has taken the lead, followed by the OECD, the EU and the World Trade Organization with its General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) negotiations (Mundy, 2007).

Bridging the European/international divide

A way to bridge the gap between explanations in terms of globalisation or Europeanisation is to recognise that there is no obvious divide between both notions. For some authors, the European Union is just one among other international organisations involved in ‘educational multilateralism’ (Leuze et al., 2007; Mundy, 2007). Still, the autonomisation of policies promoted at the European level has to be acknowledged. On the one hand, EU policy-makers re-appropriate pre-existing

references and give them a distinct regional meaning, as was the case with the European Qualification Framework. On the other hand, EU policies have a scope and binding power that other international organisations do not enjoy.

Another manner of refining the Europeanisation perspective is to examine alternative explanations of change, such as the inspiration drawn from models outside the European Union or references to narratives of global competition promoted by international organisations (Martens and Jakobi, 2010; Martens and Wolf, 2009). Furthermore, a way to escape a narrow perception of Europeanisation as the mere uploading/downloading of policy templates and to refine the Europeanisation/internationalisation relationship is to take into account the transnational channels of circulation of policy ideas. Government agencies such as the British Council or private organisations such as the Soros Foundation were active in promoting HE reforms focusing on transparency, accountability and quality assurance in the EU neighbourhood. The German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) have been active in this field and have promoted the Bologna Process in the European candidate and neighbourhood countries.⁵

Finally, although the external dimension of policy transformations can hardly be denied, it should not be taken for granted. The CEECs' case reminds us that a policy transfer (emulation, inspiration, etc.) can be 'uninformed', 'incomplete' or 'inappropriate', according to the literature on policy diffusion terminology (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). Existing scholarship on the HE reforms in the region tells us that domestic political fields and actors are main sites of policy translation; it is not only difficult to isolate European models from other external (UK or US) inspirations, but also to disentangle perceptions of appropriateness from strategic uses of these external models (Vukasovic, 2012, 2015).

Unpacking the external dimension: the Central–Eastern European perspective

The transformations of HE systems in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are a case in which international dynamics can hardly be disentangled from the European agenda. Thus, it would be difficult to analyse internationalisation dynamics in the region without taking into account the way in which the prevailing European schemes have shaped academic programmes, teaching methods, mobility, evaluation practices and governance.

In the case of the CEECs, European policies have played a major role over the last decades. First of all, the Bologna Declaration was not a *Stunde Null* of HE transformations in the region as it capped a whole decade of HE reforms in the aftermath of 1989 (Cirstocea et al., 2014). The 1990s were the heyday of international assistance to the CEECs. Hence, in the first reform stage, external references and sources of inspiration interfered and varied depending on national situations. International organisations such as the World Bank and the OECD were active in the field, providing funds, loans and expertise to the educational sector. The domestic reform strategies fuelled an internationalisation process of HE institutions, which could also be called Westernisation, as the outside references usually lay within the Western space and especially Anglo-American countries (Dakowska, 2015, Vukasovic, 2015). However, the early 1990s were also a peak period for the European Commission, which emerged as a leader in the coordination of Western assistance to the transition countries, in particular through its Poland and Hungary Assistance to the Restructuring of the Economy (PHARE) programme (Robert, 2004).

Before analysing these converging external references, I will briefly outline some contextual elements relative to the academic landscape in the region. Several analyses have shown that in Central and Eastern European countries, the academic systems have been affected by changes in this sector in a distinct way. In comparison with Western European countries, the challenges have

Table 1. Higher education institutions in Poland.

	1995/96	2000/01	2005/06	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2014/15
Public	99	115	130	122	131	132	133
Private	90	195	315	338	325	321	302
Total	189	310	445	460	456	453	435

Source: Polish Main Statistical Office (GUS), Polish Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

been both similar and more impactful because of their speed and of local patterns. The massification of higher education took place largely in the 1990s, while public funding allocated to the sector decreased (Sigman, 2014; Slantcheva, 2003). The concurrent HE privatisation process reached much higher proportions than in Western Europe, with peak numbers registered in Poland and Romania: all in all, the private sector enrolls around 27% of the student population in CEECs, while it averages 6% in Western Europe (Levy, 2012: 182). In the Polish case, the marketisation of the HE system that started in the beginning of the 1990s resulted in the development of a large private HE sector, whose expansion stopped in the second half of the 2000s (see Table 1). While about two thirds of Polish HEI are private, their number fell from 321 (out of 453) in 2012/2013 to 302 (out of 435) in 2015 (GUS 2013, 2015).⁶

The demographic explains the trend towards higher education ‘deprivatisation’ (Kwiek, 2016). While the overall number of students decreased from nearly 2 million in 2006 to 1469 million in 2014 (GUS, 2015), this decline hit private HEIs harder than the public ones. In Ukraine there were 525 public HEIs and 134 private ones in 2016, compared to 926 public and 111 private institutions two decades before (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2016) (see Table 2). The decrease of the number of HEIs is due not only to demographic reasons but also to the loss of the Crimean territory to Russia and the armed conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine.⁷ Both in Poland and in Ukraine, the statutory differences between private and public HEIs do not explain the issue of fees, as many students enrolled in public tertiary education institutions still pay fees.

Notwithstanding their specificities, these domestic processes can hardly be disentangled from evolutions that take place in the Western world, as reformers at the national level have constantly referred to foreign academic models.

The overarching European framework of reference

As far as the CEECs are concerned, there is still a debate on how endogenous and exogenous dynamics combine in reform implementation. For some authors, European pressures have resulted in a growing convergence between their HE systems (Dobbins, 2011; Dobbins and Knill, 2009). Others persistently note ‘no significant Europeanisation’ of the HE system they analyse (Pabian, 2009). Varying levels of analysis and choices of data selection contribute to these contradictory results.

As far as the new EU member states (NMSs) are concerned, three phases are generally identified after 1989 (Deca, 2015). The first was the decade of liberalisation and Westernisation, where exposure to foreign models could be expected. A second phase began with the EU accession negotiations, followed by the launch of the Bologna Process, suggesting openness to solutions developed at the European level. Finally, the third, post-accession phase is marked by further cooperation within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as well as the publication of international rankings and the increasing use of international comparisons. However, beyond this global scheme, the intensity of reforms and the relative influence of international organisations vary according to

Table 2. Higher education institutions in Ukraine (level of accreditation I–IV).

	1995/1996	2005/2006	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Public	926	749	637	633	619	609	520	525
Private	111	202	176	172	166	158	144	134
Total	1037	951	813	805	785	767	664	659

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2011, 2016). <http://ukrstat.gov.ua/>.

the domestic political context. Countries that were not part of the EU enlargement, such as Ukraine, were less dependent on the temporality of the accession process. Still, it makes sense to integrate former Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) states into the analytical framework addressing their Europeanisation and internationalisation, especially in cases where their government's attitude towards the EU was influenced by internal political struggles.

EU programmes already played an overarching structuring role during the first phase of the restoration of university autonomy in the early 1990s. The EU programme Tempus (Trans European Mobility Programme for University Studies) helped in developing closer links and expanding knowledge transfers between universities from Eastern and Western Europe.⁸ Tempus triggered significant changes in the HE landscape as it helped restructure existing institutions, launch new curricula and study programmes, and promote cooperation with industry. In addition to providing structural support, Tempus encouraged socialisation and the dissemination of expert knowledge. It facilitated the emergence and consolidation of groups of HE experts who instigated reforms within their home universities and later contributed to the domestic dissemination of the Bologna Process.⁹ Extended to the former Soviet countries in 1993, the Tempus initiatives have strengthened transnational links between Eastern and Western scholars and academic managers. In Ukraine, the Tempus IV edition focused on the implementation of Bologna principles such as the three cycle system and curricular reforms connected to the labour market as well as 'Quality Assurance tools for the management of internationalization' (European Commission, 2012). This illustrates the difficulty of separating the Bologna Process itself and the EU educational initiatives, as they feed off each other.

In the EU candidate countries, European references became more visible in the context of EU accession. While some HE institutions implemented measures aimed at facilitating student mobility (such as the European Credit Transfer System or the two-tier degree structure) on a bottom-up basis as early as in the 1990s, the perspective of accession provided an opportunity for more directive interpretations of the formally non-binding Bologna principles. The interviews with Polish experts show that the Bologna Process – and the international incentives as a whole – were not only considered as a non-negotiable package: these instruments were associated with modernity and progress and considered as tools to transform society.¹⁰

The overarching belief that a country in transition cannot afford to opt out from the process was similar to the attitudes observed in other new EU Member States, such as Romania (Deca, 2015). This domestic framing of the Bologna Process, which seems characteristic of the new democracies from Central and Eastern Europe, explains why the different provisions of the process have systematically been transformed into legal acts and detailed regulations.

Looking for the impact of international organisations

Before the growing focus on the EU level, countries from Central Europe had been exposed to the influence of international institutions active in the education sector. The interest of these organisations in the region did not start in 1989, as is shown, for instance, by UNESCO's 1972 initiative of

opening a European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES) in Bucharest. Both UNESCO-CEPES and the World Bank have been actively involved in the transformations of the Romanian HE system after 1989 (Cirstocea, 2014; Deca, 2015).

While international organisations active in the educational field have implemented several projects in Poland, their policy impact has been limited. These projects have led to the publication of several reports, which have fuelled public debate as a legitimate point of reference. However, these reports did not directly serve as a basis for reform. While international organisations called for the introduction of tuition fees for all students (Canning et al., 2007; World Bank, 2004), this politically sensitive reform has never been explicitly implemented in Poland, where HE is constitutionally free. Yet, in practice, nearly half of all Polish students pay some kind of tuition fee.

The 2011 HE Act introduced compulsory fees for students who pursue a second major, but the Constitutional Court ruled against this practice in June 2014. This shows that domestic priorities and institutional legacies make it possible to bypass the recommendations of international organisations, which have repeatedly called for the diversification of HE revenues.

In Ukraine, non-European organisations such as the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Soros Foundation have played an important role in HE reform assistance.¹¹ Their resources and expertise have been welcomed by local policy-makers, even if domestic constraints provide the most direct explanation for the adopted reform frameworks. In Ukraine, where HE has suffered from underfunding, roughly half of the student body currently pay fees, including in public HEIs. The strong budgetary pressure linked to the financial crisis and the cost of war in the eastern part of the country have reinforced the trend of reducing the number of state-subsidised (i.e. free) ‘contracts for the higher education training of specialists’.¹² While this trend had already begun in 2010 – under the controversial minister of Education Dmytro Tabachnyk – the pro-European government that came to power in 2014 has further decreased the funding earmarked for these subsidised HE institutions. This decision, resulting from domestic material constraints, resonates well with the objective of ‘diversify[ing] funding sources, drawing to a larger extent on private funding’ included in the Commission’s modernisation of higher education agenda (European Commission, 2011). However, it might conflict with the objective of increasing attainment levels in HE featured in the Europe 2020 strategy. This may also be detrimental to the so-called social dimension of HE, mentioned by the Bologna Process.

Another set of policy trends prioritised by international organisations has been reflected in various reforms that converged with Commission and OECD recommendations. They have introduced mechanisms enabling closer ties with the economic environment as well as quality assurance measures. Following these external recommendations, the Polish government invested in applied, market-oriented courses such as environmental protection (although the latter programme has recently struggled to attract enough students). In 2014 it introduced an ambitious data collection system to obtain information about the income of former students from the national social security office (which has triggered some concern about data protection). Despite this, much HE organisation has remained unchanged, as no radical reform of university governance has been imposed upon the universities (Dobbins, 2015).

In Ukraine the very idea of state contracts for the training of specialists in strategic branches, which has its origins in the Soviet period, shows a correlation between the investments in HEIs and the job market, with a central role still played by the state. A law that aimed at facilitating entry into the labour market for young holders of a HE degree was adopted in 2004 (European Commission, 2012). Several external assistance programmes have focused on the market relevance of HE curricula. The *Strategy of Reforming Higher Education by 2020* identified a ‘lack of mechanisms of interaction of high school with the labor market’ and called for ‘attracting professional public employers to control HEIs and determine the content of learning’ and for ‘basing educational standards on professional standards’ (Zhyliayev et al., 2014, P. 35). However, this strategy, which

has been developed with the assistance of USAID, has yet to be officially adopted by the government.¹³ These cases show that the decision to adapt to external policy recommendations may cause tensions between divergent policy objectives, side effects, and a discrepancy between the declared policy direction and its implementation (particularly noticeable in the Ukrainian case).

In countries outside the EU, the policy translation of international academic competition could lead to a greater stratification of the academic community. Policies aimed at diversifying HEIs and the emergence of institutions targeting the label of ‘world-class university’ are not so much a direct answer to the institutional recommendations of an IO, but rather a political recognition of the growing significance of global university rankings (Erkkilä, 2013). Even countries that seemed the most isolated from the international community, such as Belarus, which was denied admission to the Bologna Process until 2015, have made several initiatives to attract foreign students (mainly from the former Soviet countries) (Gille-Belova, 2015). The Ukrainian government has also joined the trend and launched a policy aiming at differentiating its higher education institutions with the ambition of creating national research universities, but above all to tackle corruption, low quality of teaching and research problems (Oleksiyenko, 2014). Measures undertaken to promote the internationalisation of the domestic HE system may thus illustrate a domestic effort to participate in the international academic exchange.

The political dimension of HE reforms: the Polish and Ukrainian cases

Focusing on the domestic interpretations of the Bologna Process and of the EU recommendations on HE provides an opportunity to approach the Europeanisation process through the prism of the political uses of European recommendations (Woll and Jacquot, 2010). Furthermore, the Polish and the Ukrainian cases offer an opportunity to empirically refine the recent thesis on the (party) political dimension of higher education reforms. In this section, I argue that it is important to take into account the configuration of each national political field to examine the extent to which existing cleavages influence the domestic framing of Western recommendations. The point is not to compare the structure of both party systems as such, as they diverge and result from different historical evolutions. In Poland, the left-wing parties have been marginalised over the past decade even though their leaders tried to distance themselves from their authoritarian and Communist roots. Since 2005, the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) and the liberal Civic Platform (PO) have dominated the party landscape. In Ukraine, there is a strong geographical and linguistic component – which accounts for the greater presence of the pro-Russian Party in the regions in the eastern part of the country – but also a strong personalisation of political parties (an example being the Bloc Petro Poroshenko). According to some authors, it is difficult to speak of a functioning party system in Ukraine, as most parties are weakly institutionalised and many of them appear as channels ‘for converting economic capital into political capital’ (Wilson and Birch, 2007: 53). Following the Maidan Revolution, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the military conflict in the eastern part of the country, the cleavage between pro-European and pro-Russian forces has come to the fore.

The Bologna Process has been a challenge to the approach which considers the *politics* dimension as an important explanatory variable of change: in many countries, the tendency to harmonise HE systems seems to be shared regardless of the political majority in office. In the French and Polish cases, for instance, over the past 15 years noticeable changes in the policy interpretation of the Bologna Process have been mainly rhetorical, with centre-left wing majorities stressing the importance of public funding for HE and the social dimension and centre-right governments emphasising the competitive allocation of public funds. However, a closer look should be taken to see whether the party political dimension can be an explanatory variable that helps in understanding differences in policy interpretation and outcomes. Recent studies have re-evaluated this dimension – albeit

focusing exclusively on Western European countries – and privileged a left/right divide as the main variable (Jungblut, 2014, 2015). This cleavage does not necessarily apply to CEECs, where other dividing lines can intervene, such as the divide between the socio-economic liberal and illiberal parties (as in the Polish case) or between a pro-EU and pro-Russia majority (as in Ukraine). Therefore, it is worth asking whether and to what extent a government's attitude towards European integration and the country's relationship with the EU can be an indication of its stance toward the Bologna Process and HE reforms in general.

Europe as a window of opportunity for Ukrainian reformers

After the beginning of the conflict in the East and the Russian annexation of Crimea, the new Ukrainian government launched an ambitious higher education reform. The Law on Higher Education adopted in 2014 is based on three projects that had been discussed since 2008. It was only after a pro-European government came to power in February 2014 that a window of opportunity opened for this ambitious reform, led by the Minister of Education and Science, the former rector of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, Serhiy Kvit and his colleagues (Kvit was replaced, in April 2016, by Lilia Grinevich, from the same pro-European majority). Since Ukraine joined the Bologna Process in 2005, this is the first comprehensive attempt to align the domestic HE with the European Higher Education Area's functioning mechanisms. The last comprehensive Law on Higher Education dates back to 2002. In 2011, a National Qualifications Framework was approved by the Council of Ministers of Ukraine.¹⁴ The 2014 law announced priority treatment for 'National higher education institutions' (art. 29) and 'Research Universities' (art. 30), which are entitled to extra budgetary support. In tune with the objective of quality and relevance of higher education included in the EU's HE modernisation agenda, the Ukrainian government has planned to reduce the number of HEIs.¹⁵ For this purpose, hundreds of technical schools and colleges were supposed to be re-labelled as vocational education institutions (a reform that former governments had already unsuccessfully tried to carry out). This met with widespread opposition from technical HEIs.¹⁶ The idea of reducing the number of universities through 'mergers, consolidation, clustering and specialisation' reflects the priorities of the European Commission, formulated in the Education and Training 2020 strategy.¹⁷

In Ukraine, internationalisation appears as an important criterion to claim the status of 'research university', as the latter considers the HEI's 'level of integration in the global education and research space', the 'place in the national, industry and/or international rankings' as well as the 'number of publications by indexes of recognized international scientometric databases and international peer reviewed journals' (Law on Ukraine Higher Education, 2014, p. 34–35). However, the implementation of these provisions remains unclear, not only because few Ukrainian scholars are active in international publication channels, but also due to the dire budgetary situation of the Ukrainian state. As the available funds are prioritised for the conflict that is tearing the eastern territories apart, the educational sector is struggling to maintain its level of funding.¹⁸

As far as the Bologna Process is concerned, the Ukrainian 2014 HE Law refers to the European Higher Education Area with provisions on the ECTS, learning outcomes, a National Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and 'alignment of the National Qualifications Framework with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area' (art. 74). However, several structural problems hamper the implementation of these provisions. The problem of corruption persists even though the government intends to address it by setting up more transparent mechanisms of student and staff recruitment. On the domestic level, the principle of an independent quality assurance agency is new. Yet this agency could not launch its activities by the time of the legal deadline because elected members did not meet the required anti-corruption standards.¹⁹ This shows that the pro-European orientation of the central government is not a sufficient prerequisite for the successful implementation of the designed reforms as more path-dependent institutional coalitions

may postpone or block the new measures. The entry into force of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement and Ukraine’s inclusion in the Horizon 2020 research and innovation funding programme open new perspectives for cooperation. Much will depend, however, on the country’s political situation and the evolution of the conflict with Russia.

Bringing the domestic dimension of the HE reforms back in: the Polish case

In Poland, which was signatory to the Bologna Declaration in 1999, both moderate left- and right-wing governments supported the principles of the Bologna Process and took several policy steps in that direction. The 2005 Higher Education Act translated the proposals of the Bologna ministerial meetings into a legal framework. However, this reform was deemed insufficient by the liberal government led by Donald Tusk, the leader of the Civic Platform (PO) that came to power in 2007. The new HE Minister, Barbara Kudrycka, launched a comprehensive reform of the academic system. In 2010, the government adopted a series of legal acts reforming the research system followed by a Higher Education Act, which entered into force in October 2011.²⁰ This new law introduced evaluation and competition mechanisms, which opened the race to the title of best faculty, ‘national research leading centre [KNOW] diamond grant’ and other measures promoting the internationalisation of academic publications and diversification of research centres. The vocabulary of competition has prevailed in the announcements of these measures, in tune with the narratives diffused by international organisations active in the field.

The HE Law of 2011 and the related regulations led to the definition of syllabi in terms of learning outcomes, the publication of a National Qualification Framework and numerous initiatives promoting HE quality-enhancing mechanisms as well as student and academic staff mobility. In June 2015, the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education adopted a programme of HE internationalisation which systematised measures aimed at attracting foreign students and researchers to the country and at facilitating mobility for domestic scholars, for the purpose of boosting the country’s competitiveness on the European and global market.²¹ The available EU structural funds were used to support these efforts (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2015).

However, although it is considered a committed member of the Bologna Process, Poland’s position in the European Higher Education Area has raised some international concern after the October 2015 parliamentary elections won by the national-conservative party Law and Justice (PiS). In the weeks following the electoral victory, leading PiS representatives publicly expressed their scepticism towards the Bologna Process (Flis, 2015). However, the new minister of Science and Higher Education Jarosław Gowin, appointed in November 2015, has not announced any radical departures from the previous government’s policy orientations and measures that triggered competition among universities and researchers. Overall, in the Polish case, changes in orientation of the ruling majority (left/right, conservative/liberal) have so far triggered mainly rhetorical policy changes. Although it is too early to make any definitive statements about further policy change, both the Polish and Ukrainian cases show that EHEA membership does not necessarily imply a linear advancement towards the common goals.

Conclusion

This contribution confirms the importance of external incentives for HE reform in the context of post-Communist transformation and EU accession. However, it shows that these external factors do not exercise influence per se. They depend on domestic priorities and narratives and can take different forms. In CEECs, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of European and other international factors, both IO recommendations and transnational processes such as the rise of global rankings. Their respective influences may be observed through the ways in which domestic policy-makers

and experts interpret external recommendations. In the Polish case, recommendations made by the European Commission and during Bologna ministerial conferences have played a major role. They have been useful to policy-makers and experts, who have used existing reports as legitimising references to show that their reform projects are merely a local version of more global rules.

Contrary to some older EU member states, which may have more leeway in adjusting the various features of the Bologna Process to the domestic educational system, Polish policy-makers have tried to bend their educational system to comply rather strictly with external recommendations. Several new EU Member States, such as Poland and Romania, were eager to present themselves as ‘good pupils’ in European arenas. While EU compatibility and modernisation used to be authoritative arguments to silence academic dissent in the accession period, the growth of EU-critical political movements in the region shows that the argument of an external constraint is no longer sufficient. It appears more audible in the EU neighbourhood, as in the case of Ukraine in the aftermath of the Euromaidan movement. As the country’s new governing elites owe their legitimacy to their promises of implementing the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement and fighting corruption, the pro-European Ukrainian government has a window of opportunity to implement an ambitious HE reform. However, whether the window remains open depends heavily on the overall economic and geopolitical situation and is therefore uncertain. Whether Ukrainian experts and policy-makers are willing and capable of convincing larger parts of the academic community of the usefulness of the Bologna Process, which is remote from their direct, material problems, also remains to be seen. All in all, in CEECs the domestic retranslation of policy patterns and the government’s attitude towards European integration have to be taken into account in order to better understand shifts and stagnation periods in HE policy reforms.

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Notes

1. This analysis is based on different types of documents related to the reforms (legal acts, published and unpublished reports, communications, press articles) as well as on 60 semi-structured interviews with educational experts, representatives of the academic community and higher civil servants at national, European and international level (European Commission, Council of Europe, OECD, UNESCO) in Poland, France and Ukraine, which I have conducted from 2010 to 2015. The interviews were conducted either in English, French, German, Polish or Russian and lasted over an hour on average. Consultation of the Council of Europe archives complemented the empirical part of the research.
2. The respective contributions of these organisations differ according to the time period and context. UNESCO has the most long-standing tradition of educational assistance, but it has recently lost some ground against other organisations. In the 1990s, the Council of Europe coordinated a Legislative Reform Programme in CEECs, focused on higher education, which did not have the same impact in all countries. The OECD and the World Bank issued periodical evaluations of the countries’ tertiary education sector. Rather than evaluating the respective impact of these organisations’ strategies, the focus on the domestic uses of their recommendations aids appreciation of their dynamic and contingent character.
3. Archives of the Council of Europe, G4_1129, Direction générale IV – Direction de l’éducation scolaire, extrascolaire et de l’enseignement supérieur, Bologna Process, Bergen summit, May 2005, Memorandum, Strasbourg May 24, Note for the attention of G. Battaini Dragoni, Mission report, Ministerial conference of the Bologna Process and BFUG, Bergen, May, 18–20 2005.

4. This view is widely shared by Polish policy-makers and pro-reformist experts [interviews 1, 3, 5], as well as by current Ukrainian HE policy-makers [interviews 70, 71, 73].
5. Interview no. 76, DAAD, 12 April 2016; Interview no. 78, HRK, 13 April 2016.
6. While there was one non-public university at the end of the communist period, the number of non-public HEI reached 18 in 1992–93, 90 in 1995–96, 195 in 2000–2001, 326 in 2008–2009 and 338 in 2010–2011. Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Statistical data on HE. In 2014, 24.4% of all students studied in a private HEI (GUS, 2015: 30).
7. Since 2014, the State Statistics Service of Ukraine has excluded the ‘temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and part of the anti-terrorist operation zone’ from its data. State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Demographic and Social Statistics/Education: <http://ukrstat.gov.ua/> (accessed on 7th October 2016).
8. Adopted by the Council on 7th May 1990, Tempus was extended to the former Soviet republics financed by the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programme in 1993. It was closed in 2000 for the countries associated with the EU but extended to other ex-Yugoslavia and neighbourhood countries.
9. Interviews with Polish Bologna experts [nos. 5, 13, 21, 28].
10. Interviews with policy-makers at the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education [no. 1] and the Parliament [no. 6].
11. Interviews in the Ukrainian Ministry of Education [no. 73], Parliament [nos. 70 and 71] and with a Ukrainian HE expert [no. 66].
12. Law of Ukraine on Higher Education, 2014, esp. Art. 72 ‘Preparation and placement of state contracts’.
13. The document was scheduled to be discussed by the National Reforms Council in 2016. National Reforms Council, Implementing reforms, Education reform: <http://reforms.in.ua/en/reform/indicator/11083> (consulted on 7th January 2016).
14. In January 2016, procedures concerning self-certification (verification) compatibility with European Qualifications Frameworks were being prepared. National Reforms Council, Implementing reforms, Education reform: <http://reforms.in.ua/en/reform/indicator/11088> (consulted on 15th June 2016).
15. Interviews at the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) [nos. 70 and 71].
16. According to HE statistics, there were 803 HEIs in 2013–2014 (with 2052 million students), including 167 private ones, and 299 universities. The situation is out of the Ukrainian government’s control in Crimea but also in Donbass, where 215,000 students were registered. Some of them moved to other parts of the country; others stayed in the separatist territories. Lilia Hrynevych, Verkhovna Rada, Higher Education in Ukraine; interviews in Kyiv, October 2015.
17. European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, ET 2020 working group, mandate, WG on Modernisation of Higher Education, January 2014–October 2015.
18. Interviews at the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) [nos. 70 and 71] and in the Ministry of Education [no. 73], 27–28 October 2015.
19. ‘Elections were held, but the Agency was composed of former officials who have come under the law of cleansing power’. In April 2016, no director had been appointed and the Agency was not functioning. National Reforms Council, Implementing reforms, Education reform: <http://reforms.in.ua/en/reform/indicator/11090> (consulted on 15th June 2016).
20. The legal package of six Acts reforming Polish Science has been adopted by the Parliament, published on 4 June 2010 and entered into force on 1 October 2010. The HE Act has been revised several times until 2014.
21. Interviews at the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education [no. 1, 20 July 2010; no. 43, 30 July 2014].

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Differentiation and academic control over policy in Central and Eastern Europe: The case of Romania

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Abstract

This article adds a political perspective to the phenomenon of higher education de-differentiation, by building on Gary Rhoades' neo-institutionalist account. Diversity is operationalized on a hallmark dimension for Central and Eastern Europe: the public–private divide. Higher education is conceived of as a structured organizational field and its institutionalization in Central and Eastern Europe is surveyed in a comparative approach, focusing on the institutions governing the competition for (tuition paying) students and the normative images of higher education (accreditation, quality assurance, classifications and rankings). Critical junctures are identified in regard to the structuration and re-structuration of higher education in Romania, and the agency of the ministers is traced in relation to their academic background. The article builds on evidence from studies of system-level diversity or differentiation in higher education, the structuration of higher education as an organizational field, and the more recent empirical accounts on the impact of the agency of academics in policy formulation in Central and Eastern Europe (especially those in office as ministers of education).

Keywords

Higher education, differentiation, post-communism, public–private, ministers' agency, diversity, academic control, rational myths

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Introduction

The issue of diversity has occupied the work of scholars of higher education systems in Europe since the mid-to-late nineties (for example, Huisman, 1995), and increasingly so over the past decade. This relatively recent body of work was preceded by earlier related accounts, such as the studies on academic drift of the late 1970s (Neave, 1979) or the foundational works of United States (US) scholars (Birnbaum, 1983; Riesman and Stadtman, 1973; Stadtman, 1980; Trow, 1979). Recent accounts suggest a supranational discourse emphasizing diversity in Europe which peaked during the last decade (Hazelkorn, 2011; Kehm and Stensaker, 2009; Rauhvargers, 2011, 2013) and which is linked, among others, with the policy interests of the European Commission (Sabic, 2015).

In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE),¹ the closely related question of systemic differentiation was picked up primarily in connection with the rise of private higher education after 1990 (Čaplánová, 2003; Levy, 1999; Tomusk, 2004). At the same time, the topic is specific for CEE higher education more generally, with its two ‘crucial dimensions’: the ideological, associated with the neoliberal policies of the Washington Consensus; and the financial, determined by the transition from command to market economies, which generated severe financial austerity in the public sector in some of the CEE countries (Kwiek, 2012).

In this article, we pull together three strains of research: studies of system-level diversity or differentiation in higher education,² the structuration of higher education as an organizational field, and some very recent empirical accounts on the impact of agency in policy formulation in CEE (Kralikova, 2016; Sabic, 2016). Our conceptual approach is grounded in the neo-institutionalist tradition and builds, among others, on Rhoades’ (1990) perspective concerning the impact of the ‘rational myths’ (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) deployed by powerful professional actors on the choice of diversity-sensitive policy alternatives. More specifically, we aim to explore the mechanisms behind several important drivers of de-diversification by focusing on the private–public dimension in higher education.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, we introduce the research problem, then describe the conceptual approach. Each of the two main empirical sections follows a similar structure: we initially outline common developments in the growth of private higher education across CEE countries in relation to the resources and normative images of higher education; we subsequently discuss the roles played by the agency of professional academic actors (especially ministers) in the Romanian context. We provide an overview of the findings and their relevance in the conclusive discussion section.

The problem

Levy (2009) distinguishes between three broad types of private higher education institutions (HEIs):³ elite and semi-elite, demand-absorbing and religious–cultural. Simply stated, the first type caters to the most scholastically able; the second, to the large mass of ‘regular’ students; while the third accommodates a more or less narrow segment of students with specific cultural needs. In our country, Romania, the first type is totally absent; the second includes the large majority of private organizations, which are considered to be of inferior quality (Reisz, 2003); while the niche for the third type has been marginal. Most of the private HEIs in Romania are ‘public-isomorphous’, which ‘basically argue to be no different from public universities’ (Reisz, 2003: 30). These serve as ‘demand compensating’ organizations, contributing to massification and to ‘the conflicts associated with it’, quality concerns prominently among them (Reisz, 2003). The recent shrinkage of private higher education relative to the public subsector under

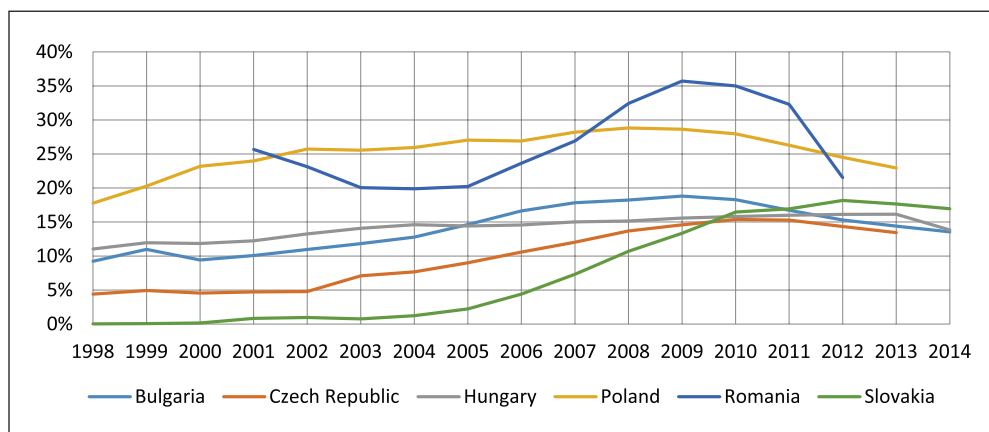


Figure 1. Share of private higher education in total higher education enrolments in several CEE countries (data source: Eurostat; students counted in full time equivalents).

conditions of constricting demand offers a statistical corroboration for the deficit of legitimacy experienced by this particular group, in Romania and in other CEE countries (see Figure 1), especially Poland (Kwiek, 2012, 2016).

The main goal of this article is to provide a (partial) explanation for the complete absence of the other category of organizations according to Levy's typology (2009), namely, of elite and semi-elite private universities. This is particularly striking given what otherwise appears to be a strong (at least in terms of size and accreditation status) private higher education sector in Romania. Notably, elite or semi-elite organizations exist and have consolidated their market position in other CEE countries, Hungary's Central European University or Bulgaria's American University being bold examples. Other instances, not all of them international like the aforementioned ones, exist across the CEE. In Poland, which is perhaps the paramount example of a large demand-absorbing private higher education sector and thus similar to Romania in this respect, several semi-elite private organizations have been operating for a couple of decades (Musial, 2009). Some specialize in double degrees (Kozminski University), others in less traditional modes of delivery (National Louis University).

The question of why the private higher education subsector did not generate elite schools was rarely asked publicly in Romania,⁴ as if this was not even among the expected outcomes. This is particularly ironic given the fact that primary and secondary education operates in a relatively similar context (socially speaking, but also governed by the same ministers and primary legislation), yet looks completely different. Niche and elite organizations are very visible. Numerous medals at national and international Olympiads are won yearly by pupils in private schools, which therefore get a lot of publicity and are highly sought after.⁵

A second, related problem concerns the development of other 'niche' higher education organizations. In Romania, this group consists primarily of confessional organizations created after 1990, related to the Catholic, Protestant or so-called Neo-protestant (Evangelical) denominations and mostly focusing on theological (divinity)⁶ studies, as described for example by Andreescu (2010). We would include in the niche category an even smaller and more heterogeneous subgroup of what Reisz calls 'diversity [organizations]' (Reisz, 2003), such as the New Europe College in Bucharest, a postgraduate school for the social sciences established in the early 1990s through Western grants on the model of an institute of advanced studies; or the aptly named Alternative University, which

can be described as an afterschool for students offering learning programmes focused on entrepreneurship, business administration, media and education.

The relationship of these niche organizations with the state accreditation system spans the gamut from formal compliance (religiously-affiliated or theological organizations) to avoidance (the New Europe College, the Alternative University). We do not aim to provide a comprehensive inventory, but a brief look at these organizational profiles strongly suggests that their strategy to provide either high-quality education and/or a substantially different educational experience entails avoidance of the formal rules of the higher education system.

To sum up, we regard the absence of (semi-)elite organizations, together with the narrow profiles or marginality of niche HEIs, as a mark of the limited diversity of higher education in Romania. (This is a convenient, if simple, approach to operationalizing systemic diversity, which is notoriously difficult to capture adequately in terms of straightforward measures such as indicators or composite indices (Huisman et al., 2007; Morphew, 2009).) While these characteristics do not, taken in isolation, make Romanian higher education atypical against the CEE background, if viewed in the wider context of the domestic higher education system they do point to a special case. After all, not only did the private subsystem enjoy a dramatic expansion throughout the 2000s exceeding even that in Poland, but it consisted almost completely of fully accredited universities, matching the public subsystem in number of organizations and, for a brief period, approaching it in matriculation figures (peaking above 35% in 2009, according to Eurostat data – see Figure 1). The absence of even a single (semi-)elite organization under *these* circumstances is worth investigating comparatively.

The conceptual approach

Our thesis is primarily concerned with (the lack of) systemic diversity in (private) higher education. The conceptual approach expands on the strategies employed in recent influential studies of the topic. These include studies growing out of the population ecology school (Birnbaum, 1983; Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Riesman and Stadtman, 1973); neo-institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Morphew, 2009); and the kindred resource-dependence theory (Huisman, 1995; Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). This being said, we aim to add here a different emphasis, which enriches the explanatory frame.

Our contribution relies on the ‘political’ frame proposed by Gary Rhoades (1990) in the tradition of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Meyer and Scott (1983). Rhoades considers the perspectives that strongly emphasize the structural dimension of (de)diversification, such as those enumerated in the previous paragraph, as too insensitive to ‘state and group political action’. Therefore he attaches a political agency dimension to the interplay between institutions and organizational and individual actors. He claims, more specifically, that the decisional dominance of academics in higher education policy-making ‘inhibits the advancement of new or alternative images of and roles for higher education [...] and] encourages accommodation to change within existing institutional frameworks and according to prevailing predilections concerning the work of higher education’ (Rhoades, 1990: 190). In other words, the more academics as opposed to laypersons are in control of higher education policy-making, the less differentiated the system will tend to be. Different forms of academic and, respectively, lay control will, furthermore, lead to different (de)differentiation outcomes. The core argument is reminiscent of Guy Neave’s (1979: 158) observation, almost four decades old, that in order to keep their binary systems functional the central authorities in Western European countries would have to exercise strict control over policy, since the ‘greater the autonomy permitted, the sooner [academia’s universalistic] values will translate themselves into action and rebound upon the internal organization, study programmes and priorities of new establishments’.

Rhoades frames his contribution in social theoretical terms as ‘incorporat[ing] [...] agency [...] into explanations of differentiation’ (1990: 189), hoping to cast light on how academic elites and ‘lay’ (non-academic) interest groups acting politically shaped the paths of diversification in several academic systems. Herein, we are less concerned with the foundational ‘structure and/versus agency’ debate (Archer, 1995, 2010; Giddens, 1984, 2015) to which Rhoades seeks to contribute. Our chief interest lies in his methodological point that in describing diversification it is worth paying attention to the behaviour of organizational and individual actors in the concrete social interactions which, under the constraints imposed by rules and resources, (re)constitute the higher education system. Specifically, we will direct our inquiry towards the ways in which such actors have deployed ‘rational myths’ and other resources, including direct control over policy, in the context of an effort to accommodate private higher education after the collapse of communism. Rhoades’ (1990: 190) major thesis that the ‘more the academic/external lay group balance of power favors academics, the less open the system will be to differentiation’ raises the problem of localizing the balance of power in question. He explores different venues of operationalization, variously locating it, across several higher education systems, at legislative, executive and/or bureaucratic administrative level.

Our approach is inspired by recent comparative analyses of post-communist systems of higher education (Kralikova, 2016; Sabic, 2016). While Rhoades seeks to explain de-differentiation with recourse to the lay-academic composition of (higher) education decision bodies, we seek to identify the exercise of individual and organizational academic agency at several ‘critical junctures’, that is, ‘moments when substantial institutional change takes place thereby creating a “branching point” from which historical development moves onto a new path’ (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 942). The exploration of critical junctures is useful particularly for the opportunity of investigating how different actors’ choices in specific circumstances end up creating institutional order and path dependencies. We will be concerned primarily with the national executive level, that of the (higher) education ministers, more specifically with the policy options which affected the development of private education in the CEE countries. Our option is determined by the fact that most of the accounts that we surveyed for this article identify (higher) education ministers as prime movers in institutional (re)definition in CEE countries (Kralikova, 2016; Miroiu, 2015; Sabic, 2016).

As noted previously, critical junctures are points at which actors’ choices shape institutional structures such that ‘historical development moves onto a new path’ (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 942). It should be emphasized, however, that critical junctures do not necessarily involve the creation of *new* paths, but may simply represent choices that ‘close off alternative options’ and lead to the entrenchment of trends already underway (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007: 341). Nor do critical junctures necessarily imply choices that are substantially free from existing constraints. Some ‘may entail considerable discretion, whereas with others the presumed choice appears deeply embedded in antecedent conditions’ (Collier and Collier, 1991: 27). One additional word of caution is needed: while, particularly in CEE higher education, relevant critical junctures cannot be properly understood in the absence of their international dimension (Kralikova, 2016; Sabic, 2016), especially the transnational policy efforts briefly mentioned in the introduction, our focus will remain on how these opportunities were translated into measures which affected, intentionally or unintentionally, the domestic private–public dimension of higher education.

Critical junctures in the development of (private) higher education and ministerial agency

The year 1990 represents the first major juncture in our narrative, as it disrupted the relatively similar institutional orders of CEE societies and, more particularly, it sparked private higher education

in the region. Across ex-communist systems, policy decisions made in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of communist systems induced path dependencies, out of which we will discuss the ones we consider relevant to the public–private divide. Alongside the change of regime, academics reclaimed the previously communist party-controlled universities, organized according to the Soviet model (Reisz, 2003), and exercised control over more or less extensive aspects of organizational autonomy, outside the formal institutional order and, in many cases, before the legislative changes which eventually enabled such actions (Pišút, 1993; Scott, 2009). Proper institutional definition commenced early in 1990, when across CEE the sole actors in higher education were the ‘state’ higher education institutions (Reisz, 2003). The system embarked on a transition from state control towards organizational autonomy, understood initially, at least within comprehensive (non-technical) HEIs, as a restitution of the Humboldtian model (Dobbins and Knill, 2009). Thus, in the initial phase, the public sector benefited from de facto predominance due to a lack of organized competition, which gave it ample freedom to define itself on its own terms.

One of the key CEE developments of the period is thus central to our thesis: the pivotal role that state universities which operated before 1990 came to play in the structuration of the higher education systems. Their agency was exercised through several venues. The first and, perhaps, the most important, was the Cabinet. Simply put, starting around 1990 the position of the minister of education was predominantly held by ‘career academics’ from HEIs founded before 1990. As observed previously, in most Central and Eastern European countries the literature tends to ascribe education ministers a key role in institutional reform in higher education (Kralikova, 2016; Miroiu, 2015; Sabic, 2016). This particularity of CEE countries is illustrated by a simple comparison of the occupants of several national education ministries with other major Western European systems.⁷

Table 1. Academics’ control over the executive governance of higher education in Romania, Hungary, Poland and several Western European countries.

	Academics – Public HEIs (number of persons)	Academics from public HEIs (period)	Academics from private HEIs (number of persons)
Romania (1990–2015)	16 out of 19	92.00% (approx.)	None
Other CEE countries, in alphabetical order			
Bulgaria (1989–2015)	17 out of 21	75.51%	2
Czech Republic (1989–2015)	6 out of 17	26.00%	None
Hungary (1989–2015)	6 out of 10	44.99%	1
Poland (1989–2015)	12 out of 19	58.10%	None
Slovakia (1989–2015)	10 out of 19	60.32%	None
An indicative sample of Western European countries, in alphabetical order			
France (1988–2015)	4 out of 13	35.89%	NA
Germany – Federal (1994–2015)	1 (Fachhochschule)* out of 4	13.52%	None
UK (1990–2015)	1 out of 11	5.51%	NA

*Note: Tertiary non-university institutions.

In the spirit of Rhoades (1990), we take these figures as indicative of the balance of powers between academic professionals and lay actors. We also note that few of the former had a primary background in private higher education. Romania provides a particularly striking example of this imbalance. Between 1990 and 2015, out of 21 Romanian ministers of education, one was a writer, one a secondary-school teacher, a third a career politician and 17 were academics (one served three terms a few years apart – hence the figure of 19 in the table). The Ministry was headed by a

non-academic for around 14 months, out of which six were immediately after the change of regime in late 1989. The single minister with a pre-higher education background remained in office for less than a month. Tellingly, out of 25 years of post-communist democracy, the ministry was headed by career academics from the dominant HEIs in the two flagship academic cities of Bucharest and Cluj for approximately 70% of this period. Only one of the Romanian ministers, Daniel Funeriu, came from the so-called ‘scientific diaspora’ to take this political position – and returned thereafter.

The second important channel through which the agency of dominant academic organizations was exercised has been that of the national buffer bodies – the various councils for accreditation/quality assurance, higher education funding, scientific research, etc. As Reisz (2003: 10) notes, in CEE ‘[a]cademics from these universities [the comprehensive national universities] have usually a monopoly for the most important positions in consultative and buffer organizations’. Writing about Romania at the end of the first post-communist decade, Temple and Billing (2003: 255) judged these bodies to be ‘effectively in the control of the elite’ state organizations. The set of dominant (or ‘elite’) HEIs also includes, in Romania and other CEE countries, the technical universities (‘polytechnics’) in the major university centres, a notable legacy of the ‘politechnisation reforms of the 1950s’ (Reisz, 2003: 11; Sabic, 2016: 68).

It is important, at this point, to highlight what the argument about the professional-lay balance of power in policy-making *does not* claim, namely, that all or most ministers coming from within dominant traditional organizations promoted a similar reform agenda or with equal intensity; or that the various national buffer bodies, in their incarnations through time, consistently supported the same policies. To refer to the heads of the central administration alone, ‘academic’ ministers often succeeded each other in a reform–counter-reform pattern despite their individual professional roots in the same small subset of traditional universities. Instead, the argument states that, when lay policy-makers lack voice, academic professionals will tend to justify their reforms (or counter-reforms) by projecting an image of the higher education system which defines the latter in terms of the images of the dominant organizational types. In this fashion, even reformist ‘academic ministers’ may indirectly inhibit diversification through the kind of institutionalized ‘myths’ (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) which encourage isomorphic behaviour within organizational fields. Thus, it is not surprising that, of the three arguably most reform-oriented minister-academics in Romanian higher education, one (Andrei Marga) is a philosopher of ‘the university’, while two others (Mircea Micălea and Daniel Funeriu) have framed their reforms primarily in terms of ‘performance’ and ‘competitiveness’ defined as scientific output and ranking in international league tables.

Having noted these two important channels of professional control over higher education, the Ministry and the buffer organizations, the following sections explore them in connection with the public–private dimension through a set of critical junctures grouped thematically. The first issue concerns the competition for students, in particular through funding mechanisms, coming from a resource dependence perspective (Huisman, 1995; Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003), which was pursued in the Romanian context as well (Andreescu et al., 2012). The second deals with normative definitions of higher education, especially through mechanisms of accreditation and classification, coming from an isomorphism perspective (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Morphew, 2009), pursued in the Romanian context by Miroiu and Andreescu (2010). Each section starts with a brief comparative examination of developments across CEE and continues with a mostly contrastive discussion of the Romanian case.

The competition for students

Distinctions between private and public higher education are fluid, both in general and in CEE particularly, as public HEIs often attract private resources and vice versa (Duczmal, 2006; Enders and Jongbloed, 2007; Kwiek, 2012; Proteasa and Miroiu, 2015). We will not enter into details

regarding theories of privatization; instead, for the purpose of this analysis, we limit ourselves to positing two ideal types at the extremes of the public–private spectrum and operationalizing them in terms of higher education funding mechanisms. Thus, we conceive of the private ideal type as an organization run by non-state actors, which receives no support from the state in terms of either direct funding of educational costs or indirectly through student support schemes. Due to reasons of parsimony we refer to the most substantial and common (thus, adequate for comparison) forms of student support in the Romanian context: grants, loans and scholarships (Proteasa and Miroiu, 2015). The public ideal type resembles quite well the arrangements inherited from the communist regime: fully subsidized education, complemented by various additional support schemes. Both public and private higher education providers are part of the same organizational field, thus operating under the influence of the same normative and coercive institutions (to be discussed in the coming subsection).

Private higher education emerged at somewhat different moments across the CEE countries. In Romania, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria the communist legislation was amended or replaced with new laws and private providers opened their doors to prospective students in the early 1990s, sometimes without proper higher education legislation (Duczmal, 2006; Nagy-Darvas et al., 1997; Reisz, 1997; Slantcheva, 2005). Private HEIs in early 1990s CEE often resembled the corresponding ideal type well. The legislation adopted in early 1990 in Czechoslovakia did not allow for the private provision of higher education (Pišút, 1993), hence preserving the public character of higher education until 1998 in the Czech Republic (Beneš et al., 2003; Pabian, 2010) and 2002 in Slovakia (Čaplánová, 2003). The demand for higher education in the early 1990s was met there by creating branches or new public tertiary organizations in medium-sized towns to provide post-secondary education. ‘The initiative in these cases came from citizens and municipalities’ (Pišút, 1993: 426) but the latter type of organizations were not initially granted the status of university proper.

According to Kralikova (2016: 194) ‘both academics’ and M[inisters]’ o[f] E[ducation] leadership played a crucial role’ in the adoption of the first post-communist law on higher education in 1990 Czechoslovakia. The law was prepared by a committee appointed by the Ministry, whose members were academics and ‘shared their university colleagues’ views’ (Pišút, 1997 cited in Kralikova 2016: 196). The preparation of the law in relative isolation from the political parties and the society is explained both in principled and pragmatic terms: ‘the intrusion of people from outside of universities into HE [higher education] reform was seen as contradicting the principle of university autonomy as defined after 1989’; on the other hand, politicians and the general public did not perceive higher education reform to be a priority comparable with the other challenges of the early 1990s, such as the formation of new political parties and rising nationalism. ‘In this situation the reforms were mostly inspired by the higher education and research communities and ministries of education, with limited assistance from outside’ (Pišút, 1993: 425). These early observations concerning professionals’ dominance in higher education policy-making also apply elsewhere in the CEE, certainly also in Romania, where 1990 was defined by a ministry that took a hands-off approach to change in academia.

As far as the relationship between public and private higher education in terms of the competition for students is concerned, Duczmal (2006) usefully distinguishes two periods in the evolution of the two subsectors in Poland. The term ‘rivalry’ is employed to refer to the extent to which private and public organizations perceived themselves as competing with respect to overlapping pools of students. The first period, one of *limited rivalry*, is placed before 1998. (We did not include it in our chart of trends covering several CEE countries.) The second one, of *rising rivalry*, is placed in the period before 2004. Recent accounts (Kwiek, 2012, 2016; Proteasa and Miroiu, 2015), corroborated with the trends in Figure 1, suggest the level of rivalry between the two subsectors will

increase significantly in Romania and Poland, the countries with the largest share of private in total matriculations.

The early-to-mid nineties period of limited rivalry was characterized in its initial phase in Romania as ‘anarchic growth’ (Miroiu, 2015). The similar context in Poland has been called a ‘policy of non-policy’ (Kwiek, 2012). It included, more broadly, a politically induced delay of higher education massification in CEE (Reisz and Stock, 2006). Where it existed, the private sector was enjoying substantial resource slack at the time (specifically, many tuition-paying students), while public education, like all public services in the 1990s, was suffering from ‘insufficient resources’ (Georgieva et al., 2002) and from a limited capacity to expand provision. In this context, individual academics in public universities rounded out their income by taking teaching positions in private institutions, in spite of the low-quality concerns. Such a strategy is reported in Poland (Duczmal, 2006), but it was common in Romania, as well.

During limited rivalry, a departure of the public HEIs from the ideal type presented earlier would provide them with additional resources, thus strengthening their relative position. Such a thrust occurred in all countries in the 1990s, except for Romania, where it had to wait until the turn of the decade and was limited to the matriculation of tuition-paying students. In Poland, public HEIs were allowed to charge tuition fees to ‘part-time and evening-time students, to full-time students but only for repetition of regular diploma courses due to inadequate student performance, and on various short-cycle post-graduate courses’ after a Decree in 1991 (Duczmal, 2006: 234). In Bulgaria, public HEIs registered tuition-paying students on top of the subsidized ones in the early nineties, followed by generalized partial fees (up to 30% of the education costs) in 1999 (Georgieva et al., 2002) in spite of the ‘strong public opposition’ (Slantcheva, 2007: 67). Hungary’s evolution is marked by additional junctures: the 1994 generalization of partial tuition, followed by the 1996 permission to enrol full tuition students on top of the partially subsidized ones, and the retraction of generalized fees in 1998 (Vossensteyn, 2003).

The period of rising rivalry starting in the late 1990s is characterized by public HEIs’ increased capacity to attract resources from students. One of the risks inherent in this development was the generalization of the ‘economies of scale’ strategy, channelling competition towards opportunity costs for obtaining a diploma, as described in detail in Andreescu et al. (2012). As these authors argued in the case of Romania, quality assurance was not powerful enough to counterbalance market forces pushing for lowering quality standards and maintaining the homogeneity of study experiences. In Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, new student support schemes, geared towards students in both public and private higher education, were institutionalized, and/or the existing ones were extended to the students from the private subsector. Some nationally important critical junctures in the institutionalization of university funding and student support schemes are:

- Poland’s 1998 loans and credit scheme, followed by the 2001 extension of the state scholarship scheme to full-time students in private higher education, and later, in 2004, to part-time students as well (Duczmal, 2006);
- the 1998 attempt to set up a loan scheme for all students in Bulgaria (Georgieva et al., 2002);
- the 2012 loan system and the tax exemption scheme in Hungary, generalized to students from private universities as well (Eurydice, 2015), which complemented a tradition of private higher education being subsidized directly or indirectly by the state (Nagy-Darvas, 2004; Vossensteyn, 2003). More than that, in Hungary an important share of private higher education was supported by congregations or municipalities.

These developments can be interpreted as lowering opportunity costs for private higher education on the financial side, which in theory, would allow them to maintain adequate quality standards.

Overall, in the three countries above, during the rivalry period the private subsector departed (further away) from its ideal type. On our abstract map, they positioned themselves somewhat closer to the position of public HEIs, building also on the latter's departures from their ideal type in the previous period.

Seen against this CEE background, Romania's development is particular: on the axis of public–private ideal types, the distance between the two subsectors remains the greatest among the analysed countries. As of this writing, private HEIs continue to closely resemble the ideal type, as the students they enrol cannot access any state-provided grants or scholarships, and no student loan scheme is available (Proteasa and Miroiu, 2015). Instead, developments in this respect are determined by the evolution of the public subsector.

The latter slowly moved away from the ideal type towards the market, on several dimensions (Dobbins and Knill, 2009). In 1993, a Cabinet Ordinance set the scene for public HEIs enrolling tuition-paying students on top of the subsidized ones. The move was met with resistance in the public sphere, where 'the view that state education must be free became compelling' (Proteasa and Miroiu, 2015: 155). The Cabinet reconsidered their position and decided to subsidize the students that entered on 'non-budgeted positions', on the basis of the Ordinance.

A critical juncture occurred in 1999, when the minister successfully implemented the decision which was withdrawn years before, so that public universities were awarded a number of fully state-subsidized places and could enrol tuition-paying students on top of that. The measure is sometimes interpreted as a thrust towards marketization (Dobbins and Knill, 2009; Kralikova, 2016), but we argue that in practice it represented an empowerment of public universities in their competition with the private ones, by enabling the former to expand their enrolments as far as their facilities would permit (and even beyond that). According to the interviews interpreted by Kralikova (2016: 141), Minister Andrei Marga, an academic from the comprehensive university in Cluj, one of the 'dominant' organizations according to the typology advanced by Reisz (2003), was instrumental in this institutional re-definition.

Another proposal which exhibited the potential to alter the status quo came in 2012, when the minister of that time proposed to 'allow [public] universities to offer students full or only partial study grants' (Proteasa and Miroiu, 2015: 156), a measure which could have paved the road towards the generalization of partial fees in public higher education. The proposal was abandoned with the fall of the government in the same year, and the subsequent ministers never picked up the issue again.

To sum up, throughout this period of major funding reforms and more limited changes, the question of extending state support schemes beyond the public subsystem, to private universities, either directly or by funding students who attended these organizations, was never seriously entertained in Romania. Instead, the major significant development along the public–private axis was beneficial to the state universities and was passed with the agency of an influential academic minister. This particular development is in sharp contrast not only to the cases of Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary, but also to primary and secondary education in Romania. As of 2016, study grants have been distributed to primary and secondary private education in this country.⁸

Quality assurance and 'transparency instruments'

The influence of academic 'rational myths' can be traced beyond the competition for resources, perhaps nowhere more explicitly than in the normative approaches to higher education which took the form of state accreditation in the early nineties. Public bodies in charge of accreditation were considered 'gate-keepers' limiting the uncontrolled growth of the private sector (Teixeira and Amaral, 2001) or even regarded as a 'quality police' closing down private HEIs (Tomusk, 2000). Accreditation was re-branded as 'quality assurance' after the turn of the century, along with the

shift of power from the state to an increasingly autonomous ‘academic oligarchy’ (Temple and Billing, 2003), under the influence of the Bologna Process (Dobbins and Knill, 2009). After 2010, an additional policy dimension was often added to the ‘quest for quality’, namely, classifications and rankings which were meant to complement the insufficiently discriminating quality assurance mechanisms and to contribute to the public recognition of the ‘genuine’ universities (Sabic, 2015; Tochkov et al., 2012).

Accreditation systems were institutionalized in 1993 in Romania, in 1995 in Bulgaria (Georgieva et al., 2002) and in Hungary through a sequence of measures, the first of which came in 1992 (Kozma et al., 2003). Though successful in limiting the ‘rapid emergence of a private HE [higher education] sector of dubious quality’ (Teixeira and Amaral, 2001: 375),⁹ accreditation has often worked as a Procrustes’ bed for the innovative approaches to the delivery of education in all the three CEE countries (Miroiu and Andreescu, 2010; Slantcheva, 2005; Teixeira and Amaral, 2001). Thus, notwithstanding its advantages, accreditation often put a brake on the development of private HEIs in the years when public, traditional universities lacked the capacities to compete for market resources. In the previous subsection, we termed this period one of limited rivalry, characterized mainly by public budget deficits.

Poland took a somewhat different path: Kwiek (2012: 134–135) describes the response to growth in higher education as based on more ‘liberal approaches to quality assurance mechanisms, licensing, and accreditation that encouraged the nascent private sector during its first decade of operation’ (1990s). A designated accreditation or quality assurance body was not created until 2001, when the private subsector matriculated close to one-third of Polish students (Duczmal, 2006). In the early nineties, a General Council of Higher Education, comprised of HEI representatives, academics and students, was in charge of ‘gate-keeping’, according to the cited author. Its requirements were minimal and rather formal, and they became even less demanding for the providers of bachelor-only education under the 1997 Law on Vocational Education. As Duczmal (2006: 241) details, out of the ‘growing disquiet’ concerning quality in the private subsector sprang a non-state accreditation initiative in 1994. Notably, and less typically for the CEE, it was framed in terms of self-regulation of the private business schools and it was considered successful in stemming the flood (Duczmal, 2006).

Returning to Romania, the 2006 transformation of accreditation (originally introduced in 1993) into quality assurance did not, in fact, represent a major departure in terms of the normative understandings of higher education. It too relied on an accreditation logic with stringent standards, was dominated by academics in traditional universities (though the new body’s composition was more diverse than the council established in 1993) and was also considered aimed at containing the expansion of private universities (Sabic, 2016: 160). Critics of the revamped system noted that the newly expanded set of national standards (or ‘quality criteria’) for organizational and programme accreditation continued to impose on private and new public universities the organizational arrangements prevalent in the traditional universities (Păunescu et al., 2012).

The transition from the accreditation to the quality assurance regime implied a transfer of authority from the Parliament to the independent quality assurance agency.¹⁰ The minister in office, Mircea Miclea, led the initiative (Sabic, 2016). He came from the comprehensive state university in Cluj, one of the oldest in the country, the same as Andrei Marga’s – the minister mentioned in the previous section. The previous accreditation council functioned under the authority of the Parliament and included some academic parliamentarians in its structures. Building on interviews, Sabic (2016: 160) gives credit to the view that under the authority of the Parliament accreditation was ‘highly politicized [...], and because of this, the council often approved the establishment of private universities if there was a political interest for it’. The Parliament represented an arena where ‘local politicians’ sought and found supporters for their initiative ‘to establish a university

in their hometown, either to improve the status of that particular town or the public perception of that political party' (Sabic, 2016: 221). Even if the perception of Sabic's interviewees was that this represented an illegitimate channel toward accreditation, the new solution, initiated by a reformist academic minister, was to place the process more directly under the authority of academic professionals. Therefore, even if the normative image of higher education was not significantly changed through the transition, 2006 represents another critical juncture in the re-structuration of the organizational field.

These normative images on higher education were later challenged in 2011–2012, in the context of increasing rivalry, with the adoption of a new law on education (Andreescu et al., 2015; Miroiu and Vlăsceanu, 2012; Sabic, 2015). The draft law was prepared in a commission where academics from dominant universities were prominent (Miroiu, 2015; Sabic, 2016) and included a formal classification of universities and a ranking of study programmes. The commission had been established in late 2006 under the sponsorship of the Romanian President (as a part of the so-called 'presidential administration') and was headed by Mircea Miclea, the former minister who also played a key role in the transition from accreditation to quality assurance. Another prominent member was Daniel Funeriu, the future minister who would be among the key movers behind the 2011 law, according to Kralikova (2016) and Miroiu (2015). Universities were to be classified in three categories, research-intensive, research-and-education and education-intensive organizations. The research-intensive category was the most prestigious and enjoyed the right to organize doctoral education and the benefits of receiving more grants for master's programmes, where the per capita allowances are twice those for bachelor's.

All in all, both material and symbolic benefits hinged on an HEI's inclusion in the research-intensive category. The positioning was determined by computing numerous indicators, a veritable 'black-box' approach which was criticized for its lack of transparency (Sabic, 2016). The single most important determinant was scientific output, measured especially in terms of Thomson ISI-indexed publications and impact factors (Andreescu et al., 2015). Not only were all private universities placed in what was almost universally perceived to be the 'lowest' category of education-intensive organizations (Andreescu et al., 2012), but the most esteemed category was populated, with one or two exceptions, by HEIs belonging to the dominant types: large organizations established well before 1990 in Bucharest, Iași and Cluj – the main university centres in Romania. For contrasting purposes, we note that three years before this official classification, a national economic policy newspaper published a ranking of Romanian HEIs. The ranking was realized with an international consultancy, used different criteria and generated substantially different results. For example, employers' perception was given significant weight, while the 2012 official classification and rankings did not include any direct measure of employability or of employers' views. In this 'unofficial' ranking, private HEIs are distributed less compactly,¹¹ and they also feature among the top 10 positions.

Minister Daniel Funeriu, a researcher in chemistry originally from the scientific diaspora, was instrumental in the construction of this image of higher education (Sabic, 2016), defined overwhelmingly by research performance measured with tools which are specific for the hard sciences. (Most of the students in Romania, especially in private HEIs, have been enrolled in economics, law and the social sciences, a situation common across the CEE.) The centrality of the classification in the reform can be explained partly in terms of the minister's (and other influential reform-oriented academics') enchantment with rankings, especially with the 'Shanghai Rankin',¹² documented by Sabic (2016), and partly through the dissatisfaction with the ability of the quality assurance system to highlight the top organizational achievers. Though criticized for its biases, we see the classification as an attempt to restore formal recognition to the Humboldtian universities in Romania (at least in terms of how these organizations perceived

themselves), a type of discourse which, to some degree, also marked the previous wave of reforms in the late 1990s initiated by minister Marga. It must be noted that formal distinctions between HEIs were abolished in early nineties Romania and were not formally re-installed as of this writing: all existing providers became ‘universities’, as they did also in the Czech Republic (Pabian, 2010) and Slovakia (Reichert, 2012).

In conclusion, one of the striking facts about the approach to classifications and rankings in Romania is that they were designed and carried out almost completely from an academically-minded perspective. These ‘transparency tools’ served two primary functions. One was to guide *public* financial allocations to the ‘best’ organizations – essentially among state HEIs. Secondly, they were designed to guide the distribution of *private* resources (money from tuition) by altering prospective students’ preferences (Vercruysse and Proteasa, 2012). This is visible if one corroborates the informational function of classifications and rankings with the increased rivalry for enrolments in the period in which they emerged. However, despite the rhetoric of public accountability, neither of these functions was pursued in terms that responded to either broader societal interests or to individual student concerns. The classifications and rankings worked by highlighting ‘the best’ according to very specific criteria of scientific productivity, biased towards certain profiles of public universities. In other words, the instruments departed substantially from the ‘consumer report’ logic, replacing it with a logic oriented by narrow professional values. Leading academics have played an important role in the structuration of the organizational field along these lines, as they did with the earlier reform of accreditation.

Discussion

After the 1993 law on accreditation, which essentially brought private HEIs in line with the public system, funding and quality assurance (and other) reforms in Romanian higher education exhibited a pattern of systematic neglect of private universities. The operation of the latter was hardly unregulated or unmonitored – they have been expected to function under the same rules designed for the public subsystem. But they were not directly targeted by policy. The reforms of minister Marga, perhaps the most comprehensive in post-communist Romania and an example of strong ministerial leadership, are illustrative in their ignorance of the private subsector. In Marga’s programmatic account of 20 ‘major options of academic policy’ (Marga, 2007: 75–79), none is specifically directed at the private academic organizations. Already a large group by the turn of the millennium, the latter are mentioned only once, in the context of justifying the differential treatment of *public* HEIs to render them more competitive, among themselves and with the ‘privates’.

More than half a decade later, the aforementioned presidential commission, whose working core consisted entirely of academics perceived as strong reformers, among whom a former and a future minister, published one of the most prominent policy documents on Romanian education.¹³ The Presidential Commission Report on the Analysis and Elaboration of Educational and Research Policy (Presidential Commission, 2007) was the main influence behind the 2011 law on education. Its section on higher education only mentions private HEIs a couple of times, as an afterthought, and its strong package of measures targets the system as a whole, and in particular its public part. The changes proposed in funding and quality assurance (including diversification and transparency tools), two broad areas where private universities could have been considered as a *distinct* subject of public policy, ignore the latter.¹⁴

This policy blind spot is a testimony to the public-dominated, self-oriented outlook on higher education reform that has been pervasive in Romania since the early nineties. Kralikova (2016) documents in some detail the systematic failure of policy-makers coming from public universities to introduce outside ‘stakeholders’ into organizational governance, either in the shape of advisory

bodies or, more modestly, in selection committees for rectors. Both the Conference of Rectors and the main higher education unions unsurprisingly opposed these measures vehemently. But, revealingly, even the reformers were sceptical about giving outsiders a substantial role in strategic decision in HEIs (Kralikova, 2016: 146–147).

In our overview earlier, we departed somewhat from a systemic perspective on higher education diversity (Birnbaum, 1983; Morphew, 2009) by focusing on the public–private distinction, due to reasons of both pragmatism (easy operationalization) and relevance. We argued that the level of diversity on this dimension was affected by normative images of higher education embedded, through the agency of academic professionals acting as national policy-makers, at critical junctures in the institutions governing the organizational field. We now close the loop and connect our account with other aspects of diversity. Proteasa and Miroiu (2015) argued that the incapacity to establish intermediate positions between ideal-type private and public HEIs poses issues of equity in the distribution of state support for higher education, affecting what Reichert (2012) terms the ‘student clientele’ dimension. Other authors (Miroiu and Andreescu, 2010; Slantcheva, 2005) note that the private–public dimension is sensitive to issues related to ‘programmatic diversity’ (Birnbaum, 1983), and that the private subsector is often the one fostering innovation, not only mimetism. Since we do not have enough empirical information to properly test all these relationships, we accept them in the form proposed by their original authors. In this context, we consider that these observations underline the fact that the absence of (semi-)elite private universities in Romania represents one symptom of a larger systemic problem: the marginality of alternatives to the path-dependent academic routes in higher education which are at least treated equitably, if not supported in the institutional settings of this organizational field. There are other dimensions that attest to this restricted diversification, for example, the virtually complete absence of short-cycle programmes in public as well as private universities (Andreescu, 2014).

Why has this happened, in Romania arguably more than elsewhere? One important part of the explanation is the manner in which the market for higher education was designed or, better said, how competition on this market was controlled. On the one hand, the private subsector was permitted to expand and, slowly but surely, to be accredited. This happened in good part due to the political pressure caused by the high demand combined with the low absorption capacity of the public subsystem. On the other hand, the growth was tightly controlled, more specifically channelled so that the paths or routes of expansion kept the organizational profile of traditional universities as the guiding standard. This perpetuated the dominance of the latter and was achieved through the agency of the academics that influenced national higher education policy. This picture adds an important qualification to the finding of increasing marketization in Romanian higher education described by Dobbins and Knill (2009). Unlike them (2009: 424), we find the relevant section of the academic community to have been very assertive in higher education policy-making. Perhaps the best qualification to their overall argument is the continuing virtual absence of laypersons on HEI governing boards (including private ones), in buffer organizations and on ‘presidential’ and other commissions tasked with strategic planning in higher education.

We can now directly engage the question of whether one should bemoan this lack of diversity in Romanian higher education. We do not need to assume that more diversity is always better in order to recognize that the current equilibrium is, at least in Romania, suboptimal. It was shown elsewhere that the current pattern of market-driven resource allocation, promoting economies of scale in the organization of study programmes, determines suboptimal results for the universities and students alike (Andreescu et al., 2012). Miroiu (2015) has recently argued that the allocation of the state budget to higher education resembles a ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin, 1968): by channelling their political influence through the education ministry, and through the person of the minister in particular, public universities compete for a larger number of state-subsidized students, in fact simply diminishing the absolute value of the award per ‘equivalent’ (standardized) student,

in the context of a limited total budget. As a result, public universities continue to matriculate a large share of publicly-funded students, but they do so for increasingly less per student, facing increased difficulties to maintain quality standards.

Furthermore, it appears to be a common opinion in Romanian society that the quality of higher education is suboptimal. Most of the private universities, the ones absorbing ‘excess demand’ (that is, demand defined function of the *public* subsystem’s absorption capacity), have been in a perpetual situation of uncertainty after the dramatic fall in student numbers of the past half a decade. Now, they have fewer resources to invest in improving their quality, paired with increasing uncertainty. When, previously, the abundant demand gave them the financial leeway that would have allowed them to consider development strategies along the path of diversification the institutionalization of higher education did not encourage them to do so.

Conclusion

If one accepts the broad thesis that, overall, the institutional setting in the early 1990s was fairly similar across CEE countries, one can plausibly connect the development of Romanian private higher education under the most disadvantageous conditions, comparatively speaking, to its being the country with the largest number and share of academic ministerships among our comparators in Table 1. We obviously do not intend this observation as a statistical validation of the relationship between ministers’ professional background and the level of diversity on the public–private dimension. But in exploring the critical junctures which led to such a development, and how they were influenced by academics and an academically-minded perspective on higher education, we provide a case study that seems to lend support to Rhoades’ thesis. The comparative perspective sheds light on mechanisms which may have inhibited diversification across CEE more broadly, and puts these mechanisms into regional context, while highlighting the particularly influential role that academic ministers’ agency played in Romania.

What this suggests, in effect, is that when academics are in charge of policy their agency tends to perpetuate the ‘rational myths’ (the rules describing existing structures as rational means to desirable ends) that are aligned with the immediate interests of their professional group. As we noted above, in spite of alternating pro-reform or counter-reformist programmes, successive ministers in Romania did not differ in terms of the myths they supported. Other, ‘inconsistent’ myths (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 356) – such as, in higher education, ‘student-centred learning’ or ‘diversification’, for example – have failed to be appropriately translated into organizational ‘technologies’ and, ultimately, to generate considerable effects. Some constituencies, such as students, stand to lose. So do the organizations in the longer term, we would argue.

To return to our question, then: why are there no elite or semi-elite private universities in Romania, despite the fact that in the recent past the private subsystem, consisting of fully accredited organizations, was roughly as numerous as the public system and matriculated a large share (over a third, at one time) of students? Our thesis is that, after the communist regime collapsed, higher education systems were institutionalized in ways that restricted systemic differentiation. In response to the persistently high demand for higher education and the corresponding actual or projected growth of private universities, the dominant academic actors (the traditional universities) stepped in to protect their market share through policies in domains such as funding, accreditation and classifications. These policies were generally underpinned by a normative model of the university. While they inhibited the prospects of diversification across the board, they locked private HEIs in a ‘copycat’ position, which essentially condemned them to an inferior status given this subsector’s legacy of questionable legitimacy (Andreescu et al., 2012). Thus, post-communist Romania was unlikely to grow domestically – or import – an elite private university because, among others: the law on education (particularly the first one, passed in 1995) would have imposed

upon it an organizational structure that closely followed the template of traditional universities; the accreditation mechanism would have forced it to hire state-university faculty en masse (given stringent staffing standards) and to mirror the structure and curricula of existing programmes in state universities; all of this without simultaneously granting any access to public resources (unlike, for example, in Hungary) or even additional private ones (through study loans). Last but not least, had this elite organization not followed in the shoes of traditional universities – if, e.g., it emphasized the educational mission over research or applied research resulting in patents over the publication of articles, and so on – it would have most likely suffered in the recent national rankings. Looking back, these barriers seem almost insurmountable.

Most of this has happened through the agency of ministers of education and other influential policy- and decision-makers who came almost exclusively from traditional academia and had virtually total control over the paths of (higher) education reform. Our approach has been not to present evidence on the ministers' motivation to hamper the development of (semi-)elite private universities; we argued instead that this was a consequence of the aggregation of a set of individual decisions which all led along the path of the traditionally dominant higher education. We thus conclude by noting that time is ripe for a more agency-oriented perspective in the study of systemic diversification: 25 years offer a reasonable palette of critical junctures, and the evolution and influence of the international narratives provide nuanced perspectives on the translation from the supranational to the national context, exhibiting common rational myths and highlighting the way the academic organizational field is structured. As some of the recent work cited herein suggests (Kralikova, 2016; Sabic, 2016), such a perspective completes the arguments regarding the impact of transnational discourses, rather than competing with them.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Notes

1. We use the term 'Central and Eastern Europe' (CEE) as a generic label for the former communist states in Europe, including the 'satellites' in the 'Eastern bloc', the ex-Yugoslav republics and the former Soviet republics known as 'the Baltics'.
2. We will use the terms (systemic) 'diversification' and 'differentiation' interchangeably, with 'diversity' being the presumed outcome of these processes.
3. Even though we use the term 'institution' in its traditional sociological sense throughout this article as theorized by Durkheim and recently by the neo-institutionalist school, for convenience we will employ the common term 'higher education institutions' (HEIs) to refer to entities such as universities, colleges, tertiary schools, etc., to be understood as organizations and as embodiments of an institution (Olsen, 2007: 26–28).

4. We found a single counter-example, a blog text by a Romanian-born American academic economist and political scientist in which the question is posed, but not answered: www.contributors.ro/fara-categorie/invatamantul-universitar-privat-paradox-simptom-si-rusine-nationala/, accessed 11 February 2017.
5. The *monthly* tuition in such schools in Bucharest is more than half of the *yearly* figure in medicine faculties in Romania – one of the most expensive degrees also offered for a fee: 1.100 to 2.000 Euros, the highest fees being charged by the public medical school in Bucharest, according to data collected by Hatos and Pop (2015).
6. Some confessional universities, such as the Baptist-affiliated Emanuel University in Oradea, have established a regional presence with forays beyond the core theological and related disciplines (such as business). Others, such as the Partium Christian University in the same city, do not emphasize theological education and seek to serve an ethno-religious constituency (in this case, Transylvanian Hungarians).
7. We collected data from public websites and identified ‘career academics’ as persons who occupied university teaching or research positions for substantial periods of time before being appointed minister. We acknowledge that whether one is a career academic or not is not so straightforward in all cases, and that the limits of authority with which the education minister is vested vary across the countries in Table 1. The lists of ministers can be found on Wikipedia.
8. The voucherization of early education was proposed at the end of the past decade, in a draft national strategy for education (the strategy was never adopted officially) (Presidential Administration, 2009).
9. The authors refer to Hungary, but other authors argued the situation was similar in Romania (Miroiu and Andreescu, 2010) and Bulgaria (Georgieva et al., 2002; Slantcheva, 2005).
10. The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS): www.aracis.ro/, accessed 20 August 2016.
11. V.A. Chișu, Topul universităților din România [The top of Romanian universities], *Capital*, 21 September 2009, accessed 15 August 2016 at www.capital.ro/exclusiv-topul-universitatilor-din-romania-125346.html.
12. Academic Ranking of World Universities, www.shanghairanking.com/, accessed 20 August 2016.
13. Beyond this working core group of around a dozen people, the commission expanded eventually to 43 members working informally, ‘to include also representatives of trade unions, student associations, parents, experts from the Romanian Academy of Science, and other stakeholders’ (Sabie, 2016: 168–169).
14. While the Presidential Commission Report fails to address private universities directly at the level of policy, the draft national strategy for education 2009–2015, which was never adopted, does propose extending to private universities funding for ‘programmes of excellence’ (so-called ‘supplementary funding’) and scholarships for foreign students attracted to these programmes.

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The academic profession in Russia's two capitals: The impact of 20 years of transition

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Abstract

This paper studies the dynamics of key characteristics of the academic profession in Russia based on the analysis of university faculty in the two largest cities in Russia – Moscow and St Petersburg. We use data on Russian university faculty from two large-scale comparative studies of the academic profession ('The Carnegie Study' carried out in 1992 in 14 countries, including Russia, and 'The Changing Academic Profession Study', 2007–2012, with 19 participating countries and which Russia joined in 2012) to look at how faculty's characteristics and attitudes toward different aspects of their academic life changed over 20 years (1992–2011) such as faculty's views on reasons to leave or to stay at a university, on university's management and the role of faculty in decision making. Using the example of universities in the two largest Russian cities, we demonstrate that the high degree of overall centralization of governance in Russian universities barely changed in 20 years.

Our paper provides comparisons of teaching/research preferences and views on statements concerning personal strain associated with work, academic career perspectives, etc., not only in Russian universities between the years 1992 and 2012, but also in Russia and other 'Changing Academic Profession' countries.

Keywords

Academic profession, higher education, faculty contracts, university governance, research universities, research and teaching nexus

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Introduction

The last two decades constituted a period of fundamental institutional change in the Russian higher education system. The system experienced huge expansion, including the emergence and rapid growth of the private sector. In 1992, just after *perestroika*, the Soviet higher education system included 535 higher education institutions; none of them were private (Smolentseva, 2003). During the next 20 post-Soviet years the public higher education sector grew by 22% to more than 650 higher education institutions; in 2012, the private higher education sector comprised more than 450 institutions (Androushchak and Yudkevich, 2012). There was also an upsurge in the number of students: total student enrolment increased from just over 2.5 million in 1993 to 7.4 million in 2012 (Androushchak and Yudkevich, 2012). This resulted in significant diversity regarding the quality of institutions, their faculty and student bodies along various dimensions, including the disciplinary scope and type of institution, their selectivity and geographic location (Smolentseva, 2003). This in turn was reflected in the heterogeneity of academic salaries, working conditions and access to up-to-date teaching and research technologies (Androushchak and Yudkevich, 2012; Kozmina, 2014).

A new system of university admissions based on the unified state examination that substituted university-based exams was also introduced. This change had a substantial effect on equity and access to higher education and helped to eliminate different forms of widespread entry-level corruption (Ampilogov et al., 2013; Minina, 2010). During the last few years the Russian government has implemented a large-scale programme of state support for leading universities to become world-class institutions by improving the global competitiveness of Russian higher education and basic research (Alekseev, 2014; Androushchak, 2014; Smolentseva, 2015). Globalization and internationalization trends also pushed universities to reconsider their strategies and adjust to new circumstances.

All the described changes have significantly affected the whole academic profession in Russia. There are several channels for such an impact. First, an academic career lost its stability both in terms of providing a secure level of financial remuneration high enough to allow academics to be a part of the middle class as well as in terms of securing long-term employment opportunities (Androushchak and Yudkevich, 2012). Many academics felt insecure and uncompetitive on a broader academic market with international students coming in and international faculty being recruited (Pavlyutkin and Yudkevich, 2016). Second, as a consequence, the university sector experienced a huge brain drain (Korobkov and Zaionchkovskaia, 2012; Smolentseva, 2003) which accounted for the so-called ‘generational gap’ – the loss of young and middle-aged researchers and university faculty (Smolentseva, 2015); no less than 7% of all university employees moved abroad (Androushchak et al., 2013). Those academics who chose to stay de facto had to face a deteriorated academic environment. Third, due to numerous institutional changes academics faced new challenges and were forced to switch to a ‘more entrepreneurial’ way of thinking and functioning at the university (Gruzdev et al., 2016). Increased requirements for external reporting to government agencies also contributed to the tensions between university autonomy and government control (Johnson, 2015).

Taken together, this definitely affected the norms and values of the academic community as well as university faculty’s perceptions towards their job, administration and the university itself. These 20 years were a period of great uncertainty and turbulence in academic culture and a period of co-existence of several generations of academics who were trained and came into the profession at different times, and who often had significantly different values and expectations.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the main changes in norms and perceptions of Russian university faculty over this 20-year period as well as to put these changes into a broader context of recent transformations in the European academic space. We use data on university faculty in the two largest cities in Russia, Moscow and St Petersburg, from two large-scale comparative studies of the academic profession (*The Carnegie Study* (1992) and *The Changing Academic Profession*

Study (2007–2011), with 19 participating countries and Russia joined in after 2012). These studies have many overlapping questions, which allowed us to use the same indicators to analyse the dynamics of key characteristics of the academic profession in Russia. Using a comparative international perspective, we focus on such issues as structures of decision-making processes and governance in Russian universities, faculty preferences in teaching and research, academic career prospects, attitudes toward stress, evaluation of working conditions, and self-assessment of the quality of training. In order to evaluate the prospects of Russian universities on the global academic market it is important to analyse not only quantitative indicators (such as the number of publications, share of international faculty and students or research funds size, etc.) and their recent dynamics but also structural features of the organization of university life and the status of the academic profession.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we describe available data as well as its potential limitations. Then we discuss the dynamics of different norms and perceptions of Russian academic faculty over the course of 20 years and put our findings in a broader international context. The final part contains the main conclusions and discussion.

Methodology

Data

This research is based on the data collected in two studies. The first is ‘The Academic Profession in an International Perspective’ (International Academic Profession), a project of the Carnegie Foundation, in which a unified methodology was used to collect data on the academic profession in 14 countries, including Russia (Altbach, 1996). The second is a study of the university sector in Russia conducted by the Center for Institutional studies (CInSt, National Research University Higher School of Economics) according to the methodology of the international study ‘Changing Academic Profession’ (CAP). The latter had been carried out earlier in 19 countries from various regions including Europe, the US, Latin America, Australia and Asia.

The Carnegie study was the first large-scale project where an attempt was made to analyse the academic profession in a comparative perspective and to collect data for cross-country comparisons (Arimoto, 2009). Many researchers involved in the Carnegie study also participated in the CAP project, which covers even more countries. Moreover, in the CAP study a range of key concepts that characterize the academic profession were specified and extended. The CAP study was based on a partially transformed questionnaire (many questions remained the same or were just slightly changed; however, some were added and some removed).

This allowed us not only to collect comparable data but also to carry out a more conclusive analysis. Owing to these two factors (the opportunity to assess the key characteristics of the dynamic academic profession and to compare these characteristics in different countries), the CAP study is by far the most important source of information on the characteristics and status of the academic profession in a number of countries.

Sample

In the 1992 Carnegie study, the Russian sample was limited to Moscow and St Petersburg universities only. In 2012, the study of the academic profession in Russia was carried out in public higher educational institutions in nine regions: Moscow, St Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod Region, Novosibirsk Region, Samara Region, Sverdlovsk Region, Rostov Region, Tomsk Region and Primorsky Krai (head institutions, without branches); all the institutions were subordinate to the

Table 1. Academic fields of faculty (academic field of the current academic unit).

	1992 (%)	2012 (%)
Teacher training and education science	06	7
Humanities and arts	10	7
Social and behavioural sciences (excluding economics, business and administration)	5	5
Business and administration, economics	11	9
Law	1	6
Life sciences	2	2
Physical sciences, chemistry, mathematics, earth sciences	21	17
Engineering, manufacturing and construction, architecture	41	38
Agriculture	03	01
Transport services, security services	0	03
Other	1	07
Have difficulties answering/no answer	7	8
<i>N</i>	438	708

Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. To ensure comparability of the data we selected a sub-sample from the 2012 sample. This sub-sample only included public universities from the two largest Russian cities. Thus, the basis for comparison consists of 400 faculty members in 1992 and more than 700 faculty members in 2012 (see Table 1). However, in some cases we refer to the results obtained for the whole Russian sample of the 2012 study in order to understand how our results based on the Moscow and St Petersburg institutions may differ (or not) from the sub-sample of other higher educational institutions in Russia.

Moscow and St Petersburg are not only the largest cities in Russia (with Moscow being the official capital and St Petersburg often called an unofficial capital), they are also the largest cities in terms of the concentration of higher education institutions. About one quarter of all public universities in the country (17% and 7%, respectively), excluding branches, are situated either in Moscow or St Petersburg. In Moscow there are 400,000 full-time students at public higher educational institutions, in St Petersburg nearly 200,000 (16% and 8% of all Russian full-time students at public universities, respectively).

Universities for the 2012 study were randomly selected from two groups: 1. higher educational institutions with a status of Federal University or National Research University (NRU) (these institutions basically receive more funding, including financial support of research activities and on average have better-performing students); 2. the remaining institutions. This was done to ensure that institutions with a special status are represented in the sample, and that they can be compared with other universities. As a result, in the 2012 sub-sample five of the 11 Moscow and St Petersburg universities are NRUs. Thus, there is a disproportionate share of institutions with a special status in the 2012 sample and sub-sample. A significant number of institutions which were recipients of special governmental funding projects in 2006–2008 and NRUs are concentrated in these two cities too.

Measures

In our analysis of faculty's attitudes, we draw on the following measures, which were used in the Carnegie study and the CAP study.

Preferences: teaching versus research: to capture these preferences, participants were asked about whether they are more inclined toward teaching or research. In both studies the same question was included with a 4-point scale: 1. primarily in teaching; 2. in both but leaning towards teaching; 3. in both but leaning towards research; 4. primarily in research.¹

Work as a source of personal strain (the same measure had been used in both studies): self-assessed agreement with the statement 'My job is a source of considerable personal strain' on a 5-point scale (1 – strongly agree, 5 – strongly disagree).

Attractiveness of academic career (the same measure had been used in both studies): self-assessed agreement with the statement 'This is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field' and the statement 'If I had to do it over again, I would not have become an academic' on a 5-point scale (1 – strongly agree, 5 – strongly disagree). These statements were analysed separately.

Evaluation of working conditions (the same measure had been used in both studies): self-evaluation of facilities, resources and personnel (classrooms, laboratories, research equipment, technology for teaching, secretarial support, etc.) on a 5-point scale (from 1 – excellent to 5 – not available).

Assessment of the quality of training (included in the Carnegie study and the Russian 2012 study; not included in the CAP study in other countries): self-assessment of research and teaching skills on a 4-point scale (from 1 – excellent to 4 – poor).

Reasons to stay at or leave the university (included in the Carnegie study and Russian 2012 study; not included in the CAP study in other countries): self-evaluation of a number of reasons to stay at / leave the university (income, resources for research, academic reputation of institution / department, etc.) from 1 to 5, where 1 equals a strong reason to leave, and 5 – a strong reason to stay.

Models of decision-making: the participants of the Carnegie study were asked to evaluate various aspects of the decision-making process (budget priorities, selecting key administrators, overall teaching load, promotions, etc.) on a scale from 1 – completely centralized, to 5 – completely decentralized. In the 2012 study the same set of issues was proposed, while the participants were asked to indicate the most influential decision-makers (institutional managers, government or external stakeholders, faculty committees/boards, academic unit managers, individual faculty, students). In our comparative analysis we consider the answer 'institutional managers' as a synonym for centralized decision-making. The same measures were utilized in both studies to evaluate faculty's own influence on decision-making: self-assessment of personal influence in decision-making at the level of the department, of the faculty/school, and at the institutional level (on a 4-point scale from 1 – very influential to 4 – not at all influential).

Control (the same measure had been used in both studies): participants' self-assessment of who evaluates their teaching and research activities (peers, head of department, students, etc.).

In our analysis we compared distributions of these measures in the 1992/2012 samples. The significance of differences in faculty's attitudes in 1992 and 2012 was tested by chi-square test (significance level 0.05) and *t*-test, when applicable (significance level 0.05).

In the following sections we discuss the results of the comparison of some important characteristics of the academic profession such as preferences for teaching versus research, reasons to leave or stay in the academic profession and the model of decision-making in universities.

Changing Academic Profession

Preferences: Teaching versus research

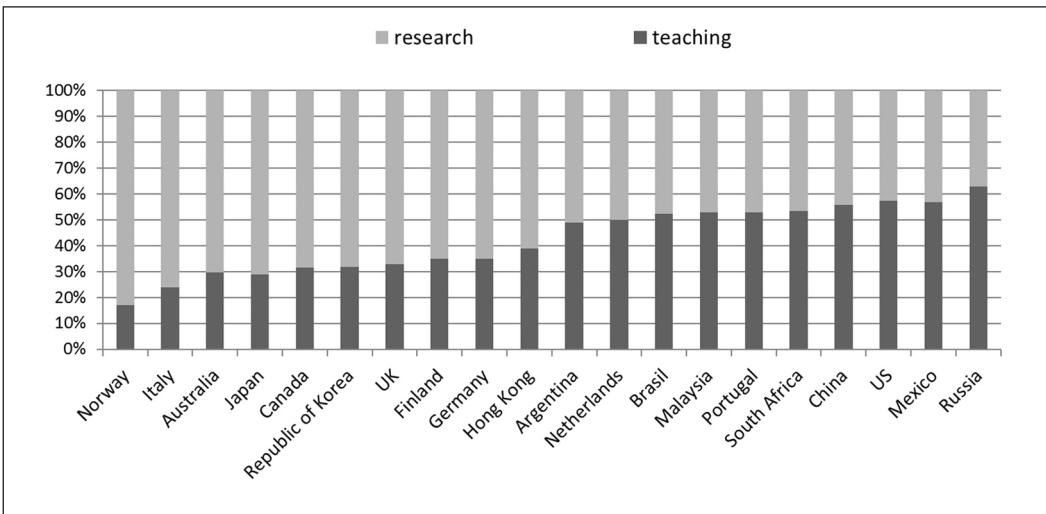
Individual preferences between teaching and research constitute an important characteristic that affects both the time budget of faculty, and the results of teaching and research activities

Table 2. Faculty preferences: Teaching versus research.

	1992 (%)	2012 (%)
Primarily teaching	18	17
Both, but leaning towards teaching	50	43
Both, but leaning towards research	29	36
Primarily research	3	4
<i>N</i>	413	669

Note: chi-square = 7.74, *p*-value = 0.05.

Question: Regarding your own preferences, do your interests lie primarily in teaching or in research? 1. Primarily in teaching; 2. In both, but leaning towards teaching; 3. In both, but leaning towards research; 4. Primarily in research.

**Figure 1.** Faculty preferences: Teaching versus research 2012.

(Shin et al, 2013; Gottlieb and Keith, 1997). Today a significantly greater number of faculty members indicate that their priorities are mostly in research (see Table 2).

Despite this emerging shift from teaching to research even in the sample with a disproportionately high percentage of faculty from NRUs, the percentage of faculty members who indicated that they preferred research or were leaning towards research remains minimal in comparison with CAP-countries (see Figure 1) (Teichler et al., 2013). Other datasets that include data on teaching–research preferences also indirectly confirm that the percentage of research-oriented faculty members in Russian universities is relatively low: for instance, data from the project ‘Practices and Approaches for the Integration of Teaching and Research’ on the UK academic profession shows that approximately 67% and 53% of faculty in the Russell Group universities and non-Russell Group universities respectively prefer research or are leaning towards research (Alpay and Verschoor, 2014).

We think that such a bias toward teaching in the Russian case (which is even higher in regional universities) is to a large extent explained by the fact that there is a clear divide in Russia between the university sector and academy sector, which is represented by non-teaching research institutions of Russian Academies of Sciences (Smolentseva, 2003). Due to this long-standing divide,

Russian universities are positioned mostly as entities with a teaching mission, while research mission is dominated by teaching-oriented purposes.

Both now and 20 years ago the percentage of those preferring teaching (or leaning towards teaching) is significantly lower among male rather than female respondents (confirmed by both chi-square test and *t*-test). However, this difference in 2012 is not as striking as in the early 1990s (in 1992, 39% of male respondents and 14% of female respondents answered that they preferred research or were leaning towards research²; in 2012 – 45% of males and 34% of females³).

Work as a source of personal strain

Many researchers draw attention to different factors that can contribute to an increase in personal strain associated with academic work. Such factors include the diminishing autonomy of academics and growing pressures for accountability (Altbach, 2000; Altbach et al., 2012, Musselin, 2005) as governance regimes are shifting towards decentralization and self-steering of universities (Enders, 2000; Estermann et al., 2011).

The term ‘new managerialism’ is used to conceptualize this process (Deem, 1998). The spread of new managerialism is associated with the massification of higher education, which implies standardized, external regulations, rationalization, etc. (Musselin, 2007), as well as increased financial costs for the higher education sector. External monitoring tools now interact with the self-regulation of the academic community. Demands for accountability result in increased pressure to produce socio-economically relevant research (Brennan, 2007; Enders, 2006; Kehm and Lanzendorf, 2007) and in more administrative work for faculty (evaluations, proposals, describing project progress, etc.).

Examples of increased accountability of the academic profession from European countries comprise the introduction of faculty contracts linking funding to research outcomes, like bibliometric research indicators and the number of PhD graduates in Denmark in 1999 (Schmidt, 2012); implementation of funding based on the number and level of scientific publications, relevance of research measured in terms of external funds received, the number of completed PhD degrees, etc., in Norway in 2002 (Schmidt, 2012); introduction of performance-based funding of higher education institutions and performance-based distribution of university resources among departments in Germany and Austria (Kehm and Lanzendorf, 2007) among others.

In this context it might look surprising that in the 2012 study substantially fewer respondents than 20 years earlier noted that their job ‘was a source of considerable personal strain’ for them – 15% in 2012 and 51% in 1992 agreed with that statement, 15% in 1992 and 64% in 2012 disagreed, and 34% in 1992 and 21% in 2012 expressed a neutral attitude (this difference is statistically significant, chi-square = 270.52, *p*-value < 10⁻⁵). However, the proportion of such respondents is still rather high, not only among academics at early stages of their career, which is typical for some other countries,⁴ but also among faculty members who are already well integrated into academic structures and hold high positions in the academic hierarchy (for a detailed discussion of stress and the professional satisfaction of Russian faculty see Davydova and Kozmina, 2014).

Relatively high levels of personal strain, as registered in the Carnegie study, can be attributed to the fact that the beginning of the 1990s was a time of radical and abrupt institutional changes in higher education that led to high uncertainty for the professional community, especially for its senior members who had invested their efforts and skills into the old rules of the academic game. This is one possible interpretation of the fact that in the 1992 sample the share of those who agreed with the statement about personal strain is higher among senior faculty than among junior teaching staff: academics with high administrative status and symbolic capital had something to lose, and systemic uncertainty therefore caused more strain on them.

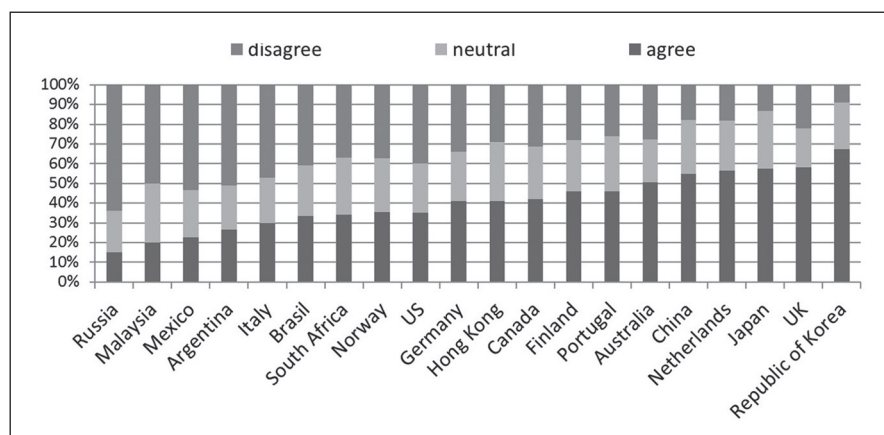


Figure 2. 'My job is a source of considerable personal strain' (2012).

In contrast, in the 2012 sample (both in research universities and in the overall sub-sample of Moscow and St Petersburg universities) the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement about personal strain was higher among young faculty, who only have a bachelor or *specialist*⁵ degree⁶ (21% in NRUs, 20% in all Moscow and St Petersburg universities included in the sample). Among faculty with a *doctorate*⁷ this percentage is relatively low (7% both in NRUs and in the overall sub-sample). This is probably due to the low salaries of junior faculty: based on the CAP study in Moscow and St Petersburg, the average annual salary of junior faculty who did not agree with the statement about strain is 1.5 times higher than the salary of those junior faculty who agreed with this statement (among senior faculty there is no such a correlation between salary and response to the question about strain). Another survey, the Monitoring of Educational Markets and Organizations, 2012,⁸ revealed that the salary of junior faculty amounted to approximately 61% of the average salary in the private sector (for professors it was 116%, for associate professors – 78%).

In general, the share of the respondents in the 2012 study who agreed with the statement concerning personal strain is relatively low compared to other countries (the lowest among all CAP countries; see Figure 2). This is probably due to the fact that academic work is characterized by relatively stable employment (with high employment guarantees),⁹ and in general there is practically no correlation between salary (but not overall remuneration) and work results, i.e. the academic environment is not very competitive.

At the same time, as major reforms have been implemented in the Russian university sector since 2013, new managerialism is becoming an important part of the governance model. Abundant anecdotal evidence suggests that Russian university faculty start to feel less secure and more stressed. One should expect that performance measures (such as publication productivity at individual and institutional level), necessity to attract external funding for research as well as increasing accountability and growing uncertainty due to competitive pressures might change personal feelings and attitudes significantly.¹⁰ However, these changes could be empirically evaluated in future surveys only.

Attractiveness of academic career / Evaluation of working conditions

In 2012, an academic career was still considered as less attractive in Russia compared to a career in the private sector, and this opinion is relatively common both among people working in academia and

Table 3. Views on the statement ‘This is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field’.

	1992 (%)	2012 (%)
Agree	32	36
Neutral	26	25
Disagree	42	40
N	377	686

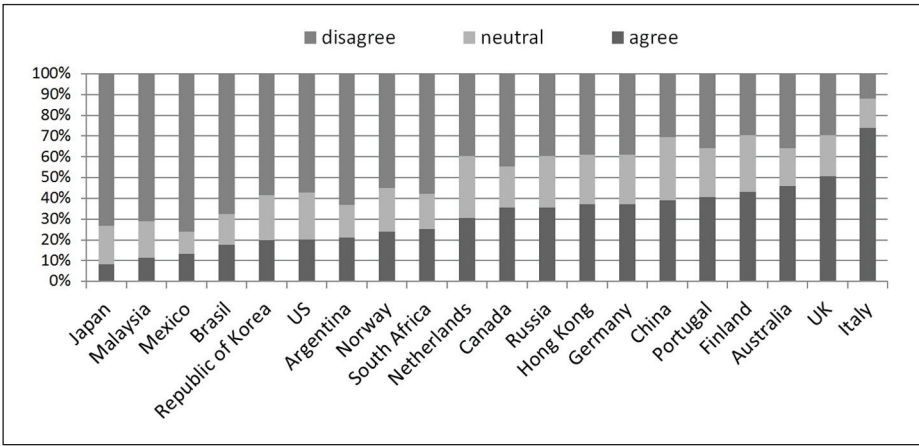


Figure 3. ‘This is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field’ (2012).

outside.¹¹ The share of participants in the Russian 2012 study who agreed that the present time was ‘a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career’ in their respective academic fields remains practically the same as in 1992, when the academic profession was in a deep crisis (see Table 3). However, it is difficult to identify factors that influence such attitudes in a national academic system. For example, speaking in a broader international context, among countries with relatively low average professor salaries and high competition for academic jobs, there are academic systems whose faculty members consider the current period favourable for academics in their scientific field. On the contrary, in some quite affluent countries the proportion of academics who are sceptical about the prospects for entry-level faculty is quite high (see Figure 3). In the Russian 2012 study there is a correlation between answers to the question about career prospects in one’s academic field and income (earned at the university): the average university-earned income of those who disagreed that the present time was a poor time to start an academic career is approximately 1.3 times higher than the average income of those who agreed with this statement (t -test = 4,37, p -value < 10^{-3}).

The reasons for declined desirability of academic careers (Huisman et al., 2002) could be the increased accountability and efficiency pressures mentioned earlier, relative abatement in salary and expanded workload (Enders, 2006). In one study (Leisyte et al., 2009), faculty in the UK and the Netherlands report that the workload has intensified in the context of increasing demands and competition in both teaching and research. Based on cross-country CAP data Cavalli and Moscati (Cavalli and Moscati, 2010) argue that in general a rather pessimistic image of working conditions prevails in European countries: in every European country in the CAP sample most faculty members state that working conditions have deteriorated since they entered the academic profession.

Table 4. Views on the statement 'If I had it to do over again, I would not become an academic'.

	1992 (%)	2012 (%)
Agree	11	17
Neutral	17	16
Disagree	72	68
N	383	687

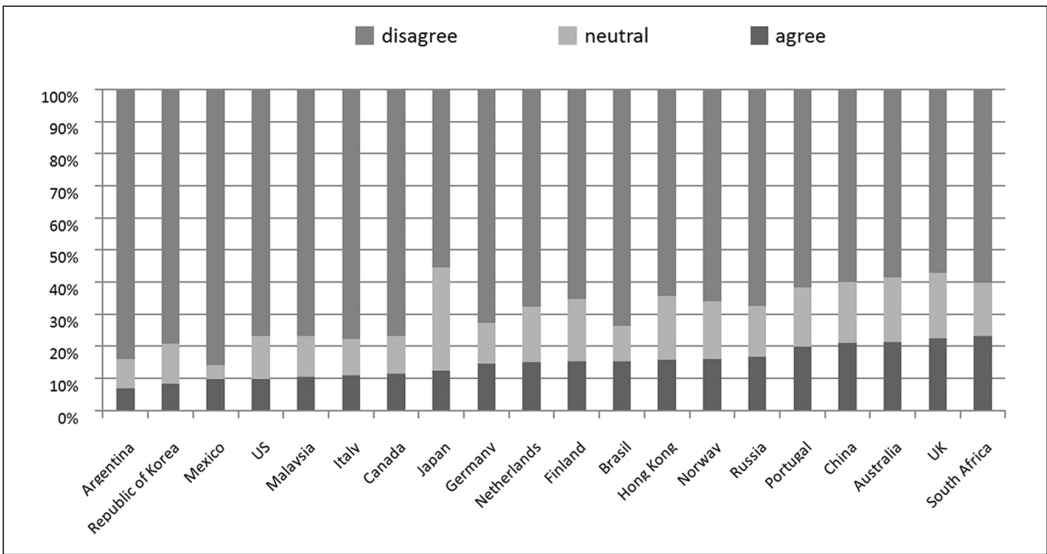


Figure 4. 'If I had to do it over again, I would not become an academic' (2012).

At the same time, although subjective faculty evaluation of their working conditions was more positive in 2012 than in 1992, the percentage of Russian respondents who do not regret their choice of profession has remained at about the same level as before (see Table 4), which is rather high compared to other countries (see Figure 4). In general, one may conclude that while the composition of faculty body has changed over the last 20 years, those who stayed in academia have adopted to existing conditions and learnt how to reduce stress by selecting their individual strategies.

Assessment of the quality of training

Relatively low levels of personal strain associated with the professional activities of faculty can to a certain extent be attributed to a surprisingly high self-assessment of their research and teaching skills. About two-thirds of Moscow and St Petersburg respondents in the CAP study consider their training in teaching and research to be excellent or good (in regional universities these numbers are somewhat lower, yet still substantially higher than in 1992). It should be noted here, however, that this self-assessment differs across various subject areas (lower for faculty in natural sciences and engineering than for faculty in humanities and social sciences), whereas 20 years ago no significant differences were found.

However, if one looks at Russian faculty's research performance and their level of individual internationalization (which is low both for the Russian sample on the whole and the sub-sample of

Table 5. Reasons to leave a university.^a

	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	N, 1992	N, 2012
Income	63	25	437	707
Resources for research	44	15	437	707
Academic reputation of institution/department	6	13	437	707
Academic cooperation among colleagues here	6	7	437	707
Region in which this institution is located	10	4	437	707

Question: In thinking about leaving or staying at this institution, how important are the following considerations? (Evaluate from 1 to 5, where 1 – a strong reason to leave, 5 – a strong reason to stay.)

^aat each cell – a percentage of respondents who marked a factor as a very strong (1) or strong (2) reason to leave.

Moscow and St Petersburg universities: 23% said that they had published articles in a language other than the language of teaching in their institution in the previous three years; 21% stated that they had published articles in international journals, with no significant differences between capital and regional universities), it is clear that faculty’s self-assessment to a large extent does not relate to objective international criteria of competitive research skills and faculty’s chances of competing internationally. The percentage of those who evaluate their research training as excellent is higher among those who have international publications (published in the last three years) but the differences, although statistically significant by chi-square test, are generally small: 56% among those who have at least one publication in an international journal, 44% among those who do not have any (chi-square = 15.76, *p*-value = 0.003). This conclusion is supported by the fact that there are no significant differences in self-assessments of faculty in universities of different types. However, there are also no differences in faculty preferences regarding teaching and research in NRUs and other institutions (Kozmina, 2014).

Reasons to stay in or leave the university

Both in 1992 and in 2012 the most common reason for potentially leaving the university was insufficient income (63% and 25% of respondents in 1992 and 2012 studies, respectively, noted this as a strong reason to leave a university) (Table 5), although the percentage of respondents who agreed with this was lower in 2012.¹² This difference may be explained by improved funding of Russian higher educational institutions in general.

The most common reason to stay is the university’s/department’s academic reputation, although in 2012 there was no general consensus on this as in 1992 (Table 6). A possible explanation is that in 1992, with very low funding allocated to salaries and minimum access to necessary resources, social esteem and recognition were the main sources of motivation to stay in the academic profession.

The problem of insufficient resources for research as a reason to leave plays a much smaller role in 2012. In 1992, the most important factors contributing to faculty’s willingness to stay at a university were its reputation and academic environment (i.e. academic cooperation between faculty): 86% and 83% of faculty mentioned these factors as strong reasons to stay, respectively. This is consistent with the results of other studies into factors affecting job satisfaction and preventing faculty from leaving the academic profession (Barnes et al., 1998; Lacy and Sheehan, 1997). These studies indicate that the ‘sense of community’ and good relationships with colleagues are one of the strongest predictors of job satisfaction and factors that keep people in academia. In today’s situation, these factors are valid for a much smaller number of university faculty.

Table 6. Reasons to stay at a university.^a

	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	N, 1992	N, 2012
Income	20	40	437	707
Resources for research	25	40	437	707
Academic reputation of institution/department	86	46	437	707
Academic cooperation among colleagues here	83	41	437	707
Region in which this institution is located	78	68	437	707

Question: In thinking about leaving or staying at this institution, how important are the following considerations? (Evaluate from 1 to 5, where 1 – a strong reason to leave, 5 – a strong reason to stay.)

^aat each cell – a percentage of respondents who marked a factor as a very strong (5) or strong (4) reason to stay.

Table 7. Decision-making at the university (1992).

	Centralized 1	2	3	4	Decentralized 5		N
Determining budget priorities	67	20	10	1	2	100%	342
Selecting key administrators	59	19	19	2	1	100%	352
Setting admission standards for undergraduate students	55	21	16	3	4	100%	369
Determining the overall teaching load of faculty	43	24	22	8	4	100%	380
Approving new academic programmes	32	21	31	9	8	100%	369
Making faculty promotion decisions	23	23	39	8	7	100%	376
Choosing new faculty	19	17	39	15	9	100%	373

Question: At this institution, where are the following decisions usually made? (Evaluate from 1 –completely centralized, to 5 – completely decentralized).

Models of decision-making

The analysis of roles that different actors play in institutional decision-making and faculty's estimation of the degree of their own participation in these processes reveal strong centralization of decision-making in Russian universities. This highly centralized governance model has been quite stable in the last 20 years and has undergone only minor changes (see Tables 7 and 8).

Most of the respondents in both the 1992 and 2012 samples indicated that the same decisions were taken with a high degree of centralization (i.e. at the level of institutional management): determining budget priorities, selecting key administrators and setting admission standards for prospective undergraduate students. In both samples fewer faculty members stated that decisions regarding promotions and new faculty appointments were still centralized.

At the same time, today the role of institutional top-management in making the most important decisions (such as electing key executives or determining budget priorities) is stronger in federal universities and NRUs than in institutions without a special status. At first glance these findings contradict the conclusions of some existing studies concerned with the relationship between models of management and the development of the academic environment at universities (see, for example, Masten, 2006). A general conclusion of these studies is that reliance on shared governance is to a greater extent necessary in the research university sector, while management is characterized by greater centralization at other universities and colleges focused on teaching. However, this contradiction is only apparent: the main body of such studies is based on data from US

Table 8. Decision-making on different issues: Key actors (2012).

	1 ^a	2 ^a	3 ^a	4 ^a	5 ^a	6 ^a		N
Determining budget priorities	72	4	16	7	1	0.1	100%	667
Selecting key administrators	47	24	25	3	0.1	0.1	100%	667
Setting admission standards for undergraduate students	42	22	20	15	1	0.2	100%	665
Determining the overall teaching load of faculty	31	4	22	42	1	0.3	100%	676
Approving new academic programmes	25	23	35	16	1	0.3	100%	668
Making faculty promotion decisions	19	1	23	57	0.3	0.2	100%	666
Choosing new faculty	19	2	34	44	1	0.1	100%	674

Question: At your institution, which actor has the primary influence on each of the following decisions?

^a1. Institutional managers; 2. Government or external stakeholders; 3. Faculty committees/ boards; 4. Academic unit managers; 5. Individual faculty; 6. Students.

Table 9. Evaluation of faculty members' own influence on decision-making.

	At the level of the department		At the level of the faculty, school		At the institutional level	
	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	1992 (%)	2012 (%)
Very influential	31	23	8	10	3	7
Somewhat influential	41	37	35	25	19	12
A little influential	22	32	27	33	25	23
Not at all influential	6	8	30	32	53	59
N	413	657	401	641	388	622

Question: How influential are *you*, personally, in helping to shape key academic policies?

institutions, where the status of a research university (according to the Carnegie classification) is awarded to a university in accordance with objective measures of university performance. At the same time, Russian universities were awarded NRU status under special development programmes that require university management to mobilize institutional human resources to achieve the results required within these programmes. That is why elements of ‘mobilizational’ management can be found in research universities.

Both in 2012 and 20 years earlier faculty members at Russian universities (both in capital cities and in regional ones) evaluated their own influence on decision-making as fairly low (see Tables 9, 10, 11). In comparison with other CAP countries, there is a relatively large percentage of Russian faculty members who perceive the participation of faculty (individual faculty or faculty committees, or university senate) in decision-making processes as high. For some institutional decisions in the Russian 2012 sample (selection of managers, budget, admissions, new programmes of study, research priorities and international linkages) the percentage of faculty who said that individual faculty members or faculty committees, or the university senate had primary influence on decisions taken was 1.5 to three times higher than the average percentage in CAP countries (see Teichler et al., 2013: 170).

However, the CAP study is targeted at faculty employed full-time or at least at persons who spend a substantial part of their work time on teaching and/or research (Teichler et al., 2013). Meanwhile, researchers note that the number of fixed-term contracts for both teaching and research

Table 10. Senior faculty (professors and associate professors).

	At the level of the department		At the level of the faculty, school		At the institutional level	
	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	1992 (%)	2012 (%)
Very influential	34	29	10	13	3	8
Somewhat influential	42	40	37	30	21	15
A little influential	19	25	28	31	27	26
Not at all influential	4	5	25	26	49	51
N	345	447	335	436	323	418

Table 11. Junior academic staff.

	At the level of the department		At the level of the faculty, school		At the institutional level	
	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	1992 (%)	2012 (%)
Very influential	16	10	1	5	1	4
Somewhat influential	32	29	24	14	12	7
A little influential	37	47	24	37	15	16
Not at all influential	15	14	50	44	71	73
N	68	211	66	207	65	206

positions is growing, while the number of tenured and tenure-track positions is declining (Cavalli and Moscati, 2010; Finkelstein et al., 1998). There are many concerns over the growing ‘uncertainty’ of employment in the academic profession internationally due to reductions in funding, increases in student enrolments, diversification of academic institutions, etc. (Altbach, 2000; Enders, 2000; Finkelstein et al., 1998). The number of ‘para-academics’ (staff who specialize only in one element of the academic profession, like educational developers or research management staff) is increasing (Macfarlane, 2011). In the UK only 51.5% of those employed on academic contracts in 2008–2009 had a ‘teaching and research’ function (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2010). Thus, additional attention should be paid to the participation of other groups of academic staff, as long as their participation in decision-making processes differs from full-time and part-time faculty.

Control

A specific feature of the present situation in the university academic sector in Russia is that significantly more faculty members (compared to the 1992 study) feel the pressure of regular monitoring of their teaching and research activities and performance (see Table 12), both by peers, direct superiors, senior administrative staff (to a lesser degree) and students. These relatively higher shares indicate that faculty are dissatisfied with increased control over their activities. At the same time, faculty members realize that this is also associated with increased requirements for contract extension and promotion.

In this respect there is a difference between higher educational institutions with a special status and all other institutions. Among NRU faculty the proportion of those who noted that the head of their department evaluated their teaching is higher (84% of NRU faculty versus 76% of faculty at

Table 12. Who evaluates the teaching and research of faculty?^a

	Teaching		Research		N	
	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	1992 (%)	2012 (%)	1992 (%)	2012 (%)
Your peers in your department or unit	20	84	15	59	437	603
The head of your department or unit	47	80	25	75	437	655
Members of other departments or units at this institution	9	40	8	53	437	340
Senior administrative staff at this institution	13	58	10	51	437	525
Your students	40	86	2	18	437	460
External reviewers	3	25	24	77	437	342

Question: By whom is your teaching, research and service regularly evaluated?

^aat each cell – a percentage of respondents who mentioned that a group evaluates teaching/research.

other institutions, chi-square = 4.39, *p*-value = 0.036). This also applies to the percentage of those who said that their teaching was evaluated by students (63% and 57%, respectively, chi-square = 4.59, *p*-value = 0.032). And vice versa, among NRU faculty fewer respondents noted that their scientific work was evaluated by the head of department (70% and 79%, chi-square = 6.27, *p*-value = 0.012), and that their administrative work was evaluated by external reviewers (7% and 15%, chi-square = 8.6, *p*-value = 0.003).

However, many faculty members indicated that continuous monitoring and high demands for increased scientific productivity negatively affected the quality of research (50% in the 2012 sample and 9% in the 1992 sample agreed with the statement ‘High expectations to increase research productivity are a threat to the quality of research’).

Conclusions

Using two broad surveys with the set of the same or comparable indicators we aimed to analyse the attitudes of Russian faculty in a comparative perspective. The Carnegie survey and the Changing Academic Profession survey were carried out in Russia with a 20-year time lag. During these 20 years the Russian higher education system underwent fundamental changes. Comparative analysis of the two datasets enabled us to observe both relatively stable and volatile characteristics of the academic profession in two major Russian cities (where a significant share of all higher education institutions is concentrated) and also investigate how the academic profession is perceived by university faculty.

Our analysis suggests that these perceptions have changed significantly. The percentage of research-oriented faculty has increased, as well as the share of those who do not consider their job as a source of personal strain. Moreover, the significance of different reasons to leave or to stay at a university has changed. These changes are probably linked, on the one hand, to higher salaries in the academic sector and availability of financial resources allocated to research activities and, on the other hand, to the dismantling of a number of highly productive scientific schools.

However, based on the results from Moscow and St Petersburg universities we can suggest that some important characteristics of the system are relatively stable. For example, the proportion of those who regret their career choice remains almost the same (as well as the share of those who believe that today is a poor time for young people to start an academic career in their field). On average, there are no changes in university governance structures and the involvement of faculty in decision-making processes at universities is still low. There is no supporting evidence to claim that

Russian universities are shifting to a governance model with a significant role of the academic community in decision-making or shared governance. This is a matter of concern as empirical evidence suggests that a low level of faculty involvement in decision-making may negatively affect university performance (Brown, 2001).

While our dataset includes public institutions in two major cities, we can argue that corresponding limitations are not substantial. Indeed, the public university sector in Russia accounts for about 85% of all students in Russian higher education institutions. Moreover, private universities (with some minor exceptions) belong to a low-quality educational segment and quite often do not have their own core faculty. At the same time, a substantial part of higher educational institutions is concentrated in Moscow and St Petersburg, the biggest Russian cities, with high variations in quality, size and scope. So, limiting the sample to universities in these two cities still allows us to get a generalized picture of the academic profession in Russia.

Priorities of the higher education system, as perceived by university academics, have changed: 20 years ago faculty believed that one of the most important challenges that the higher education system faced was to prepare students to enter the labour market. Now, priorities have shifted in the direction of strengthening Russia's competitive ability in the global community. This shift is in itself not surprising. However, it is a significant warning sign that this is probably the only (and rather ephemeral) evidence that the academic culture is adapting to the idea of competitiveness in the global academic market place.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Notes

1. Exact wordings of all the questions are given in the corresponding tables.
2. T -test parameters: $t = 6.44$, p -value $< 10^{-5}$; chi-square test parameters: statistic = 40.44, p -value $< 10^{-5}$.
3. T -test parameters: $t = 6.25$, p -value $< 10^{-5}$; chi-square test parameters: statistic = 38.24, p -value $< 10^{-5}$.
4. According to CAP data the proportion of faculty who agreed with the statement about strain is greater among junior positions in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Hong Kong, Italy, Korea and Portugal.
5. This is the first higher educational degree in Russia; nowadays it is being replaced by bachelor degree. A specialist degree usually requires five years of study.
6. Chi-square = 9.94, p -value = 0.05.
7. A rough equivalent to the German habilitation; the highest academic degree in Russia, which can be received after a candidate degree (roughly equivalent to PhD).
8. Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations (MEMO) consists of annual representative surveys of students and their families, school teachers and faculty at colleges and universities, heads of colleges and

- universities, and employers. It is designed and administered by National Research University Higher School of Economics, with the financial support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.
9. Now, in 2015, we argue that it is not the case anymore: due to increasing competition for faculty positions and the bias of many universities toward short-term contracts, nowadays university employment is not considered stable and secure. On the contrary, increasing requirements in research performance are considered to be a source of extra strain.
 10. Comparison of faculty's perception of the mission of higher education in the 1992 and 2012 studies can give us an inkling that the idea of a competitive academic labour market has started to spread among Russian faculty: the respondents of the 1992 study most frequently mentioned 'preparing students to work' as a high priority while nowadays one of the first priorities is 'strengthening the nation's capacity to compete internationally'.
 11. Public opinion polls (Public Opinion, 2010) showed that in 2010, only 8% of the respondents noted that they would like their children or grandchildren to become 'a professor, a scholar, a faculty member at a university'. The most high-ranked occupations were 'lawyer, economist and financier' (23%), 'programmer, expert in the field of high technologies' (23%) and 'doctor' (22%).
 12. There are no statistically significant differences between NRUs, federal universities and other higher education institutions in terms of the percentage of faculty members who noted that insufficient income was a reason to leave. So, the lower percentage in 2012 cannot be explained by overrepresentation of institutions with special funding sources in the 2012 sample.

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A generational divide in the academic profession: A mixed quantitative and qualitative approach to the Polish case

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Abstract

In a recently changing Polish academic environment – following the large-scale higher education reforms of 2009–2012 – different academic generations have to cope with different challenges. Polish academics have been strongly divided generationally, not only in terms of what they think and how they work but also in terms of what is academically expected from them following the reforms. This article explores intra-national cross-generational differences based on a combination of quantitative (surveys, $N = 3704$) and qualitative (interviews, $N = 60$) primary empirical evidence used according to the mixed-methods approach methodology and its ‘sequential’ research design. This article explores the major dimensions of the intergenerational divide between younger and older academic generations (and how they are related to both post-1989 developments and recent reforms). It shows the power of research at a micro-level of individuals, complementing the traditional research at aggregated institutional and national levels. Implications for Central European systems are shown.

Keywords

Academic generations, European universities, Poland, generational conflicts, university governance, internationalization in research

Introduction

The academic profession in every country consists not only of academics from various academic fields and institutions of different types, of males and females of different ranks – all in changing percentages over time – but also of different academic generations (Finkelstein et al., 1998). Higher education systems at different times have employed different proportions of young and

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older academics, of which those in the most prestigious positions (chairs, full professorships, etc.) usually act as role models for new entrants (Brechelmacher et al., 2015; Cole and Cole, 1973; Hagstrom, 1965). This article explores the Polish academic profession through the analytical lenses provided by academic generations and focuses on the power of intergenerational tensions within and across academic institutions and fields. Similar intergenerational tensions occur in other European systems – especially those undergoing structural reforms, based ever more on the competitive logic of (research) performance in academic careers and research funding allocations between academics, their research teams and their institutions (Huang et al., 2014; Stephan, 2012; Yudkevich et al., 2015). Tensions increase, as does the pace of change.

Historically, there have always been intergenerational tensions in academia (Clark, 1983; Stephan and Levin, 1992; Wilson, 1995). In particular, these tensions can be linked to periods of either sustained reforms, or the lack of them, despite a perceived need (Neave and Rhoades, 1987; Rhoades, 1992). Studies of various types of differentiation in the academic profession (Clark, 1983; Enders, 2006; Enders and Musselin, 2008; Huisman, 1998) indicate that cross-generational differentiation may play a fundamental role in times of changing academic rules, especially under sweeping reform programmes (Białecki and Dąbrowa-Szefer, 2009; Antonowicz et al., 2016), which is the case in Poland and also refers to European higher education in transition in more general terms (Kehm and Teichler, 2013).

Younger and older Polish academics are a textbook example of academics born to academic life in different eras, working with different career opportunities and following different academic norms. Marquina and Jones suggested recently (2015: 1349) that different generations of academics may ‘experience and understand academic work in quite different ways’. My research seeks to explore these differences following a more general observation that academic cohorts are individuals who:

[s]hare similar experiences or receive similar exposure to the unique events that characterize their lives. These common experiences may mark each one for life, and as a result, members of different cohorts may exhibit differences in behavior, values, and intellectual abilities (Stephan and Levin, 1992: 115; see Finkelstein et al., 1998; Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006).

The difference between common academic experiences under communism and those of today have already been widely discussed in research literature (e.g. Kwiek, 2014, 2012; Pinheiro and Antonowicz, 2015).

In a recently changing Polish academic environment – following the large-scale higher education reforms of 2009–2012 – different academic generations have had to cope with different challenges, and they have had to use different academic strategies. Polish academics have been strongly divided generationally, not only in terms of what they think and how they work but also in terms of what is academically expected from them following the reforms. This article explores intra-national cross-generational differences based on a combination of quantitative (a large-scale survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) primary empirical evidence used according to the mixed-methods approach methodology and its ‘sequential’ research design.

This article is structured as follows: the next section, ‘Theoretical background’ has subsections on academic generations in higher education research and on changes in Polish higher education. The section after that is focused on methodology and data. Thereafter, the research findings are presented in three subsections: on internationalization in research; on meritocracy in science; and on perceptions of university governance and management, all three across distinct academic generations. The three guiding research themes are closely linked to a radically changing academic environment following the recent wave of reforms. The final section, ‘Discussion and conclusions’ concludes the findings.

Theoretical background

Academic generations in higher education research

The research question of this article is as follows: What are the major dimensions of the intergenerational divide between younger and older academic generations and how they are related to post-1989 developments in the higher education sector in general, and to recent higher education reforms in particular.

The idea of designing my research along the lines of academic generations is drawn from Paula Stephan and Sharon Levin's (1992) *Striking the Mother Lode in Science. The Importance of Age, Place, and Time*. They argue that 'many conditions that lead to RPRT [the right place at the right time] are not specific to the individual but, rather, specific to a generation. This means that success in science depends, in part, on things outside the control of the individual scientist' (1992: 4). Stephan returned to the idea of 'cohort effects' again after two decades:

Some scientists graduate when jobs are plentiful; they have a choice among jobs and have little difficulty obtaining funding for their research. Their career flourish ... Others graduate when jobs are considerably less plentiful (Stephan, 2012: 174–175).

So, in the Polish context, as well as in a larger European context, 'the 60-year-old is not only 25 years older than the 35-year-old but was also born in a different era when values and opportunities may have been significantly different' (Stephan and Levin, 1992: 58).

Previous academic profession studies focusing on academic generations, cohorts and career stages include Finkelstein et al. (1998: 103) who studied two different academic generations in American higher education: 'new entrants' (those in the first seven years of their academic careers) and 'seniors'. Their conclusion was that the two cohorts differed not so much in what they did but in who they were. Recently, Shin et al. (2015: 1407) in their study of the 'academic boomers', 'sandwich generation' and 'new generation' (academics hired in different periods since 1981) in Korean higher education suggested that personal and institutional characteristics are limited in explaining differences between academics and that 'academics share similar perceptions and experiences even though they are in different age groups or academic ranks, if they have experienced a similar socio-economic environment'. In a different study, Shin et al. (2014: 185) analysed teaching and research activities, academic role preferences and time budgets by three career stages (academics under 40, aged 41–55 and over 56) and showed increasing research orientation among the younger generation, with negative policy implications for the Korean system. Kyvik and Aksnes (2015: 1451) explained the increase in publication productivity over a period of 30 years among Norwegian academic staff from a generational perspective and concluded that four factors mattered: better qualifications of younger generations, their increased research collaboration, their work in improved research conditions and the introduction of new incentive and reward systems. In her study of research productivity of Korean academics by career stage, Jung (2014: 87–88), following previous literature, categorized academics into 'fledglings', 'maturing academics', 'established academics' and 'patriarchs', and argued that 'academics tend to experience changes in terms of their interests, values, or performance according to their career stage'. Finally, Santiago et al. (2015) studied academics' perceptions of governance and management in Portuguese higher education by 'younger', 'middle' and 'older' academic generations, concluding that there were no differences between them concerning the prevailing preferred management model. Only recently have primary cross-national data on 'generational change and academic work' (Marquina and Jones, 2015) been analysed, following massive work produced within the CAP ('Changing Academic Profession') and the EUROAC ('The Academic Profession in Europe') research projects.

Ulrich Teichler's (2006: 2) description of academic careers fits the Polish case perfectly:

[b]etween the ages of about 30 and 40 years, when those in other careers are settling, there tends to be a high degree of uncertainty and selectivity in academic careers ... Concern is growing that academic careers might lose their attractiveness and that talented individuals might opt out for other careers.

In the Polish academic context until recently, the brightest may have been lost to science because of semi-feudal academic relationships, non-competitive research funding modes, unclear career advancement rules and the lack of objective assessment criteria of individual and institutional research output. Times are changing though, and all Polish academic generations are in the eye of the storm now.

Changes in Polish higher education

The Polish case in a nutshell is as follows: for about two decades after the collapse of communism, higher education was largely unreformed, heavily underfunded, teaching-focused at both individual and institutional levels, highly collegial and based on semi-feudal relationships between seniors and juniors, with academics being satisfied with the status quo at the level which precluded any substantial reforms (see Dobbins, 2015). The 2009–2012 wave of reforms (the so-called Kudrycka reforms, termed so after Minister Barbara Kudrycka who was in office in 2007–2013) introduced new funding and governance mechanisms, new buffer bodies between the ministry and academic institutions, and new peer-run national research assessment and research funding institutions. In short, new rules of the academic game were introduced despite heavy public protests by academics from soft sciences – combined with generally silent support of (mostly) younger and predominantly research-focused, internationally oriented academics, usually from the hard sciences (see 'constructing universities as organizations' in Poland (Kwiek, 2016b) as seen through the lenses of institutional theory). Consequently, in the last few years, the Polish academy has become more divided generationally than ever before: divided not so much along a traditional powerless juniors vs. powerful seniors line (based on traditional rigid academic hierarchies, see Clark, 1983; Neave and Rhoades, 1987) but along a new line of contrasting generational approaches to the internationalization of research and its emergent competitive funding modes and to academic promotions based on quantifiable academic output and international publication channels.

Interestingly, as elsewhere in Europe (Kehm and Teichler, 2013; Santos et al., 2016), in the last quarter of a century there has been a tremendous increase in the number of doctoral students, a natural pool of future academics: from fewer than 3000 in 1990 to more than 43,000 in 2014 (GUS, 2015), closely following the pattern of increasing student enrolments. While there are ever more doctoral students, the number of doctorates awarded does not follow this trend, increasing slowly by only 150% between 1970 and 2014 (and by merely 50% between 1980 and 2014, as the growth in numbers was not stable over time). The academic rank pyramids in 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2014 do not differ substantially: the Polish academic profession has been led by a small (5.4%–8.7%) upper stratum of full professors; a lower stratum of assistant professors has systematically consisted of 73%–79% of academics; and there is a middle stratum of 14%–21% who are associate professors (in international terms). Surprisingly, half a century of changes, including a quarter of a century of post-1989 political and economic regime change, have not influenced the Polish rank pyramid, closely linked to the age (and generation) pyramid, as Figure 1 clearly shows. The changes in the composition of the Polish academic profession in the last 50 years are shown in Table 1.

Behind the relatively stable aggregated data, there is a complicated picture of changing inter-generational relationships over time. My assumption was that there would be no single academic

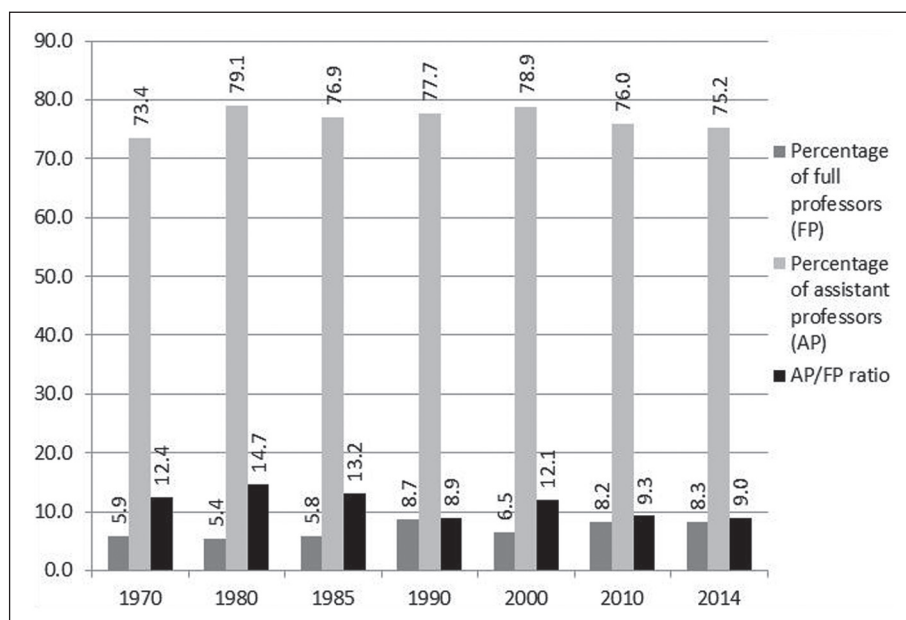


Figure 1. The percentage of full professors, assistant professors and the assistant professors/full professors (AP/FP) ratio in Poland, 1970–2014 (based on GUS, 2015 and previous editions; the category of assistant professors includes all research-involved academics without a habilitation degree).

Table 1. Polish higher education, selected parameters 1970–2014 ('assistant professors': includes all research-involved academics *without* a habilitation degree), based on GUS 2015 and previous editions.

Year	1970	1980	1985	1990	2000	2010	2014
Students	330,789	453,652	340,709	403,824	1,578,241	1,841,251	1,469,386
Doctoral students	3,235	5,844	1,262	2,695	25,622	37,492	43,399
Doctoral students as a percentage of academics	10.3%	10.7%	2.2%	4.2%	31.9%	37.4%	46.6%
Doctoral degrees awarded	2,290	3,737	1,780	2,324	4,138	4,449	5,712
All academics (total)	31,320	54,681	57,280	64,454	80,208	100,151	93,133
Full professors	1,850	2,938	3,341	5,597	5,242	8,200	7,763
Full professors as a percentage of all academics	5.9%	5.4%	5.8%	8.7%	6.5%	8.2%	8.3%
Assistant professors	22,995	43,238	44,076	50,076	63,260	76,086	69,998
Assistant professors as a percentage of all academics	73.4%	79.1%	76.9%	77.7%	78.9%	76.0%	75.2%

profession in Poland, as elsewhere in Europe: there would be increasingly stratified and differentiated 'academic professions' (Enders and Musselin, 2008), with different academic behaviours, attitudes and productivity. This article shows the importance of the differentiation between academic cohorts or generations in Poland: young academics (under 40) and those from older cohorts. Poland in 1989–2015 has been a special case which fits perfectly with Finkelstein et al.'s (1998: 9) general description:

Higher education tends to change slowly in its aggregate characteristics. From time to time, however, there have been substantial, almost revolutionary changes in the cohorts of entering faculty over even as little as a single generation (in an era of expansion) or over two or three generations (in less dynamic periods).

After 1989, there was a quarter of a century of large-scale structural changes (1990–2015) intended to replace communist-period governance and funding arrangements with new ones, mostly in an incremental manner. No academic revolution occurred – but incremental changes gradually led to an entirely new system based on new governing principles. In the wake of the Kudrycka reforms, the assessment of research output is performed not only at an individual level, with an impact on academic careers – but also at an institutional level. Since 2010, a Polish version of a research assessment exercise has been applied: a newly created (2010) national Committee for the Evaluation of Scientific Units (Komitet Ewaluacji Jednostek Naukowych, KEJN) provides a large-scale, periodical assessment of the research output of all basic academic units (about 1000, usually at the level of faculty), leading to their national categorization. So, increasingly, academic outputs in both teaching and research are being assessed, benchmarked and linked (at an aggregated level of academic units or at an individual level in the case of project-based research funding) to public funding. Detailed bibliometric assessments of individuals and academic units (performed through a system of points and a ranking of academic journals) increasingly matters in financial terms. Overall, Poland is gradually implementing a performance-based research funding system, with funding levels linked either directly (institutional funding for academic units) or indirectly (grant-based funding for academics) to research outputs. The level of public research subsidies is declining, while the level of public competitive research funding is increasing, which lies at the core of ongoing performance-oriented changes. Academics from different generations perceive the changes differently, with younger academics seeing more opportunities than threats in them, and older academics feeling threatened by performance-based rules. Older generations, as elsewhere in Europe, keep working in a system with changing rules of academic promotions, modified hierarchies of prestige in science, evolving institutional norms and, especially, with ever more competitive access to research funding.

Methodology and data

The article uses a mixed-methods research design, with extended quantitative and qualitative strands, as I am interested in both narrative and numerical data – assuming that one data source may be insufficient. I follow Creswell and Plano Clark who argue that ‘mixed methods research helps answer questions that cannot be answered by qualitative or quantitative approaches alone’ (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011: 12). The mixed-methods approach ‘stands in the middle of a qualitative-quantitative continuum’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009: 28). More specifically, I use a ‘sequential mixed design’ in which the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research programme occur in a chronological order (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009: 120). I collected and analysed two independent strands of data in two phases, then merged the results of the two strands.

I analysed the survey data quantitatively (3704 returned usable surveys) and the interview data qualitatively (60 semi-structured in-depth interviews), and then merged the two sets of results, seeking ‘to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic to best understand the research problem’ (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011: 77). Semi-structured in-depth interviews, lasting on average between 60 and 90 minutes (and conducted by Dr Dominik Antonowicz) followed the survey by one year (2010 and 2011, respectively) which made it possible to structure them according to preliminary analyses of Polish quantitative data. The Polish interviewees were predominantly junior academics (about 80%) from the university sector (about 80%); half of them

Table 2. Interview statistics.

	N	%
Interviews	60	100
<i>Academic rank</i>		
Junior academics	47	78.4
Senior academics	13	21.6
<i>Age groups</i>		
Under 40	31	51.6
40–49	14	23.3
50–59	10	16.6
60 and more	5	8.3
<i>Academic disciplines</i>		
Humanities and arts	7	11.6
Social and behavioural sciences	23	38.3
Business and administration, economics	10	16.6
Physical sciences, mathematics, computer sciences	7	11.6
Engineering, manufacturing and construction, architecture	2	3.3
Life sciences	8	13.3
Education/teacher training	3	5
<i>Institutional type</i>		
University sector	48	80
Non-university sector	12	20
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	44	74.4
Female	16	26.6

were aged under 40; three-quarters of them were males and they were evenly distributed among all major academic fields (see Table 2). All surveyed and interviewed academics came from the public sector, as in other European CAP and EUROAC project countries, with a total of 17,211 usable cases from 11 countries: Norway, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland, Portugal and Poland. A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was assumed to lead to less biased results than using either of them separately.

I used the sampling method of an ‘equal probability of selection method’ (Hibberts et al., 2012: 55): every Polish academic had an equal chance of being selected for the study, with individualized invitations to participate in the survey sent out to about 39,000 academics, or all academics whose email addresses were available at a national level. In the process of international data coordination, sample weights were made by the Kassel statistical team (and coordinated by Ulrich Teichler); sample values were weighted to reflect the actual parameters of the Polish academic profession, as in the other ten European countries.¹

Academic age cohorts have been classified into four categories: those aged under 40 (or young academics), aged 40–49, aged 50–59 and aged 60 and more. Young academics are in their ‘formative years’ and have usually held their PhD degrees for no more than ten years (Teichler, 2006). I have assumed that a contrast between academic cohorts or generations expressed in the four age groups (and between two contrasted academic ranks: ‘full professors’ and ‘new entrants’) may work better in the Polish case than either a general bipartite junior-senior split (as in Teichler and Höhle, 2013) or a number of tripartite splits: a junior/middle rank/professors split (Enders and Teichler, 1997), an early-career/mid-career/late-career split (Shin et al., 2014) or a ‘novel’/

Table 3. The Polish sample: age cohorts and academic ranks (percentages rounded).

Age cohort/academic rank	under 40	40s	50s	60s and above
Assistant professor I (<i>asystent</i>)	84.2	9.5	4.5	1.8
Assistant professor II (<i>adiunkt</i>)	50.4	35.8	11.0	2.9
Associate professor (<i>doctor hab.</i>)	4.0	25.5	42.8	27.7
Full professor (<i>tytułarny</i>)	0.0	3.4	27.4	69.1

‘intermediate’/ ‘consolidated’ split (Marquina et al., 2015). ‘New entrants’ are defined here as those granted their PhD degrees in the ten years preceding the execution of the survey, or in 2001–2010; in most cases, they would be in the 29–39 age bracket, and ‘full professors’ are academics holding the ‘presidential’ professorship granted for life, the pinnacle of the profession.

From an international comparative perspective, the Polish case is somehow unique: academic generations to a large extent reflect academic ranks: a generational gap is in fact almost identical to a rank gap. There is a standard national road leading from academic dependence to academic independence (the latter being legally defined as having a habilitation degree). In the university sector studied here, almost all older academics (in their fifties and sixties) are in fact of an associate or full professorial status: 96.8% in the sample. A standard academic career in Polish universities means that academics obligatorily need to have a PhD degree (usually when aged 30–33: on average 32 in the sample), a habilitation degree (usually when aged 40–45: on average 44 in the sample); and some of them receive full professorship (usually when aged 50 and more: on average 51 in the sample). There are almost no newcomers to academia (from other professions), and there are almost no late-bloomers as the system does not tolerate those who are not able to receive their habilitation degree within the maximum 12–15 years after their PhD degree, that is, roughly before they are aged 45. Interestingly, in practical terms, it means that all young cohorts (in their twenties and thirties) are almost exclusively assistant professors (in international terms; 96% in the sample). The same rule applies to interviewees, with a special contrast between younger academics in their twenties and thirties vs. older academics in their fifties and sixties, with vastly different academic ranks. The Polish sample from the perspective of age and rank is presented above in Table 3.

My previous generationally-focused article on Polish academics discussed them from a European cross-national comparative perspective: Poland was contrasted with ten Western European countries in terms of weekly research and teaching time allocation, teaching/research role orientation and academic productivity in a reference period (Kwiek, 2015a). In this article, in contrast, Polish academics are discussed only intra-nationally and the intergenerational gap is studied through the themes figuring most prominently in the Polish case (rather than emerging from cross-European comparative analysis): these are internationalization in research, meritocracy in science (both related to competition for prestige and research funding), and university management and governance. All three themes were at the core of the 2009–2012 reforms and therefore were important components of the initial Polish interview protocol.

Research findings

Internationalization in research across academic generations

From the qualitative material, there emerges a major intergenerational dividing line between the ‘internationalists’ and the ‘locals’ in the Polish academic research production. The young academics interviewed tend to believe that their research matters as long it aspires to belong to the ongoing

international scholarly conversation; older academics (almost exclusively in senior ranks, for structural reasons explained above), in contrast, more often seem to believe that research in Polish universities can still be mostly local in scope and orientation – and only extraordinarily be international. These contrasting approaches to research go far beyond the Polish case, though. The traditional cosmopolitan/local tension in academia (Gouldner, 1957) has been all-pervading and it refers to the way research activities are conceived of, to academics' natural reference groups in research, to preferred or expected publication channels, types of conferences being routinely attended, and books and journals being routinely read.

While among both younger and older academics the proportion of locals in research is considerable (which I will discuss further based on quantitative material), it is currently decreasing among younger academics faster because of, *inter alia*, new academic promotion and research grants' requirements, both with a strong emphasis on international research outputs (as elsewhere across Europe, see Huang et al., 2014; Smeby and Trondal, 2005). The increasing internationalization in research was one of the two founding principles of the Kudrycka's reforms (the other one being competition; see an overview of their criticism in Szadkowski, 2015: 307–325). As an older professor of educational sciences explained the difference between current and past approaches to academic research:

I had no awareness before that one had to participate in this [research] game at a supranational level. I realized this only recently, in the past few years. We used to be stuck in a milieu in which there were only national-level authorities who were not recognizable beyond Poland (17/Older/Full professor).²

The times are changing, though, and especially so for younger generations of academics seeking prestige, research grants, scientific awards and promotion opportunities – which is directly related to internationalization in research and, especially, to publications in top international journals. In the Polish case, the core role of research internationalization in ongoing changes means the increasing competition between academics – and between academic units – based specifically on this dimension of academic work.

The increasing international competition in research, reported to be obvious to young generations, is still often hard to accept for older generations (as is the case globally, see Yudkevich et al., 2015). One of the reasons is the lack of direct academic requirements for older generations and especially for those who are already high on the career ladder. Interviewees believe new requirements to be predominantly applicable to young generations and especially the newcomers to the academic profession. A new general question of whether academics are doing anything relevant for the global 'borderless science' emerges as a new common generational experience. Therefore, in a global context,

[y]oung people, as the next academic generation, will not have this comfort that I used to have: the comfort that the competition does not exist ... There appear new questions: first, are they doing anything scientific, and, second, whether what they are doing matters at all (17/Older/ Full professor).

Such questions were alien to most Polish academics under communism, and they are bothering younger generations much more than older ones. The generational divide clearly shows that age – that is, belonging to different academic generations, entering the system under different conditions – matters for both the research role orientation and for academic productivity (for predictors of becoming 'top performers' or highly productive academics across 11 European systems, see Kwiek, 2016a).

Science needs clear academic reference points and scientists need unmistakable academic reference groups (Cole and Cole, 1973; Crane, 1965; Hagstrom, 1965; Wilson, 1995). For older

generations, a reference point both under communism and in the 1990s was national science, and reference groups were mostly national scholars, even in top public universities. The international dimension of research was largely absent: for structural, ideological and financial reasons (as elsewhere in communist Europe). The political and economic integration of Poland into the European Union meant the increasing cosmopolitanism of science, especially for younger generations, the process usually being referred to as its 'Europeanization' (see Dakowska and Harmsen, 2015: 14). The individual position in science no longer means exclusively the position in Polish science, young interviewees claim, as they observe radical changes in the officially stated rules of the academic game, which started with the Kudrycka reforms, and try to accommodate them. As a young female economist concludes her reflections on international high-impact journals and life stability:

When I was beginning my academic work, it was a comfortable job with low salary – but OK, there was a trade-off, let us assume, the salary was low, so were the requirements ... But all this has been changing in the last 2–3 years. A new path emerges, with the pressure on publications and seeking external funding sources (56/Younger/Assistant professor).

The young generation seems to appreciate – albeit with some reservations – a new competitive mode of allocation of research funds from the National Research Council (NCN, founded in 2011). A new system is believed to be fairer – but at the same time it may be leading to increased job insecurity. A young mathematician summarizes the current situation as follows:

[s]omeone who is not doing anything and who is not receiving grants – is making small money. But someone who is working, who has got achievements, grants, is making good money. And it is fair. There is a moment of uncertainty, though (38/Younger/Assistant professor).

There is a clear split between older academics who are not in top academic ranks and who are allowed to continue working within a system of limited research requirements – and young academics who, from the very beginning, are required to follow much tougher academic rules. The split is characteristic of major European systems too in which intergenerational tensions are on the rise – as testified by 520 interviews conducted across 7 European systems and not used here (see Kwiek and Antonowicz (2015) on major milestones in academic careers across Europe). While the former group can still have academic stability due to their long-term job contracts, the latter group is very much afraid of working in a new system of short-term renewable contracts. Their feelings of economic stability and academic continuity are often threatened: as a young sociologist explains what he terms an 'intergenerational deal' in his own institution:

[t]he deal is that they [older academics not in top academic ranks] do not have to make progress, and they can be associate professors for life. But the requirements from us are different. I accept this and I am trying to follow the requirements but I am also thinking about the academic career in terms of continuity, a possibility to advance, and now I am afraid that there is a transformation toward a system from which I had escaped – that of a non-governmental sector. In which if you have no grants, you have nothing to live from ... There is no feeling of stability, especially in the context of new two-year employment contracts being proposed today (50/Younger/Assistant professor).

Young academics interviewed believe that Polish degrees and positions are merely the consequence of research achievements and that the system already allows this sequence: research (especially international) first, academic degrees and titles (habilitation and professorship) second. Therefore, for them, international recognition is often more important than Polish academic titles. Fortunately, 'Polish degrees, by half a step, follow international research achievements' (37/

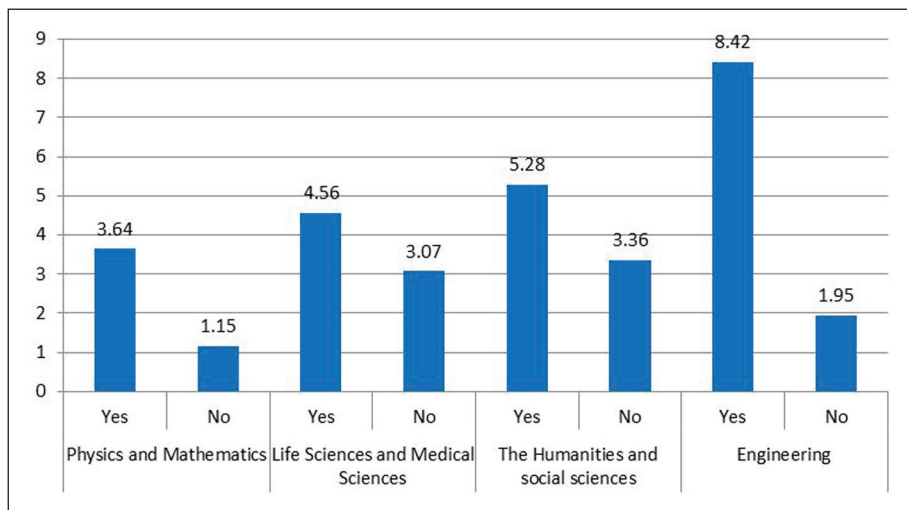


Figure 2. The average *number* of peer-reviewed papers (and book chapters) published by Polish academics in the three-year period studied, by international cooperation in research ('yes' or 'no') and by major clusters of academic fields (results for 'professional sciences' were not statistically significant $p\text{-value} > 0.05$).

Younger/Associate professor). Also, academic recognition abroad is being increasingly translated into academic recognition at home, which was not the case prior to the reforms when the international research tracks and national promotions were largely unrelated to each other.

There emerges a new pattern, previously largely unknown, which links international research achievements and national recognition: 'If someone is known, or perhaps not known but recognizable abroad, then somehow by extension he or she is also recognized in Poland' (5/Younger/Assistant professor). Older academics see the core of the current changes to be the increasing internationalization, especially following the emergence of new external funding sources:

[t]here was nothing like that before, it is much easier today. There appeared international connections. For me an international travel, I remember, was an unbelievable event: one had to save money, and also from an organizational perspective – [you needed] visas, passports and all that. Young people are clearly global today (40/Older/Assistant professor).

Quantitative material on various aspects of internationalization strongly supports the above insights from the interviews. From a quantitative perspective, there is clear correlation between the internationalization of research and academic productivity (although no causal connection can be shown). Polish 'internationals' (defined as academics involved in international collaboration in research) publish on average considerably more across major academic fields. For instance, statistically significant results based on the t-test for the equality of means for physics and mathematics (shown in Figure 2 above) demonstrate that there are on average 3.64 papers published by internationals and 1.15 papers published by locals in the reference period – and 5.28 vs. 3.36 in the case of humanities and social sciences. Internationals also publish more with international co-authors, consistently with research literature (Abramo et al., 2009; Huang et al., 2014; Katz and Martin, 1997; Kwiek, 2015c; Kyvik and Aksnes, 2015). As Figure 3 below shows, without international collaboration in research, joint publications with international co-authors are on average almost

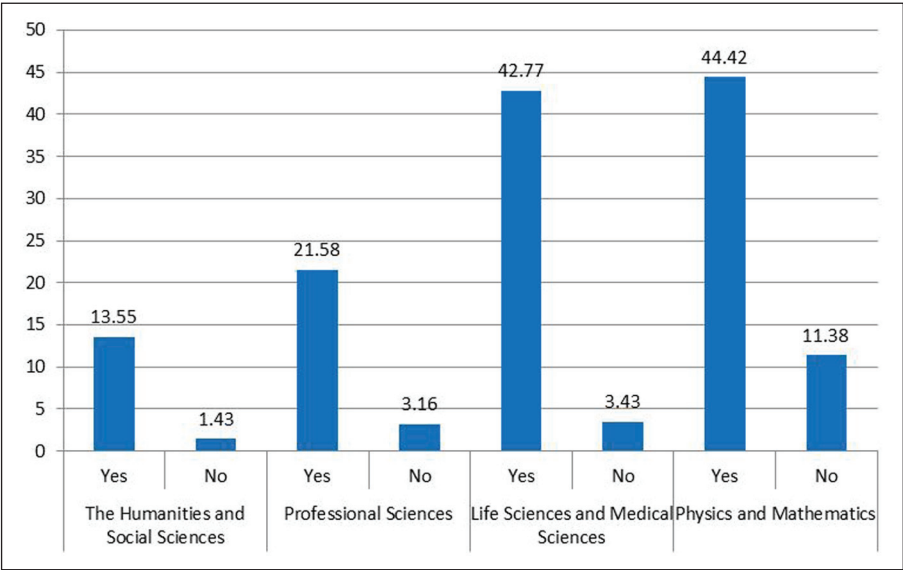


Figure 3. The *percentage* of peer-reviewed papers (and book chapters) co-authored by Polish academics with academics from other countries in the three-year period studied, by international cooperation in research ('yes' or 'no') and by clusters of academic fields (in%) (results for 'engineering' were based on a too small number of observations).

impossible (only 1.43% of Polish internationally non-collaborating academics in the humanities and social sciences, and only 3.43% of them in life sciences and medical sciences report internationally co-authored publications in the three-year reference period, about ten times fewer than their internationally collaborating colleagues). The statistical details, including the 95% confidence interval for mean with lower bound and upper bound, are given in Tables 4 and 5.

As Table 6 below shows, international collaboration in research takes time to develop: the percentage of academics collaborating with international colleagues increases with every age group (from 44.6% for academics under 40 to 59.5% for those in their fifties, and drops for those in their sixties); and it certainly increases by career stages, from less than half (45.0%) in the case of new entrants to three-quarters (75.1%) in the case of full professors.

And as can be seen in Table 7, differences in various aspects of internationalization between new entrants and full professors are much more pronounced than those between subsequent age groups. In particular, full professors are more internationalized in their teaching and their research, and are collaborating internationally much more often and using primarily English in their research. Figure 4 below shows the differences graphically.

Table 8 shows substantial cross-disciplinary differentiation in international research collaboration: physical sciences and mathematics are clearly the most highly internationalized academic field, with almost 80% of new entrants, almost 80% of academics under 40, and more than 90% of full professors collaborating with international colleagues – in contrast to social sciences characterized by the lowest shares of internationals for both career stages and for all age groups (again, consistently with research literature: see Lewis et al., 2012; Smeby and Trondal, 2005). These findings show different working patterns across academic fields – and possibly the continuing power of mentorship and personal academic examples across them. Young academics in the two fields show radically different conceptions of doing research: international in scope vs. local

Table 4. Articles published by Polish academics (full-time employed in universities only) in an academic book or journal by international collaboration ('internationals' – 'yes', and 'locals' – 'no') and academic fields (LB = lower bound, UB = upper bound).

Academic field	International collaboration	N	Mean no. of articles	SE	95% confidence interval for mean		t-test for equality of means	df	p-value
					LB	UB			
Life sciences and medical sciences	Yes	290	4.56	0.37	3.83	5.28	3.06	524.44	0.002
	No	239	3.07	0.32	2.45	3.69			
Physical sciences, mathematics	Yes	123	3.64	0.49	2.67	4.62	4.33	168.14	<0.001
	No	47	1.15	0.30	0.56	1.75			
Engineering	Yes	11	8.42	2.85	2.05	14.78	2.19	11.20	0.050
	No	30	1.95	0.76	0.41	3.5			
Humanities and social sciences	Yes	262	5.28	0.38	4.52	6.03	4.07	480.06	<0.001
	No	290	3.36	0.27	2.83	3.9			
Professional sciences	Yes	57	5.70	0.94	3.82	7.59	1.13	93.37	0.262
	No	92	4.47	0.55	3.39	5.56			

Table 5. Percentage of articles by Polish academics (full-time employed in universities only) published in an academic book or journal co-authored with colleagues located in other (foreign) countries, by international collaboration ('internationals' – 'yes', and 'locals' – 'no') and academic fields.

Academic field	International collaboration	N	Mean percentage of articles	SE	95% confidence interval for mean		t-test for equality of means	df	p-value
					LB	UB			
Life sciences and medical sciences	Yes	174	42.77	2.63	37.61	47.93	13.46	247.87	<0.001
	No	156	3.43	1.27	0.94	5.92			
Physical sciences and mathematics	Yes	72	44.42	4.48	35.64	53.20	4.54	65.54	<0.001
	No	30	11.38	5.74	0.14	22.62			
Engineering	Yes	7	66.07	16.92	32.91	99.23	3.62	6.51	0.010
	No	18	3.12	4.10	-4.91	11.15			
Humanities and social sciences	Yes	174	13.55	2.24	9.16	17.94	5.16	207.08	<0.001
	No	199	1.43	0.71	0.04	2.82			
Professional sciences	Yes	39	21.58	5.30	11.18	31.98	3.23	50.91	0.002
	No	66	3.16	2.11	-0.98	7.30			

in scope – despite belonging to the same academic generation – which casts additional light on intra-generational cross-field variations.

Meritocracy in science across academic generations

Both young and older interviewees acknowledge the existing tensions between subjective and objective, as well as meritocratic and non-meritocratic factors determining individual academic trajectories. Young academics tend not to accept the traditionally important role of personal connections ('being one of us' in a given discipline) in academic promotions and the important role of subjective assessments in both habilitation and professorial procedures.

Table 6. National and international research collaboration (percent stating 'yes'), only academics involved in research, employed full-time, in the university sector, by career stage and age groups.

	Do you collaborate with persons at other institutions in your country?		Do you collaborate with international colleagues?	
	%	n	%	n
New entrants	55.7	345	45.0	275
Full professors	78.0	145	75.1	138
Under 40	53.8	286	44.6	232
40s	61.8	242	50.9	196
50s	67.8	228	59.5	200
60s and above	68.5	174	52.9	131

Table 7. Various international activities, academics employed full-time in universities, Poland (some answers from 1 to 5 on a five-point Likert scale, answers 1 and 2, 'strongly agree' and 'agree', 'very much' and 'much' combined), in percent.

Academics:	New entrants	Full professors	Under 40	40s	50s	60s and above
Who emphasize international perspectives or content in their courses	58.8	68.0	59.0	57.1	63.6	58.9
Whose most graduate students (i.e. MA) are currently international	1.9	2.4	1.8	2.1	2.7	2.1
Who employ primarily English in teaching	6.5	3.8	6.2	4.2	5.3	3.5
Who teach any courses abroad	18.2	25.2	18.9	15.7	18.2	17.8
Whose primary research is international in scope or orientation	47.9	53.8	50.6	49.6	42.7	44.9
Who collaborate with international colleagues in research	48.5	75.3	50.3	54.2	63.3	62.3
Who employ primarily English in research	36.4	49.1	38.3	37.3	40.4	39.0

They seem to have a dream of meritocracy in science: one's academic output is objectively assessed (in a quantitative way through a carefully weighted allocation of points for publications) and one gets what one (objectively) deserves. Or does not get it. The national points system developed within the framework of an institutional assessment exercise (termed 'parameterization') and applied at an individual level is a major source of complaints among all interviewees, young and old alike – but it is also viewed by a large proportion of them as the only tool available to downplay the role of personal connections and unpredictable, subjective assessments in academic promotions. The points system is viewed as a necessary evil leading to more meritocratic academia. As an older chemist praised the spirit of new reforms under discussion at the time:

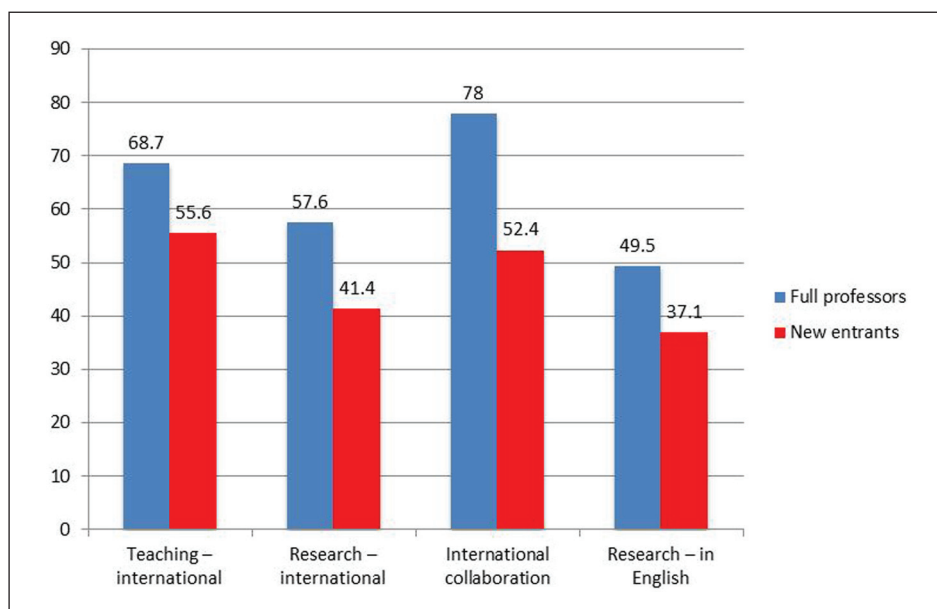


Figure 4. Various international activities, academics employed full-time in universities, Poland, by career stages (some answers from 1 to 5 on a five-point Likert scale, answers 1 and 2, 'strongly agree' and 'agree', 'very much' and 'much' combined); (Academics 'who emphasize international perspectives or content in their courses'; 'whose primary research is international in scope or orientation'; 'collaborating with international colleagues in research'; and 'who employ primarily English in research'), in percent.

Table 8. Percentage of academics collaborating internationally in research, Poland, by academic fields, only research-involved academics (in percent).

	New entrants	Full professors	Under 40	40s	50s	60s and above
Humanities and arts	40.0	61.9	40.5	45.2	50.3	52.1
Social sciences	34.2	52.5	39.3	31.1	37.4	33.4
Physical sciences and mathematics	77.9	90.8	78.0	80.7	59.7	73.3
Life sciences	53.4	84.5	55.3	52.6	77.8	55.0
Engineering and technical sciences	38.5	70.0	42.4	42.0	43.1	44.2
Medical sciences and health related sciences	37.8	76.3	38.7	31.6	45.3	59.6

What I like about them is that everyone will be assessed on the basis of measurable, documented scientific achievements ... If I am doing research, then it is followed by projects, money, publications. And this can be assessed ... Someone will assess my achievements. And I will either be awarded a position or a degree, or not (4/Older/Assistant professor).

This new way of measuring individual output in science, through its imagery of objectivity, is viewed as appealing – but also demanding to the younger generation. A previous assessment system in science is viewed as too arbitrary; a new one is described as tough but fairer. The points

system of assessing publications at an individual level is also linked to a national research assessment exercise of research units linked to national research categories and, consequently, linked to institutional-level public subsidies for research. The measures used are crude, as is the link between publications and degrees awarded; but compared with the subjectivity of previous research funding and career models, they are viewed as a move in the right direction: ‘previously, there was no need to publish in good journals. And today this is the major expectation’ (3/Younger/Assistant professor). Young academics feel that the publishing pressure is linked both to their individual academic futures and to the financial future of their institutions. The formula is simple: publications mean points, which are both their future individual habilitation and professorial titles, and their faculty’s research funds.

Academic progress is believed to be increasingly measurable in the future, documented by (preferably international) publications, and determined by their quality. Individual connections, personal likes and dislikes, are expected not to play any role because they can destroy a feeling of stability in science. In a non-meritocratic system, which it is hoped is soon disappearing, while academics with research achievements also climbed up the academic ladder, generally ‘achievements were not necessary’ (30/Younger/Assistant professor). And promotions based on subjective decisions are widely believed to discourage academics from sustained research activities and possibly bring about their frustration. Subjectivity seems to be damaging the national prestige market in which prestige is believed to be strongly correlated with research output. I term current processes the de-subjectivization of the academic career requirements – meaning the decreasing role of subjective factors, and the increasing role of objective ones. The subjectivity/objectivity and meritocracy/non-meritocracy tensions are strong:

To give you an example: you can have five books or only two papers published, and if the academic output and the connections are decisive factors, both persons will reach the same step in their professional career. That is to say, they will reach the same academic degree at the same speed, even though one deserves it and the other does not ... [that means] a clique character of the environment – acting on the basis of non-meritocratic mechanisms rather than meritocratic ones (30/Younger/Assistant professor).

Therefore, in a highly criticized current academic world of uncertain academic norms, the hope for the future among younger interviewees tends to be a system of objective measurement of individual research outputs: a dream of meritocracy. Clearly formulated academic promotion criteria are viewed as fair, and leaving academic career decisions to the subjective opinions of the older generation is viewed as unfair. The remedy is simple: ‘whatever we do, whatever we publish, including our applications and patents, should be assessed’ (4/Older/Assistant professor). The system is already believed to be moving towards a previously unknown quantification of the individual research output: ‘everything needs to be calculated into some values, and more specifically, into points. This is a fundamental issue’ (55/Younger/Assistant professor).

However, measuring academic outputs also means an increasing stratification between academics in top tiers and bottom tiers of academic research production, between those who are active and successful in research – and those who are not. Systematic measurement of individual outputs (and consequently academic productivity) means systematically making known what has generally – until the recent reforms – been unknown. Such new social stratification in science has been unknown to large segments of the Polish academic community. As an older professor of educational studies described the emergent tensions:

After years of believing in being good, very good, there comes a moment when people are losing their sense of self-esteem ... One can be a known, recognized professor because others are saying that one is

someone important. What I hope is ahead of us will be more measurable, more objective ... There is widespread unwillingness to show scientific achievements. There are few departments in which it is said: you are stronger, you are weaker, and you are the weakest so you have to do something about it. Even if it is the case, we are not saying this because it does not make any difference (17/Older/Full professor).

Expectations from the younger generation on the part of their institutions are clear: ever more research papers and ever more external, especially competitive, research funds. As there are few high-impact Polish journals, what increasingly matters in academic careers is publication in international high-impact journals. For older generations, these publication outlets are reported to be mostly beyond reach for several reasons: weak international research contacts, poor English abilities and a general unwillingness to participate in the international research competition, especially in soft research areas, and specifically in social sciences and the humanities. Clearly, while for the young generation interviewed science is increasingly international (and therefore highly competitive), for the older generations, even in top tier academic centres, science can be still local and non-competitive. The pressure to internationalize research does not seem to work for older academics – one of the reasons being that competitive research funding is made available mostly to academics under 40. Certainly, the generational divide concerning research productivity is not a unique Polish phenomenon – but only in Poland does the average academic productivity increase only marginally between younger and older generations (Kwiek, 2015a).

The intergenerational tensions grow because it is certainly the older generations who make career decisions about the younger one – not the other way around. Subjectivity and personal connections in the context of academic progression are viewed as destructive to science. Therefore, more precise assessment tools are needed. Academic promotions are still believed to be related to what interviewees term ‘being well-located’ in science (30/Younger/Assistant professor). The subjectivity of career decisions and, consequently, the arbitrariness in, and contingency of, individual academic trajectories, are a major issue: ‘the major problem is the lack of clear criteria specified for a given academic discipline’, as an older German philologist emphasizes (34/Older/Assistant professor). Young academics believe that scientific achievements will matter more and more, and personal connections will be finally unimportant.

Certainly, not all young academics view the new rules of the academic game favourably; some may feel disappointed, seeing their current professional stability threatened. As a junior sociologist explains his attitude to what he terms the ‘total folly’ of current publication assessment procedures:

I am terribly depressed as a person ... that everything now has to be so measurable and countable ... This is not the way I had imagined it (50/Younger/Assistant professor).

A new order clearly means more individual and institutional competition and a higher role for the accumulation of individual successes in the collective institutional successes of faculties. In all interviews, the increased competition in research (and for research funding) is mentioned, mostly approvingly. There is a growing awareness that academic success in Poland will soon come only through research achievements and good publications. However, academics are worrying that other dimensions of academic life are bound to suffer. The principle of individual competition in research may threaten the principle of cooperation with others, as well as sharing preliminary research results in national-level scholarly conferences, and more intense involvement in teaching. As an older computer scientist explains:

[t]here is absolute, pure competition ... If someone is devoted more than marginally to teaching and wants to do it properly – then he makes harm to himself (41/Older/Assistant professor).

The new academic environment is reported to require new academic attitudes: young academics 'have to be able to fight for money, have to be assertive and aggressive; they have to be like young wolves' (18/Older/Assistant professor). The negative consequences of recent publishing pressures are reported to be manifold. They include a feeling of job insecurity and a newly discovered direct link between one's access to funding (through research grants) and one's individual academic future: 'no funding, no job'; publishing pressures leading to 'huge mental tensions' (21/Older/Associate professor); as well as a growing feeling of being 'on one's own' in academia: 'everyone is working on one's own ... Everyone needs to be strong' (12/Younger). The role of cooperation is viewed as heavily decreasing:

There is no emphasis here on collective work. Everyone is doing what they want; it would be the best if they even could get financed by themselves. The problem is where to get the money from unless you have a grant (7/Younger/Assistant professor).

Thus, young academics feel they are largely being left on their own in academic life, which is beginning to be ruled by new principles – and in which the only way to proceed is to learn by doing. However, the new standards which make intra-generational competition between juniors fairer (and which are based on clearly meritocratic principles) are perceived more as a chance than as a threat, at least by research-oriented academics. An apparently unfair intergenerational (younger-older) treatment is at the same time perceived by interviewees as leading to a fairer intra-generational treatment (younger-younger): the emergent competition for academic recognition, research grants and other scholarly awards among young academics is strongly believed to be fairer under the new organizational principles.

Perceptions of university governance and management across academic generations

One of the strongest dividing lines in Poland, as elsewhere in higher education systems, is between seniors and juniors, or across different academic ranks. The role of the habilitation degree in Poland is fundamental: it is the entry ticket to a lower-level class of senior academics (the entry ticket to its higher-level class being full professorship).

The interviews reveal the existence of what in one of them is termed a virtual 'battlefield' between the 'independent' and the 'subordinate classes' ('there are two estates which are heavily distinguished from each other in a symbolic sense, in a primarily economic sense – but not in the sense of competences', 30/Young/Assistant professor); as a young academic put it metaphorically, 'one becomes a human being only after habilitation. Everyone before it – is a half-human being' (12/Younger/Assistant professor). The young generation of academics is reported to suffer from a 'deep hierarchization' (21/Older/Associate professor). Academic semi-feudalism or feudalism, almost unanimously reported to still dominate in personal and professional relationships between junior and senior academics, is sometimes believed to be caused by a fear of competition on the part of seniors ('they are embedding themselves in their positions to introduce ever new criteria of what young academics need to do', 18/Older/Assistant professor). The emergent picture is one of a generationally divided academia: the split between academics in the two career stages – before and after being granted the habilitation degree – is powerful and holds across all clusters of academic fields.

Poland does not seem to be fundamentally different from other European countries, though: everywhere juniors are not equal partners to seniors, and their voice in university matters is better heard only when their voice in research is stronger. Institutional authority has always

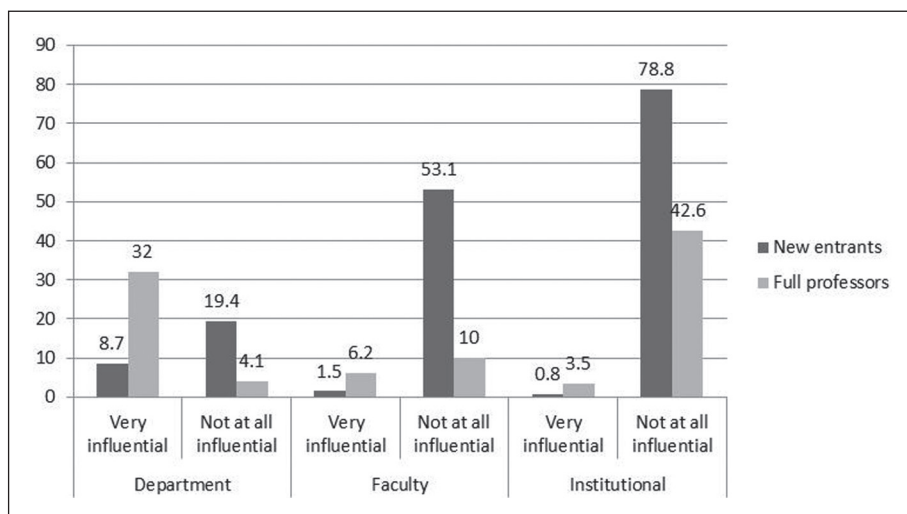


Figure 5. Responses to the question: 'How influential are *you*, personally, in helping to shape key academic policies?' (Question E1), by career stage and age groups, Polish academics (percent).

been related to authority in the system of science. In countries in which institutional promotion is strictly based on the assessment of research achievements, the voice of faculty with higher research prestige is always more important than the voice of faculty with necessarily lower research prestige, i.e. juniors.

In quantitative terms, Polish new entrants showed much lower personal influence than full professors at all three university levels studied: department, faculty and institution. The distribution of their answers to the question 'How influential are *you*, personally, in helping to shape key academic policies?' shows that one-fifth of them report being 'not at all influential' at the department level, more than a half at the faculty level and almost four-fifths at the institutional level (Figure 5 above). The lack of influence of full professors is much less pronounced (below 5% at the first, about 10% at the second, and about 40% at the third level studied).

Differences between the two contrasted career stages (and age groups) are also substantial in selected views on management and administration. In general, new entrants are much more appreciative of current ways in which their institutions are managed, and they seem much more satisfied with the institutional status quo. In particular, surprisingly, a substantially bigger share of them agrees (and strongly agrees) with the view that in their institutions there is good communication between management and academics and collegiality in decision-making processes; a much smaller share of new entrants perceives a top-down management style. A bigger share of them views top-level administration as providing competent leadership and feels they are being kept informed about what is going on at their institutions. The distribution of views across career stages and age groups is given below in Table 9.

There are also substantial generational differences in academic satisfaction, which can be explored through several proxies: in the survey, academics were asked to refer to such statements as 'This is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field', 'If I had to do it over again, I would not become an academic', and 'My job is a source of considerable personal strain'. More than four in ten (43.9%) of new entrants to Polish universities perceive the time in question as poor and more than four in ten of them (41.6%) are stressed by their job. Less than 20% of them would not become academics again (17.8%). Full professors view the timing in the

Table 9. Views on institutions' management and administration, Polish academics, by career stage and age groups (full professors and new entrants only), full-time academics employed in universities only, on a five-point Likert scale from 1-strongly agree to 5-strongly disagree; responses 1 and 2, 4 and 5 combined) (in percent).

		Career stage		Age group			
		New entrants	Full professors	Under 40	40s	50s	60s and above
Good communication between management and academics	Agree	56.8	36.4	55.2	52.7	42.7	33.7
	Neither agree, nor disagree	26.2	32.6	28.6	28.9	32.4	32.0
	Disagree	17.0	30.9	16.1	18.4	24.9	34.3
A top-down management style	Agree	21.5	34.1	19.1	21.3	30.7	29.6
	Neither agree, nor disagree	22.2	28.0	23.3	22.8	23.5	31.7
	Disagree	56.4	37.9	57.7	56.0	45.8	38.7
Collegiality in decision-making processes	Agree	50.1	27.7	50.0	41.0	34.6	21.3
	Neither agree, nor disagree	29.9	31.8	27.9	38.5	32.8	38.9
	Disagree	20.0	40.5	22.1	20.4	32.7	39.8
Top-level administrators are providing competent leadership	Agree	48.9	39.8	52.5	44.4	42.2	28.1
	Neither agree, nor disagree	31.4	31.7	29.8	31.7	34.5	30.7
	Disagree	19.7	28.5	17.7	23.9	23.3	41.2
I am kept informed about what is going on at this institution	Agree	43.1	25.4	42.2	38.0	27.5	25.2
	Neither agree, nor disagree	28.7	26.9	25.1	28.1	31.0	24.0
	Disagree	28.2	47.7	32.7	33.8	41.6	50.8

Table 10. Perceptions of academic staff: academic satisfaction (proxies), by academic stage and age groups.

	Career stage		Age group			
	Full professors	New entrants	Under 40	40s	50s	60s
This is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field	36.5	43.9	43.4	41.7	41.0	38.2
If I had it to do it over again, I would not become an academic	14.6	17.8	17.5	18.0	16.8	18.1
My job is a source of considerable personal strain	26.9	41.6	40.3	43.4	38.3	26.0

question as poor less often, find their jobs less stressful, and would not choose an academic career less often, as shown in Table 10 below. These findings are fully confirmed in interviews: young academics interviewed often feel more stressed, overworked and frustrated than their older colleagues (see Kwiek, 2015b on the 'unfading power of collegiality' in Polish universities and the 'index of collegiality' across 11 European systems).

Discussion and conclusions

Different generations of academics exhibit different academic behaviours and attitudes – and react differently to ongoing structural reforms in higher education. The qualitative material reveals a picture in which there are two types of (Polish) academics today. One type comprises older generations, mostly from soft academic fields, predominantly unable to be as productive, as internationalized in research and in publication channels, and as internationally mobile as required in new policy discourses (and, increasingly, in new recruitment and career advancement requirements). Their major feature is the lack of understanding of – and sometimes even hostility to – new competitive mechanisms used in research funding distribution, a general distrust of objective, measurable criteria of assessment of individual research achievements, and a general dislike of the emergent competitive academic order. And the other type of academics comprises mostly young academics, predominantly from hard sciences, working under mounting competitive pressures, beginning to understand that the rivalry in seeking research funding and publishing research results internationally is a constitutive element of the academic profession employed in top segments of national systems. This dichotomy goes far beyond the special case of Poland and pervades numerous European systems, Central Europe and beyond, and including, to varying degrees, Western European systems.

The Polish academy, to a larger extent than its Western European counterparts but certainly not uniquely, is torn between an old ideal of doing research at a somewhat leisurely pace, without tough external pressures related to promotion and funding, and a new ideal in which (ever more externally funded) research is at the core of the academic profession's activities in top tiers of the system. While the former ideal also encompassed semi-feudal academic relationships based on seniority and highly subjective criteria for academic advancement, the emergent ideal is that of heavily quantified, objective criteria of career assessment and research funding distribution.

Young academics are increasingly aware of a new academic order and of being somehow on their own, with ever more competition between individuals and institutions around – combined with ever more professional uncertainty and financial instability. They increasingly share these uncertainties and instabilities with their European (see Teichler and Höhle, 2013) and international (Yudkevich et al., 2015) colleagues. Research into the academic profession by academic generations – as developed here – shows academic generations as yet another line of differentiation, following widely discussed differentiations of the academic profession by gender, institutional type, institutional rank and academic field. Intra-national differences between generations can often be higher than cross-national differences between the same generations: the Polish case study may not differ much from parallel European case studies. In most European systems, recent performance-oriented changes in academic rules of promotions and research funds' distribution are driven by structurally similar factors, which may tear apart the cross-generational homogeneity of the academic profession. In some systems, and Poland is a good example, a generational gap overlaps a rank gap, while in others it is not the case.

The findings presented here have wider implications for Central Europe. National academic recruitment and promotion policies increasingly matter for less research-oriented national systems – like those in Central Europe – wishing to catch up with more research-oriented Western European ones: who gets recruited and who is retained in academia (and especially what their research attitudes, behaviours and productivity rates are) may define the future distribution of research production across Europe, which is highly unfavourable to Central Europe at the moment.

In the long run, the research competition between systems of young academics with high research orientation (and high research focus), as represented by major Western European countries, and systems of young academics with low research orientation (and high teaching focus) as represented by Poland (and other Central European countries) seems fundamentally difficult. On

an individual level, the growing gap can be seen in the marginal number of European Research Council grants awarded in the region (1.6% of all in 2007–2016, or 103 out of 6621 grants); and on an institutional level, in the marginal presence of Central European institutions in the World Top 500 Universities of the Shanghai ranking.

Poland since 2009 has been undergoing a transition from a severely underfunded and non-competitive academic research system – to a slightly better funded and highly competitive system. The changes reported in this article from quantitative and qualitative perspectives indicate an ongoing conflict of basic values in the academy, with reform-inclined policymakers being more strongly supported by the younger generation of academics, predominantly from hard academic fields, and being opposed by the majority of the Polish academic profession, and especially by academics from soft academic fields. There emerges a deep generational divide, with younger and older generations having contrasting academic dreams about the future. New policy mechanisms and recently created research funding institutions – based on the twin principles of ‘competition’ and ‘internationalization in research’ – seem to find more support among the former; but to get them embedded in the dominant academic culture, certainly more time is needed.

A generational approach to the academic profession used in this research, especially in mixed-methods research designs, highlights new policy dilemmas from a new angle for all countries currently reforming their higher education and science systems. The lessons learnt for public policy go far beyond Poland. The winners and losers of university funding and governance reforms – as well as their supporters and opponents – need to be differentiated to a much greater degree along their academic cohort affiliation (that is, age). Consequently, the political economy of reforms emerges from this research to be heavily linked to different patterns of academic generations in different countries.

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Notes

1. The Polish sample was as follows: by gender – 54.8% male and 45.2% female; by age – aged under 40 31.4%, aged 40–49 24%, aged 50–59 24.2%, aged 60 years and older 20.4%; by academic degree – 4.1% MA, 67.9% PhD, 16.5% PhD with habilitation and 11.5% full professors; by academic fields, only those of 3% and more – 22.7% humanities, 21.3% technical sciences, 8.7% economics, 6.9% chemistry, 6.0% biology, 5.7% agriculture and 3.3% Earth sciences; by type of employment – 98% full-time, 1.3% part-time, 0.3% contracts; by sector – only public institutions; by institutional type – university 48.2%, technical university 6.2%, other universities (of economics, of medicine, etc.) 10.6%, polytechnics 17.6%, academy 9.6%, higher vocational school 6.5%, other 1.3%; by academic duties – 98.8% provided teaching and were involved in research (the Polish CAP/EUROAC database 2016).
2. The interview material is quoted as follows: interview number/age bracket/rank (younger, i.e. under 40, or older, i.e. aged 40 or more; rank: assistant, associate or full professor).

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Higher education governance in Central and Eastern Europe: A perspective on Hungary and Poland

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Abstract

This paper seeks to answer the question of what motivates governments to introduce and implement reforms in higher education (HE). The political and economic reasons why some governments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), for the period 1990 and 2015, have invested resources in order to facilitate cooperation between employers and universities, and have introduced quality criteria in HE finance while others have not, are identified. Use of a comparative perspective on Poland and Hungary revealed important differences in HE regulations in these seemingly otherwise very similar cases, showing that what drives regulations, at least in part, is the governments' responses to the labour market, i.e. the dynamic between students – future workers – and employers – largely multinational companies. Moreover, differences in HE regulations in the two countries are responsive to voters' concerns. The paper thus contributes to the literature on skill formation in Central and Eastern Europe and to the literature on political economy focusing on this part of the world.

Keywords

Eastern Europe, education policy, higher education, varieties of capitalism

Introduction

Why have different models of higher education (HE) governance emerged in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)? Two contrasting models of HE governance have developed in Hungary and in Poland in the first 25 years following the collapse there of communism. This difference is puzzling given the many similar features of the two countries. This article explains the

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emergence and the evolution of these two contrasting models of HE governance, and argues that political parties in government have been driven by political motivations when regulating HE. Rather than focusing on the administrative and financial capacity of the government, the focus here lies on the motivations of governments to pursue such reforms. As such, this provides a political–economic perspective by concentrating on the incentives of governments to act. Polish and Hungarian governments have designed reforms aimed at incentivizing businesses and students to invest in skills provided by universities in different ways. These governments sought to build and improve a relationship between employers and universities and introduced quality criteria in the funding mechanism of HE. However, the ways in which the reforms have taken place show significant variations between and within countries. The set of constraints that make the reform of HE reform – aimed at improving its fitness for purpose, and thus its quality and labour market suitability – uncomplicated has led to different HE models in Hungary and in Poland. These different HE models mirror different coordination mechanisms in these economies. Signs of coordination emerged in Hungary: a more liberal regime developed in Poland.

The point of departure of this study is represented by existing theories about comparative capitalism in the region (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012; Nölke and Vliegenthart, 2009) as well as analyses of higher education governance (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011; Dobbins, 2011; Kwiek, 2012). This article interprets these higher education reforms in a new theoretical framework by showing that the institutional determinants of higher education governance are more complex than has previously been shown. This is one of the first studies about the political economy of human capital formation in post-communist CEE. The paper also considers Romania as a shadow case that is better understood in the literature (Freyberg-Inan and Tarlea, 2015). It seeks to provide an understanding of the extent to which political parties in government have responded to different incentives when deciding on the reorganization of their education systems. Two aspects of the ways in which governments have adapted HE provision to the labour market are considered comparatively: first, establishing relationships with specific employers, which has required significant investment on the part of the government; and, second, the introduction of quality assurance criteria in the financing mechanism of HE using public funding.

Even though political parties in government have rarely been considered in the literature or in public debate as active players in these reforms, they do play such a role and they have the opportunity to make use of their power when regulating higher education (see also Busemeyer et al., 2013). While the role of the state has changed substantially since 1989 in CEE, somewhat ironically it continued to play an equally important role after the communist regimes collapsed.

However, political motivation cannot be regarded to be entirely separate from structural conditions in the economy, such as those determined by the labour market. I show that these political considerations – which are understood as the room to maneuver of political parties in government – are endogenous to the labour markets in these countries. Governments made efforts at coordination in order to build links between universities and the labour market. First, they introduced and financed study streams aimed at improving the goodness of fit of HE output to demands in the labour market; and, second, governments also introduced financing mechanisms intended to improve HE quality, switching the focus from input (e.g. number of students) to output (e.g. research productivity) indicators. The first aspect is more important in Hungary: the second has been more visible in Poland, thus far. This has led to different models of HE governance very much in line with different models of capitalism. An empirical analysis shows that, in response to the labour market, more forms of coordination have emerged in Hungary between employers and universities in comparison to Poland, which has evolved along a more liberal path.

Theoretical and empirical contribution

HE governance in a political–economic context

The theoretical framework developed here builds on political economy scholarship with a strong interest in skill formation, the ‘varieties of capitalism’ (VoC) framework. HE governance understood as quality assurance and goodness of fit has not, to date, been explained in the VoC framework, in either new or old democracies. I show here, in a novel way, that it can help us explain higher education dynamics in the post-communist world. One important tenet of this theoretical framework is that skill formation, understood as the processes through which individual countries create human capital – skills – is essential for the types of relationships that are established between the different political–economic institutions.

Hall and Soskice (2001) explained that modern democratic capitalist systems are not characterized by the same coordination mechanisms between the most important institutions in the economy. The authors distinguished between liberal and coordinated market economies. A liberal economy, such as the United States, is characterized by an education system that provides people with general skills. Coordinated market economies, such as Germany, provide individuals with more specific skills (Culpepper and Finegold, 1999). In a liberal market economy, individuals obtain more specific training on-the-job, while in coordinated economies these highly specific skills for the industry in which employees are active are provided by a formal education system. Hall and Soskice (2001) explain that skills provided by education institutions, by either vocational training in coordinated economies or more general education in liberal economies, are complementary to the needs of the labour market. As a result employers are also well adapted to this existing skill pool in the market. However, little is known about whether such coordination has emerged in the market economies of CEE with the exception of Hancke (2011), nor about what could explain the differences between Poland and Hungary.

I show here that similar, complementary institutions have emerged in CEE, but these have not been addressed in the literature either conceptually or empirically. I emphasize these institutions of skill formation by focusing on the critical role of the state in facilitating coordination between employers and higher education institutions and by improving HE quality. I start the analysis with the work of Nölke and Vliegenthart (2009), which characterizes the countries of CEE as dependent market economies. This is a third variety of capitalism, joining the liberal and the coordinated market economies. Rationalizing the implications of this conceptualization, Tarlea (2015) explained how skill formation in CEE can be understood within this framework. The dependent market economy model is redefined in such a way as to allow skills to play a similarly central role as in the initial varieties of capitalism formulation (Hall and Soskice, 2001). The evolution of skill formation in CEE is explained in the context of the emergence of the dependent market economy in these countries. The labor markets for highly educated individuals have been fundamentally influenced by multinational companies (MNCs) (Tarlea, 2015).

Along similar lines, Freyberg-Inan and Tarlea (2015) characterized Romania as a low-skills equilibrium-dependent market economy. They explained that the low-skills equilibrium in goods and services in Romania is determined and sustained by the higher education sector in the country; and showed that the most important employers in the market – MNCs – are key actors in supporting this low-skills equilibrium. Given the structure and types of activity developed in the region by MNCs, the relatively low quality of instruction and research in HE in Romania is complementary to the low-level requirements of firms that are active domestically. The demand for sophisticated labour is low in private and public firms, both domestic- and foreign-owned. However, the large, more productive firms tend to be MNCs (EBRD, 2014). Given that MNCs do not need very sophisticated skills, students enrolled in university do not have incentives to invest in acquiring

difficult-to-obtain skills. By having these two sets of actors following their interests, the outcome is what Tarlea and Freyberg-Inan (2015) call a low-skills equilibrium where relatively low-value-added activities are carried out by a relatively low-skilled labour force (Tarlea, 2015).

The question addressed in this paper is whether this relationship between employers, universities and governments can also explain the diverging policy changes in Poland and Hungary. Indeed, in this picture of overall low equilibrium, some companies active in some countries have managed to move up the ladder of economic sophistication; others, less so. This paper engages with these theories and with their empirical implications and tests to what extent their scope conditions are more encompassing. The paper therefore engages in a comparison of two relatively similar countries – Hungary and Poland – while treating Romania as a shadow case, better understood in the literature (Freyberg-Inan and Tarlea, 2015).

The analysis relies importantly on the work of Dobbins (2011) on the Europeanization of higher education in CEE. Key trends are emphasized in that research, such as the undeniable power of the Bologna process to change the organization of universities in the region. The Bologna reforms were a good opportunity for CEE countries to prove their commitment to the European project. Nevertheless, differences have emerged among the higher education sectors, despite the highly globalized network of European regulatory institutions pushing for a more homogenous European HE landscape. This divergence remains to be explained.

The differences in how these relatively similar countries have changed their higher education sectors can be explained by the internal dynamics of the labour market and by the active role of governments in HE reform. Indeed, Kwiek's insightful work on Poland showed how trends in HE have changed since the liberalization of the HE system was embraced, and how the hard sciences started playing a more important role once governments recognized the importance of these areas of study in the labour market (Kwiek, 2012).

Fit-for-purpose and HE quality

Widely accepted European criteria for measuring HE quality are not yet established (Leisyte and Westerheijden, 2014). As Jones and Ratcliff (1999) pointed out, the proper goals and means of education are highly context- and stakeholder-dependent, while firms active in the labour market are key stakeholders. One aspect of higher education quality is taken into account here – its fitness for purpose, which is closely linked, but not synonymous, with employability. It is a feature of HE that provides for a connection between employers and HE graduates. This link is especially vulnerable in instances in which market mechanisms have changed in fundamental ways.

Another indicator for HE quality captures the tension between enrolments and funding and this aspect is taken into account in this paper together with the introduction of quality criteria in funding mechanisms (Harvey and Green, 1993, 2009). Also documented in other work (Kwiek, 2012; Tarlea, 2015), enrolment levels in higher education have increased spectacularly in the two countries in the post-communist period. Nevertheless, spending patterns have not followed the same trend, and this has had a series of consequences for the ways in which funding was distributed locally, especially for study streams that are more expensive. Some governments have been particularly concerned about developments that influence this quality indicator, as both the Polish and Hungarian cases show.

Reforms aimed at improving the quality of HE and its fitness for purpose are more likely to be initiated and to succeed as long as political parties in power can benefit from the change, as developments in Polish reform, in the empirical part of the paper, indicate. The Hungarian case shows how parties can politicize HE governance, as the Orbán government has done by directly targeting its constituency.¹ It implemented reforms aimed at restricting fresh HE graduates from working abroad. This found favor with voters having nationalistic views, unlike those who were

cosmopolitan. The political factors driving changes in HE have changed both the design as well as the focus of studies.

This mechanism is likely to be perpetuated further. Political parties in power are also likely to benefit from the change if there is a demand in the market for higher skills, or if they can help create that demand, as some Hungarian governments did before 2010. The demand for higher skills comes from important employers in the market. Companies active domestically have changed as a consequence of market liberalization since the 1990s. A significantly important trend has been the entrance of multinational companies (MNCs) into the market. Certain measures by the government were important in attracting these foreign companies, one of them being the provision of human capital via the university system. Thus MNCs active domestically have started to play a key role in the demand side for skills. They are important as desirable employers for fresh higher education graduates and their presence is salient in these countries, which makes them important stakeholders in the higher education sector (e.g. EBRD, 2014).

A comparative perspective on Poland and Hungary

The functioning of markets in goods and services in virtually all areas has been dramatically reconfigured since the fall of communism (e.g. Stark and Bruszt, 1998; Svejnar, 1999). Interactions between key actors in given structures have determined different outcomes in reforms, including the governance of higher education. This sector has seen the most spectacular evolution in the post-communist era, with very rapidly increasing levels of enrolment, from around 15% to more than 60% across the region (UNESCO, 2016). However, the development of funding for higher education has not been similarly spectacular. One factor that has allowed for these diverging trends has been a more flexible approach to HE quality, as this empirical part argues.

Poland and Hungary have been successful in the post-communist period, both economically and politically. This has had direct consequences for the development of higher education in both countries, especially in contrast to other countries of the region such as Romania (Freyberg-Inan and Tarlea, 2015). However, developments in higher education have not followed a monotonic trend in Hungary and Poland.

The following case studies provide a narrative of the HE policies promoted by various political parties in different contexts in the two countries. I emphasize the types of incentives that parties seem to be responsive to when engaging in reforms in HE, and how these reforms have a direct, measurable impact on HE governance. I focus in particular on the relationship to an important stakeholder group in HE quality: employers. I explain why these reforms have differed in the two countries and explain the complex mechanisms driving HE reform.

Hungary

The emergence of coordination between employers and universities. To put it in its historical context, the reform of Hungarian HE began before the 1980s. Lajos (1993: 404) emphasized the bilateral intergovernmental agreements, the support of the Soros Foundation, as well as the incentives and funding for university courses taught in different foreign languages. This was important for the internationalization of Hungarian universities in the 1980s and it therefore preceded the political changes of the 1990s. At the same time, cooperation between universities and industry had already started at the end of the 1960s. Short-cycle professional higher education has a long tradition in Hungary – for example, the schools of engineering and the agricultural academies (Lajos, 1993: 404): Hungary has a dual HE system, composed of colleges and universities. Moreover, in the period following 1990 higher education enrolment has increased most in the public sector.

The first democratically elected government, headed by Prime Minister Antall, was a right-wing government led by the Hungarian Democratic Forum. Funding was not as problematic in Hungary as in the rest of the Eastern European region, especially at the beginning of the 1990s, due to a 'relatively favourable government policy' (Lajos, 1993: 403). But, most significantly, secondary vocational schools continue to be important and more students are enrolled in vocational schools than in other secondary schools. As Hancke (2012) also emphasized, this distinguishes Hungary from Poland, Romania and Estonia, where vocational training has almost disappeared.

The evolution of coordination

Similarly, Hungarian governments have played an essential role in building links between HE institutions and MNCs, especially in the period 2000–2010. Successive governments have played an active role in building the educational infrastructure and in fostering links with MNCs. Probably the most important aspect of the measures undertaken by the Hungarian socialist governments of Medgyessy, Gyurcsány and Bajnai between 2002 and 2010 is that they provided first the infrastructure necessary for these businesses, including the development of HE. Moreover, successive governments have actively pursued a policy of attracting foreign direct investment to this sector. Strategies for this have included state aid and subsequently lower corporate taxes, and investment in higher education. The automotive sector has become Hungary's comparative global strength, also emphasized by PwC's studies (PwC, 2014).

The government provided the infrastructure necessary for businesses active locally by ensuring the supply of much-needed local skilled labour (Economist Intelligent Unit, 2012). This was achieved by relying on the educational infrastructure in higher education. I show below that when Audi entered the Hungarian market it required HE graduates in engineering; the government eased the process by supplying the skills that were required. It also provided Volkswagen with financial incentives (direct subsidies and low taxation) for the relocation of the company and, subsequently, to elevate the level of sophistication of the activities it carries out in Hungary. This cooperation between the government and different producers in the automotive sector showcase the mechanisms for the creation of links between employers and higher education institutions. However, and emphatically, this does not exclude the possibility that cooperation can occur in other sectors as well. Equally, it is not always easy to create the link between employers, universities and young graduates.

Cooperation also occurred in the case of Audi. In 1993 the Hungarian government, headed by prime-minister Antall, was successful in attracting investment from Audi, a company of the Volkswagen group, to Győr in western Hungary. Between 1993 and 2014 Audi invested a total of €5.7 billion (Tury, 2014). A policy of maintaining Audi's interest in Hungary was pursued further by the government through action taken to develop a high-skilled base of graduates tailored to meet the requirements of this MNC. As early as 2007 the Audi Hungary Vehicle Engineering Department Group was launched, as a part of the Department of Applied Mechanics at the Széchenyi István University of Győr. The university offers higher apprenticeships, similar to the German system, as well as bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and PhD-level training. Unsurprisingly, the department's website is fully available in German and Hungarian, although not in English. The faculty is expected to train future employees for the manufacturer in Győr. The government's role in this process is emphasized further, particularly since Audi does not appear to have provided financial support to the university. The government justified this incentive package by reference to the beneficial relationship that would be developed with the University of Győr (Tury, 2014, provides good descriptive evidence of this). This points yet again to the fact that Hungary evolved more clearly into a coordinated dependent market economy and that HE provision is supportive of this.

Indeed, in 2014, Volkswagen manufactured in Győr what PwC (2014) would call ‘advanced automotive’ for Audi. In this branch Audi manufactures engines, assembles vehicles and carries out technical developments closely linked to the production cycle. Engineers are expected to understand advanced processes and to be able to supervise automated production. The branch in Hungary therefore requires some highly skilled HE graduates: ‘Complete engine development exists only in Germany and in Hungary only partial tasks are being carried out’ (Tury, 2014). This is typical for a dependent market economy. While the main part of development is still being carried out at Ingolstadt, Neckarsulm and Wolfsburg in Germany, the level of technological cooperation between branches ensures that there is substantial scope for the Hungarian automotive industry to cooperate with the universities in Hungary.

A closer analysis of the investment made in business promotion shows that the Hungarian government commissioned PwC, the management consultancy, to assist with the government’s efforts to attract investment: PwC has branches in Budapest and Győr. The investment agency advertises the education level of its employees as the biggest asset of the economy: ‘The Hungarian automotive sector’s cooperation with the local education system is strong and focuses on research and development’ (PwC, 2014). This shows the strong incentives Audi had in supporting the university sector in building links to the companies active locally. However, the relationship between businesses and universities is not necessarily one without troubles, as later developments proved.

These reforms built on the work of previous governments. In spring 2008 the government headed by Ferenc Gyurcsány of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP — Magyar Szocialista Párt) had already attempted to introduce moderate (€550) fees to be paid yearly by all students as part of its deficit-cutting reform package. However, a nationwide referendum in March 2008 rejected the package and the introduction of tuition fees was banned. Thus a left-oriented government decided not to make HE budget cuts: the government was responsive to voters’ concerns regarding HE. Orbán could still benefit from the decisions that were made while the previous government was in power. This is a telling example of what Pierson (2004) refers to as the time lag between decisions being made and their effects on institutions. In fact, Daimler Mercedes started manufacturing cars in Kecskemet in 2012: the decision to build the factory was made in June 2008 while Ferenc Gyurcsány of the Hungarian Socialist Party – MSZP – was in power. Daimler responded to state efforts to develop vocational training in the Kecskemet region, according to the existing cooperation agreement with the government. As was noted in the magazine *Business Week*, ‘Hungary’s allure is an educated labor force that last year cost €8.61 an hour compared with €45.66 in Germany, according to the German auto industry group’ (Business Week, 2012).

This highlights Orbán’s ambivalent relationship with investors. He argues that he is supportive of large industrial investments, particularly in the manufacturing sector, but he has declared repeatedly his lack of trust in foreign investors, especially those in banking or the media; he has even acted on this by introducing a set of new taxes on these businesses, as reported by Reuters: ‘Companies hit by the taxes include Hungarian units of Deutsche Telekom and EOn, and the main local lobby group for German firms say they feel separating investors into good and bad groups is counterproductive’ (Reuters, 2012). This different attitude of the Orbán government to investors also shows that the government does not necessarily need to be a continuous supporter of strong links with the business environment. As a result the relationship between employers and universities can be particularly vulnerable in its incipient stage. The analyses on Poland also seem to identify some inconsistencies among policymakers regarding higher education.

Quality assurance mechanisms in Hungary

Hungarian HE received significant attention from close observers of European politics when, in 2010, the Orbán government started a controversial process of HE reforms, including massive

budget cuts. This is an example of a non-incremental HE development, showing that the active decisions of governments influence HE spending. In this instance the government had stated that, in the longer term, higher education should be 'self-financing' (Fuzessi, 2013). Orbán's cabinet was invested in May 2010, following the formation of a super majority coalition headed by the right-wing Hungarian Civic Union (Magyar Polgári Szövetség – Fidesz) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). In 2011 the government reduced the number of scholarships drastically, which led to a 25% drop in the number of higher education applicants in 2012 (Fuzessi, 2013). Students on government scholarships were required to sign a contract in which they promised that they would work in Hungary for a period, within the next 20 years, of twice the length of their course (Fuzessi, 2013). While this was a response of the far right to the challenges of integration in the European common market and an attempt to keep its highly educated skill pool in the country, it also provides some indication that HE can be used quite efficiently by parties to target their own constituencies. The government appealed more to nationalistic ideals and less so to the structure or the needs of the economy – such as the necessity to attract highly skilled labour at home. One reason why this has been a notoriously contested reform is the fact that the government has not incentivized the different institutional actors, choosing instead to force students to stay in the country through formal requirements.

Universities in Hungary are relatively autonomous. The Hungarian Accreditation Committee carries out the evaluations for quality assurance in HE, but the share of funding distributed according to quality criteria is low. In 2008 universities received around 15% of their funding from third-party funding, 70% came from the state and 15% from tuition fees (Vasilache et al., 2012). For Poland the respective data were 34% from business, 59% from government and 7% from abroad (EUROSTAT, 2010). Similarly, most research grants from the Hungarian education ministry stemmed from operational grants rather than competitive grants. (Vasilache et al., 2012). This shows little commitment to HE quality provision, even in a regional perspective.

Poland

The emergence of coordination between employers and universities. While the reform of HE in Hungary has taken centre stage in the region and has led to street protests, Poland has also witnessed significant changes in HE. However, the HE systems in the two countries have evolved along surprisingly different paths.

The HE sector has traditionally been structured differently in Poland compared to Hungary. Polish communist HE did not benefit from an institutional framework that would allow for cooperation between universities and firms active domestically. Moreover, both the more liberal development of HE and the more distant connection to the labour market have been maintained in the post-communist era. A skill formation system developed in the country more closely resembling a liberal education system than one providing specific skills typical for a coordinated system. A natural consequence of having a different skill formation system in place in the beginning of transition has been that subsequent decisions to reform HE had different sources, understood as stakeholders, than in Hungary. The governments in power had a more direct influence on HE governance; this was not linked directly to employers, and improving HE quality was more direct. Also, the relationship of universities to employers is less straightforward, but there is scope for cooperation. A different type of cooperation between the state and private firms active domestically has been at play in Poland historically, with universities providing general skills tailored less to the specific requirements of employers. The post-communist governments, starting with that elected in 1993, have not reversed this communist legacy.

The evolution of weak coordination

Important changes were implemented under higher education minister Barbara Kudrycka, in office between 2007 and 2013. Moreover, discussions regarding a reform of HE continue to be on the public agenda following the 2015 parliamentary elections. A member of the Civic Platform, Kudrycka introduced controversial but progressive HE reforms – a cut in enrolment, especially in certain fields. She was a member of the Tusk government, an example of an economically liberal government preparing reforms in HE likely to be supportive of the domestic economy and, most importantly, having an impact on the quality of education provision. The changes in government in this case have also had effects on the spending and enrolment ratio in the country (Tarlea, 2015). Kudrycka introduced a law designed to prevent this over-commitment of university professors by binding them to full-time employment in one university. Similar to Romania, a ranking of universities was introduced in Poland, according to which research funds would be distributed. These reforms resulted in a reshuffling of the entire HE system. Above all, however, the reform had significant implications for the quality of the education provided: one direct implication was higher spending per student. However, because parliamentary elections were approaching, Kudrycka resigned at the end of 2013 as a result of her too controversial reforms. Minister Kolarska-Bobińska took over the education portfolio after Prime Minister Donald Tusk's reshuffle in November 2013.

The Civic Platform government understood the need to incentivize students to invest in skills rather than coerce them not to leave the country. This distinguishes it from the Orbán government in Hungary. Reforms aimed at improving the quality of higher education are more likely to be initiated and to succeed as long as the political parties in power can benefit from the change. The Civic Platform, which benefitted from the support of the somewhat urban middle class, was more likely to take the risk of implementing these controversial reforms. The controversial reform introduced by Barbara Kudrycka aimed to improve the entire HE sector and to reshuffle the equilibrium between the losers and the winners of these reforms. Even more significant, what is specific to this more liberal variety of capitalism in the dependent market economy of Poland is its top-down approach, started by the government and with no particular cooperation of employers as important stakeholders in the process. Kudrycka was particularly active in this pursuit.

Nevertheless, other similarities between Poland and Hungary have become more noticeable since the 2015 elections in Poland. In addition, far-right policies have also taken centre-stage in the country. An analogous debate to that in Hungary is also taking place in Poland regarding the right to free education. In 2016 discussions have been held regarding the appropriateness of free education for medical students: the cost of educating one medical student, by the end of their six-year studies, amounts to around 66.000 euros (11.000 per year). Maciej Hamankiewicz from Poland's Medical Council complained that graduates in medicine find foreign countries more attractive, while Poland is experiencing an increasing shortage of medical staff (Polish News Agency, 2016).

It is a fact that the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and its leader Jarosław Kaczyński are generally suspicious of foreign influence (Foy, 2016). The discussion the need of universities to attract students, i.e. to be entrepreneurial is also salient in Poland. Kaczyński believes there is a need for new education policies (Foy, 2016). Unlike its predecessor, the Law and Justice Party represents those that have benefitted less from the transition to a market economy. These are the people at the bottom of the income distribution and the PiS government seems to be responding to these concerns as well. This shows some similarities to what takes place in Hungary.

All in all, instances of cooperation between the government and private firms in Poland are less numerous and such developments have not been as central as in Hungary. Examples of this do exist in Poland, such as the cooperation of the technology company Google with a business school in

Warsaw that started in 2015 and which was intended to foster entrepreneurship in the region (Stanislawska, 2015). However, the government was less involved in this project, which has developed more organically, as a cooperative venture between a private university and a private firm. It should come as no surprise to find more instances of cooperation of local branches of MNCs with education providers in Poland, either. Indeed, the consulting firm Deloitte (2014) provides a more comprehensive overview of the different programs developed at national level in Poland aimed at improving the cooperation of private firms with universities. These programs provide a legislative framework that should allow for this cooperation, rather than the government becoming closely involved in specific relationships between universities and private employers.

This emphasizes the more liberal orientation of the country in comparison to Hungary. It also underlines once more that there is more than one way to achieve success in a democratic market economy, which is very much in line with the tradition of varieties of capitalism. Interestingly, cooperation between universities and businesses is also possible in this framework; it can happen without the government being particularly active in pursuing cooperation. Nevertheless, unlike in Hungary, this close collaboration of businesses and universities is less likely if incentives for cooperation are not present, if firms and education providers do not believe they are benefitting from direct collaboration. The case study on Hungary showed that the government was able to intervene to create incentives for cooperation.

Quality assurance in Poland

From a broader perspective, and similar to the rest of the region, Polish higher education has expanded, a consequence of the liberalization of the market for education. However, some fields have expanded more than others. Kwiek (2012) showed how the expansion era in Polish HE lasted for about 15 years, from 1990 to 2005, and that this upward trend in enrolment has slowly started to change. Most interestingly, the model of the Polish HE system has allowed for the burgeoning of private universities. This development was in contrast to the situation in Hungary, but similar to that in other countries in the region, such as the Baltic countries, Romania or Bulgaria. One consequence of this market mechanism in higher education has been the fact that universities in both the private and the public sectors have become particularly interested in attracting a large number of students (Grove, 2014): this enabled them to secure funding. A larger proportion of students is enrolled in private HE institutions than in Hungary. While Kaczyński's Law and Justice Party was in power, before 2007, HE governance simply developed in a *laissez-faire* fashion.

Kwiek argues that as a consequence Polish universities have, paradoxically, become even more teaching oriented than they once were. During communism HE instruction was separated from research and the purpose of the university was to provide instruction. Therefore, the argument that universities have become even more teaching oriented is a strong criticism of HE developments, especially for the quality of education provided in these institutions. The fields that have experienced the greatest expansion are also those that have done poorly, especially when their research output is analysed. We are dealing with a university system divided between soft and hard fields, similar to the situations in Estonia and Romania (Tomusk, 2000).

Performance-based funding for research is relatively new in Europe: the very first such programs to be introduced were in Belgium in 1985 (OECD, 2010: 90; 2016; European Commission 2010). Furthermore, in 2010 no single country used a 100% performance-based system of funding. So, it should come as no surprise that performance-based funding is also new in post-communist Europe. We observed some differences between Poland and Hungary: Poland uses purpose-specific funding while Hungary relies on an input-based mechanism. This means that in Hungary 91% of funding is based on inputs, such as the number of students enrolled (Eurydice, 2011). In Poland, 70% of the total public contributions to HE are provided for specific purposes, directly

linked to functions, tasks and objectives (Eurydice, 2011: 38). In contrast to Hungary, Poland was already using output criteria in the 1990s.

The introduction of a performance-based indicator was not without problems in Poland. An important reform took place in 2008 with the aim of improving innovativeness (Polish Ministry for Science and Higher Education, 2009). This was amended by the Law of 18 March 2011 (Eurydice, 2011: 86). A side effect was that it favored competition, rather than cooperation, between universities. The government is continuing its work on the performance assessment system that is meant to foster collaboration between national innovation systems and universities. However, this collaboration continues to be less substantial than in Hungary.

Conclusions

This analysis of the political and economic nature of HE reforms shows that the regulation of HE in Hungary and in Poland has been a matter of contention between political parties. Parties catering to different constituencies have pursued different policies once in government. This happened in both countries when parties targeting the middle classes pursued different reforms to those catering to lower-income individuals and families. These reforms have been relevant in political debates and have even led to street protests. Most importantly, however, change has not always been in the same direction. This nonlinearity is expected to continue in the years to come. Equally importantly, these reforms in HE have built on existing traditions understood as historical legacies in the education sector and in the relationship of firms with universities. Governments can build on pre-existing conditions, such as the inherited industrial structure together with the inherited university structure. This interplay between political parties, universities, and firms, each pursuing their interests, has determined the different HE reforms in the two countries. This relationship explains the puzzle identified at the beginning of this paper, the different HE regimes in two otherwise relatively similar countries.

The analysis shows that governments can strongly influence HE governance in a variety of ways: political parties influenced HE governance by targeting the fitness for purpose of HE – that is, its relationship to employers, as well as quality criteria in HE funding. The most important channel in Hungary has been the attempt to build relationships with MNCs in order to attract these to the country and to keep them active locally by providing the necessary human capital. This has simultaneously fostered the demand and the supply of technical skills, which has had an important positive effect on the development of HE quality in the country. It has allowed education to develop more closely alongside the labour market and thus to make HE fit for purpose. Other actions have also proved effective, such as the attempts of Polish governments to incentivize students and university staff to invest in skills, by providing funding through either tuition or better pay and a reduction of the workload of academic staff, which were important quality criteria. Even in contexts where the relationship of HE provision to the demand for skills in the labour market has been less direct, the existence of a qualified skill pool was essential in attracting business to the country, as the case of Google in Poland emphasizes.

Developments in Hungary show that the country is highly dependent on MNCs, which makes it a good and clear example of a dependent market economy. At the same time, there is strong cooperation between institutions of skill formation and universities and providers of vocational training, which shows strong characteristics of coordination. Most importantly, however, it shows that, sooner or later, skills develop very much in line with the ‘spirit’ of coordination typical of the country. Poland is also highly dependent on MNCs, but the links between universities and companies arise in a different way. Governments incentivize students, rather than companies, to invest in skills. Poland is a more liberal dependent market economy and the skills provided by universities tend to be more general, which resembles the HE system in the United Kingdom. But, most importantly,

both coordination mechanisms – liberal and coordinated – can be effective in fostering skill formation in the economy. Both have their specific weaknesses, which need to be tackled with policies; and the most obvious promoter of these policies identified in this paper has been the government.

Political parties in government can have a clear vision about the needs of the labour market and they can incentivize companies, students and even university staff to invest in education, and thus to promote quality in HE. However, the political parties seem to use this understanding in order to please their voters. The extent to which parties cater to their constituencies is systematic and whether it falls along partisan lines, such as the left–right spectrum, should be analyzed in future research. Nevertheless, what can be claimed with certainty is that the support of parties in government can lead developments into one direction or another. This can become an important hurdle for HE development in the region. Somehow ironically, the state, as represented by the political parties in government, has rediscovered its role in the economy and this role can be used fruitfully. A radically different vision of the government can have dramatic consequences for HE and for the political economy more generally. This is the reason why this present paper emphasizes that it is not entirely clear that Hungary will continue on its path of coordinating businesses with education provision; nor is it entirely certain that Poland will continue on its neoliberal path. However, change is expected to occur – albeit with difficulty.

While much of the public discussion on education reform has focused on the inability of governments or on the restrictions imposed by the scarcity of public finances, or by the clear and strict guidelines of European reforms, this paper highlights how governments can and do play an important role even in such less friendly environments. One fact is here to stay: it would be extremely difficult to analyze the quality of higher education when separated from labour market dynamics and their political determinants. Other factors influence HE governance, among which are the Europeanization and the globalization processes of which all CEE countries are a part. The level of professionalism of HE officials will also play a role. Just how important these roles are should be considered in future research.

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1. Viktor Orbán has been Prime Minister of Hungary, for the second time, since 2010. See: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister> (accessed 18 October 2016).

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Exploring higher education governance in Poland and Romania: Re-convergence after divergence?

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Abstract

This analysis focuses on changes in higher education governance in Poland and Romania in the post-communist era. The author applies a theoretical framework based on institutional isomorphism and historical institutionalism and maps the policy trajectories of both systems on the basis of three governance ideal-types. The public higher education systems of both countries initially took a markedly different reform path after 1989. Polish higher education by and large returned to its historical model of ‘academic self-rule’ and has resisted pressures for stronger marketization, even during the Bologna Process, while Romania has been characterized by an early and strong isomorphic orientation towards higher education models primarily of Anglo-American inspiration. The main argument of the paper is that – after a period of marked divergence – both systems are visibly ‘re-converging’ towards a new hybrid governance model. The new governance model aims to (re-)embed the research mission of universities to foster homegrown research and innovations. These new hybrid constellations enable both countries to simultaneously deal with global pressures for change and liberate themselves from economic dependence on the West, while not throwing historical institutions entirely overboard.

Keywords

Poland, Romania, higher education governance, dependent market economy, Bologna Process, marketization, Humboldt

Introduction

The higher education (HE) systems of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have been influenced by a bewildering array of internal and external forces of change in the past 25 years: the introduction of market economies and democracy, the renewal of the academic profession, public sector reforms and, not least, the Europeanization and internationalization of HE have penetrated to the core of

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pre-existing governance arrangements and regulatory frameworks. Throughout the process of change and adaptation, post-communist HE systems have oscillated between reinvigorated traditions and modern-day policy models. The result has been a heterogeneous patchwork of policies and institutions, which reflect both the historical roots of CEE universities – in some cases spanning back to the 13th or 14th century – and the accommodation or fully fledged implementation of market-oriented mechanisms often inspired by Western practice (Dobbins, 2011; Kwiek, 2012).

This analysis focuses on two large post-communist countries – Poland and Romania – whose public HE systems initially took a markedly different reform trajectory after 1989. Polish public HE by and large returned to its historical model of ‘academic self-rule’ (Leja, 2012) and has generally resisted pressures for stronger marketization, even during the Bologna Process. The Romanian reform pathway, by contrast, has been characterized by an early and strong isomorphic orientation towards HE models primarily of Anglo-American inspiration. In contrast to Poland, Romania quickly implemented a wide range of market-oriented policy instruments after shrugging off its historical pattern of state-centred control. Thus, Romania and Poland initially represented a case of policy divergence in an era of perceived policy convergence (Holzinger and Knill, 2005).

This paper builds on previous findings regarding the governance of public HE in Romania and Poland by taking a longer chronological perspective of 25 years (1990–2015), which enables us to reassess the convergence/divergence hypothesis. This approach can be justified by various factors rooted in the changing nature of the European integration process, both in HE as well as in the broader political economy of CEE. First, it is legitimate to argue that policy areas other than HE were given precedence in the early and mid-2000s during the European Union accession process. Regulatory alignment in areas directly affected by the common market (e.g. consumer protection, trade liberalization, etc.) was prioritized in order to accelerate the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* (Sedelmeier, 2005). Successful accession to the EU has, however, liberated the new member states from these constraints, and potentially enabled them to focus on new priorities such as education.

Second and most importantly, the integration of post-communist economies into the European common market has led to notable changes in the political economy of CEE. Here, I draw on Nölke und Vliegenthart’s (2009) argument that the accession process has reinforced the economic hierarchy in Europe, and turned the political economies of CEE into what they define as ‘dependent market economies’. Post-communist economies underwent a significant process of deindustrialization after 1989, making them extremely dependent on foreign direct investment. Many large- and medium-sized businesses operating in CEE are essentially ‘eastern outposts’ of transnational enterprises and thus find themselves at the bottom of transnational interfirm hierarchies (Nölke and Vliegenthart, 2009). Instead, the competitive advantage of CEE economies lies in their function as ‘assembly platforms for semi-standardized goods’ based on intense low-cost labour, whereby technological innovations are frequently simply imported from the West (Jasiecki, 2014). Their reliance on cheap labour has forced CEE countries to maintain low tax rates – to the detriment of public education (see Tarlea, 2015). As a result, top-class research and development activities are generally conducted in the West, while the CEE countries lag severely behind their Western counterparts with regard to patents issued (Eurostat, 2015; Jasiecki, 2014).

This political economic reality has become ever more blatant since the accession process (Nölke and Vliegenthart, 2009) and provides strong incentives for CEE policy-makers to use education as a lever to liberate themselves from the shackles of economic dependence. Along these lines, the emergence of international HE rankings (Hazelkorn, 2011) has played into the narrative of CEE universities as laggards in top-class research and development (see Boyadjieva and Tarlea in this issue) and thus compounded fears that these universities lack capacity to promote economic viability. This narrative dovetails with the European Union’s Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000),

which defines university research as a major catalyst of economic growth and development in Europe.

Given the widespread perception of economic and educational inferiority in CEE, policy-makers may seek to recalibrate existing HE governance models to engender top-class research. In this process, Western policy models may continue to provide a source of inspiration and reform anchor to post-communist policy-makers. After all, the late 2000s and early 2010s have proved to be a period of intense HE reform activity in Western Europe, spanning from the Pécresse reforms in France (2007) (Dobbins and Knill, 2014), to the reform of German federalism and the *Exzellenzinitiative* (2006) (Toens, 2009) and the Gelmini reforms in Italy (2010) (Donina, 2015). As a result, new potential reference models have recently emerged in systems that have historically provided reference points for CEE HE.

The article is structured as follows: I first discuss a theoretical framework to conceptualize policy change and inertia in post-communist HE. I then present three ideal-types of HE governance as an overarching analytical framework for tracing policy changes. After a very brief discussion of pre-communist and communist historical legacies, I highlight early post-communist developments up to EU accession (2004 in Poland, 2007 in Romania). The main thrust of analysis focuses on developments in the past 10 years (*c.* 2005–2015) and whether both systems have ‘re-converged’ in view of the altered HE playing field, which has resulted from the deeper institutionalization of the Bologna and Lisbon Processes, the completion of EU accession and the increasingly perceived reality of economic overdependence.

Theoretical considerations and analytical framework

In the past 25 years, post-communist HE systems have not only struggled with similar issues to Western systems, such as financial shortfalls, the lack of transparency and international competitiveness, but have also been burdened with numerous additional challenges. In the early 1990s, post-communist HE institutions first struggled to liberate themselves from communist ideology and restore academic self-administration. In the mid-1990s, governments became increasingly concerned with counterbalancing institutional autonomy and, in some cases, ‘academic anarchy’ (for Bulgaria see Georgieva, 2002: 30) with new forms of state regulation. Policy-makers were subject to increasing pressures to ensure the quality and transparency of rapidly expanding private HE sectors, while public institutions were often preoccupied with their very survival amid drastic financial shortfalls.

While domestic exigencies dominated the policy trajectories of the early and mid-1990s, the Bologna Process, in particular, has increased pressure on HE policy-makers to assess critically the effectiveness and quality of university output. Although the main lines of action of Bologna affected study structure harmonization and quality assurance, the process has also exposed the vulnerability of existing governance models. Bologna has been framed by a transnational discourse on making universities more globally competitive, attractive and efficient. As a result, market-oriented policy instruments, primarily of Anglo-American inspiration, have been explicitly promoted. The European Commission, which assumed a more central role in the 2000s, consistently advocated university autonomy, entrepreneurial governance approaches and closer synergies with the business world. Along the same lines, the transnationalization of HE has engendered a new culture of ‘international comparison’ and rankings, thus making HE systems more aware of their position amid global competition (Hazelkorn, 2011; Martens et al., 2010).

Against this background there appeared to be viable prospects for the *convergence* of policies in line with rapidly spreading liberal market ideology. Convergence is generally understood as the ‘tendency of societies to grow more alike, to develop similarities in structures, processes and

performances' (Kerr, 1983) due to greater economic and institutional interlinkages. In theoretical terms, the pressures stemming from socio-economic transformation, transnational scrutiny and HE expansion amid underfunding may prompt policy-makers to emulate external policy models perceived as successful. According to the theory of isomorphism, organizations strive to assert their legitimacy by means of imitation instead of developing their own solutions to emerging problems (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Isomorphism is particularly virulent when organizations are plagued by uncertainty and ambiguous goals. Against this background, one can justifiably argue that post-communist HE is extremely prone to isomorphic effects due to the daunting challenges of HE expansion amid severe underfunding. This uncertainty has been compounded by the emergence of new technologies, the reality of 'brain drain' and competition from private providers. This is particularly true in Romania and Poland, which quickly lifted restrictions on both private and public HE institutions to even greater competition.

However, a frequent critique of institutional isomorphism and the 'convergence hypothesis' is their determinism and, more specifically, their neglect of embedded historical institutions and pre-existing policy pathways (Perrow, 1986). A competing theoretical paradigm based on *historical institutionalism* may help explain unique country-specific reform trajectories. Historical institutionalists contend that national and local politics, economy and culture metabolize, translate and reshape global trends in the face of their cultures, needs, practices and institutional framework (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Vaira, 2004). The pre-existing functional logic of European universities may, therefore, make them highly change resistant, as external models and practices may pose undesired challenges to national institutions and beliefs. Thus, path dependencies and vested interests in upholding existing institutions and policies may frustrate any efforts at policy change.

As previously argued, historical institutions in CEE may be derived from both the pre-communist and communist phase. On the one hand, policy-makers may draw inspiration and legitimacy from historical models – e.g. Humboldtism and renaissance nationalism. A typical guiding principle of policy-makers in CEE has been to restore 'continuity of history' after the communist aberration (Radó, 2001: 14). Scholars have frequently distinguished pre-war HE systems based on the Humboldtian ideal of freedom of the search for knowledge through non-utilitarian research and teaching (e.g. Poland, Czech Republic) from those that leaned towards the French or Napoleonic concept of stronger state coordination of HE (e.g. Romania, Russia) (Sadlak, 1995: 46). On the other hand, the radical transformation and reorganization of society after communism did not necessarily mean that universities would automatically re-embrace pre-existing structures or isomorphically align themselves with external models. It may take years or even decades to uproot historically entrenched structures and norms. Thus, institutions and patterns of action inherited from communism may continue to impact HE systems (File and Goedegebuure, 2003: 218) and be combined with what is perceived as modern-day HE policy.

Three ideal-types of HE governance

How can we trace changes and inertia in HE? I suggest a classification into three broader, historically rooted and still-relevant ideal-types of HE governance: a *state-centred model*, a *model of academic self-governance* and a '*marketized*' model. These classifications integrate key insights and categorizations from previous studies, most notably Clark (1983), Neave and Van Vught (1994), Braun and Merrien (1999), Olsen (2007) and Jongbloed (2003). Although all HE systems combine and integrate components of each ideal-type, identifying three broader poles towards which systems may converge enables us to better contrast the status quo ante with present trends and identify historically rooted path dependencies amid recent developments.

Let us begin with the *state-centred model*, which constituted the pre-war HE tradition in Romania, and was taken to an extreme form under communist rule. Here, the state bureaucratically regulates university affairs such as admissions, academic profiles, quality assurance and personnel, as well as university–business relations (Clark, 1983). Subsequently, the role of both the ‘academic oligarchy’ and the market are limited (see below) and universities are granted relatively little autonomy. Universities are rational instruments employed to meet national priorities (Olsen, 2007). The state exercises *process control* by defining the curriculum, duration of studies, access conditions and expended resources. The state also tends to take an input-based funding approach, linking expenditure with indicators such as staff and student numbers. Institutions, therefore, have little freedom to use funds at discretion, as they are frequently itemized for state-specified objects (Jongbloed, 2003: 122). Quality assurance is also generally conducted within the the ministry higher education, which focuses on the *ex ante* plausibility that an institution has the capacity to carry out a programme. All in all, the government exerts a high degree of hierarchical oversight, while universities are often conceived as a vehicle for national cohesion, socio-economic transition and nation (re-)building.

The *model of academic self-governance* or ‘*academic oligarchy*’ (Clark, 1983) is characterized by the dominance of the professoriate in governance bodies (De Boer and Goedegebuure, 2003: 215). Founded upon Humboldt’s principles of intellectual freedom and the primacy of unfettered research, the model is based on a state–university partnership, in which academic and governmental policy-makers collectively negotiate policy frameworks. The state remains a potent actor through planning and funding regulations, but exerts little or no authority over teaching and research. Socio-economic demands are generally not reflected in academic profiles and student placement. Instead, universities are committed to the search for truth through intellectual freedom and fundamental research – regardless of its immediate utility or political convenience. Hence, the advancement of non-utilitarian research is the *raison d’être* of the university. Another crucial characteristic is the professorial chair system, in which powerful chair-holders engage in collegial academic governance as a ‘federation of chairs’ (Clark, 1983: 140) and can block initiatives of the government or university management.

In view of the change-promoting forces described above, there are strong grounds to assume that HE systems will converge on the ‘*marketized*’ model. Such systems are based on the idea that universities function more effectively when operating as economic enterprises within and for regional or global markets (Marginson and Considine, 2000). Academic institutions are in a state of permanent competition for human capital and financial resources (Braun and Merrien, 1999). Unlike the academic self-rule model, they are characterized by strong *entrepreneurial institutional leadership*, which enables university management to strategically design their structures and study programmes in line with socio-economic demands, whereby non-utilitarian research may also be seen as critical to the university mission. Marketization may also embolden the state to take a more prominent role in ensuring teaching and research quality, often through quasi-governmental accreditation or evaluation bodies (Dill, 1997; Neave, 2003). Instead of bureaucratically ‘designing’ the system, the state generally promotes competition, e.g. through performance-based funding and transparency for HE consumers. When public HE systems become ‘marketized’, the state usually provides lump sum funding, often at a reduced level. This increases the budgetary flexibility of university management, but also compels universities to acquire external funding, e.g. through student tuition and contract-based research. External stakeholders often act as ‘co-agenda setters’ along with the academic community, which affords academics greater opportunities to engage in entrepreneurial activities with the private sector.

The empirical analysis now traces HE policy developments in the two largest new EU members – Romania and Poland – based on this framework. Previous research revealed an initial marked

divergence in the policy trajectories of both countries, as Polish public HE – at least structurally – re-aligned largely with the academic self-rule tradition (see Antonowicz et al. in this issue), while Romania was quicker to embrace the ‘marketized’ paradigm. My argument, however, is that the ever more visible realities of the transformed political economy and global competition in HE are now pushing the governance model of both countries in multiple directions simultaneously. This is resulting in a novel hybrid governance model, which strategically combines features of all three ideal-types to increase national research and development capacities. In other words, the forces of Europeanization are still virulent, but are visibly producing different outcomes for post-communist HE governance than those which resulted 10–15 years ago.

Case study: Poland

The Jagiellonian University in Cracow (*Uniwersytet Jagielloński*) is the second-oldest CEE university after the Charles University in Prague and has a longstanding tradition of scientific excellence. Several other (originally) Polish universities were established during the Polish–Lithuanian Union, including Wrocław (Breslau) (1702), Lwów (Lviv) (1661) and Vilnius (1578), and enjoyed considerable autonomy from the political authorities. However, the partitions of Poland radically fragmented the Polish university landscape. Originally founded as the Royal University of Warsaw in 1816, the University of Warsaw came under Russian control, while the University of Wrocław was incorporated into Prussia.¹ A bastion of the Polish renaissance in the 15th century, the Cracow Academy initially remained a Polish institution in the Free City of Cracow, before being incorporated into the Austrian Empire in 1846. The Jagiellonian University became bilingual (German and Polish), and entered a second golden age of scientific productivity and research in the late 19th century based largely on the Humboldtian model (Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2016).

Upon the territorial reconstitution of Poland in the early 1900s, Polish universities reinstated Humboldtian principles of scholarly freedom and non-utilitarian research (Scott, 2002). However, the Nazi invaders deliberately eliminated Polish language education, demolished most university buildings and killed scores of Polish academics after the Warsaw uprising (Duczmal, 2006: 935). The hardships continued under Soviet occupation, as much of the remaining Polish intelligentsia was murdered in the Katyń massacre. Soviet dominance resulted in the conversion of Polish universities to instruments of indoctrination and political repression. Although bureaucratic control based on Marxism–Leninism was the primary coordination mechanism, Humboldtian traditions were partially preserved, as Polish academics had somewhat greater autonomy in teaching and research (Van Beek, 1995) and contacts with Western science communities were also partially tolerated.

After 1989, Polish public HE was strongly characterized by a *return to history* logic, resulting in the restoration of the main tenets of the academic self-governance model almost overnight (see Antonowicz et al. in this issue). The first post-communist HE act (1990) strongly enhanced the autonomy of universities to define their organizational structures and regulate their own personnel and funding policies. It also decentralized decision-making to the faculties and professorial chairs (World Bank, 2004: 5). This weakened university management and the state’s regulatory capacity. Drawing on the pre-war tradition of academic self-rule, high-ranking academics governed university affairs through academic senates. The fragmented chair and faculty structures left few intervention mechanisms for university management, and university-level decisions essentially resulted from the professoriate’s aggregated preferences. Structural decentralization enabled universities to embrace the Humboldtian notion of an ‘isolated community of scholars’ without any significant means of intervention for the state and external stakeholders.

However, extreme underfunding of Polish HE and the struggle for mere survival severely limited public universities’ capacity to live up to Humboldt’s vision of unfettered scholarly research.

HE funding remained around 1% of the GDP in the 1990s (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2007), far below most other European HE systems. To cope with increasing demands for access to HE and facilitate educational expansion amid the enormous funding shortfall, the state introduced very liberal relations regarding the establishment of private providers (Duczmal, 2006). This created a new HE playing field that was increasingly driven by supply-and-demand dynamics, while private institutions imported distinctly Anglo-American management methods and degree structures.

The question arises, therefore, whether the changing environment for public institutions would foster convergence towards the ‘marketized’ model. Evidence shows that reinvigorated historical institutions prevailed over marketization pressures, as most structural features typical of the academic self-rule model were upheld in the public system (Kwiek, 2015). This applies in particular to funding, which was allocated based on itemized formulas consisting of the weighted number of students and teaching staff with scientific degrees (OECD, 2006: 81).² National legislation also prohibited tuition fees for full-time students, but public institutions were authorized to charge tuition from ‘non-traditional students’, primarily part-time and weekend students or those who failed entrance exams (OECD, 2006: 14; World Bank, 2004: 5).³ The expansion of part-time programmes led to an increasing focus on fields such as business and economics (Duczmal, 2006: 462), which – combined with severe underfunding – undermined universities’ capacity for top-class research in the humanities and social sciences in particular.

Although internally fragmented, Polish academics did pursue an outward strategy to defend their collective interests and protect themselves from state intervention. For example, the General Council for Higher Education (*Rada Główna Szkolnictwa Wyższego*) was a new, academic-dominated consulting body that enabled the academic community to maintain a tight grip over policy-making.⁴ To further cement their collective interests, Polish rectors ‘isomorphically’ borrowed an additional institution from neighbouring Germany known as CRASP (Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland).⁵ Although both bodies did not have formal veto power, they forced the government to operate with great caution towards the HE community. Thus, policy change, and in particular marketization, was decelerated by the insufficient leverage of the government and university management over the well-consolidated academic community. Consequently, there were no formal governmental instruments to balance high institutional autonomy with public accountability, as essentially no quality assurance system existed.

However, instead of contenting themselves with low public budget salaries, many professors actively expanded the private HE sector. After fulfilling daytime teaching obligations at public institutions, they delivered similar evening lectures at private institutions. Due to new external financial sources, most professors had few incentives to introduce new market- and performance-based instruments at public institutions. This had a substantial impact on the research capacities of public universities: from a structural perspective, most public universities had reinstated the pre-war regulatory model based on Humboldtism. However, the heavy teaching load, combined with chronic underfunding, hindered the emergence of research-focused universities in the true Humboldtian sense. In other words, Polish public universities had revoked their Humboldtian ‘skeleton’, i.e. in terms of administrative structures, without reviving their Humboldtian ‘spirit’, i.e. the capacity for top-class fundamental research.

To what extent did the Bologna Process and intensified transnational interlinkages influence the development of Polish HE? The evidence suggests that the external policy-making arena initially only weakly to moderately impacted the direction of change. Internal management structures remained bottom heavy and decentralized in the 2000s, while overarching university management still lacked the capacity to set strategic goals and introduce performance criteria (De Boer and Goedegebuure, 2003: 224). The funding scheme also essentially remained a case of non-reform, as performance-related criteria were not applied. Lump sums received from the state were distributed

evenly among individual faculties without an output-based component. In other words, despite their immersion into a more competitive playing field of private colleges and the European HE space, public institutions remained rooted in the academic self-rule paradigm.

Along these lines, university rectors were generally still recruited based on academic achievement (Polish Law on Higher Education, 2005). Contrary to other Humboldt-oriented HE systems, Polish public universities also did not explicitly separate academic and administrative management (for the new German *Hochschulräte*, see Mayntz, 2002). However, the Bologna Process prompted one very major shift in Poland (and Romania). In line with a global trend towards autonomy in return for accountability, it inspired the creation of a State Accreditation Commission in 2001, a body which evaluates the quality of study programmes *ex ante* and *ex post*.⁶ Pre-empting this, Polish public HE had at least accommodated a series of transparency-promoting instruments within restored pre-communist HE legacies during the Bologna Process phase. The downward devolution of power (to chairs and faculties) with new and restored institutions of academic self-rule hindered far-reaching policy change.

A new direction in Polish HE policy? The tables began to turn around 2010, as a series of new, virulent forces of change began to impact not only the national rhetoric surrounding HE in Poland (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2013), but also concrete policies (see also Dakowska, 2013). I argue that the new economic dependencies resulting from European integration have again increased pressures for change on Polish HE policy-makers.

It is important to note that Poland underwent a process of large-scale deindustrialization in the post-communist phase. The transition to a market economy and return to economic growth was largely facilitated by the expansion of the service sector and the transfer of Western industrial infrastructure. This led to a high degree of foreign-owned industry, which fed into a perception that the Polish economy was merely an assembly plant for more developed Western countries (see Miller et al., 2014). The omnipresence of foreign businesses, which thrive on research and development conducted abroad, has more recently contributed to a consensus that Poland must shift away from labour-intensive to knowledge-intensive industries in order to overcome its perceived technology lag (Board of Strategic Advisers to the Prime Minister of Poland, 2010; Jasiecki, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Science in Poland 2016). Combined with the poor results of Polish universities in international university rankings (see Boyadjieva in this issue), these unfavourable long-term political economic framework conditions have facilitated a broader societal perception that Poland is overly dependent on foreign innovation and capital. This sense of being a laggard was reinforced by the poor performance of Poland in EU research programmes (see Antonowicz et al. in this issue).

These combined factors have triggered a new push for Poland to align itself with Western HE policies, albeit with a new twist. While DiMaggio and Powell assert that uncertainty is a primary driving force for isomorphism, I argue that a more *emancipatory isomorphism* is taking place in Polish HE, resulting in a recalibrated governance model aimed at fostering greater economic independence by doubling down on the research mission of the university. Subsequently, the public university system has taken centre stage in large-scale governmental efforts to reindustrialize Poland and establish it as a regional and global leader in knowledge-based industries through local research (Ministry of Interior and Administration 2008; Polish Press Agency, 2015). To do so, the Polish government has drawn on and strategically allocated EU structural funds to breathe new life into the research landscape by means of new competitive mechanisms and a restructured institutional framework (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2009).

Driven by rhetoric centred on competition, international visibility and human capital formation to increase economic independence (Polish Press Agency, 2015; Science in Poland, 2015), the 2011 HE law to some extent pushes the public HE system towards all three governance ideal-types outlined above. First, the law seeks to better align Polish public universities with the original

intentions of Humboldt's vision for universities, namely research excellence (see also Kwiek, 2012). The state-driven efforts to upgrade the research function of universities are reflected, in particular, in the funding scheme. While the lion's share of funding is still drawn from the public budget and fees from 'non-typical students' (i.e. part-time students or those who fail entry exams), the 2011 amendments significantly increased the performance-based funding component. The government now allocates extra funds to a selected group of 25 leading faculties designated as 'National Scientific Leading-Edge Centres' (*Krajowe Naukowe Ośrodki Wiodące* (KNOW)) based on evaluation and quantitative indicators of scientific output for five-year periods (Dakowska, 2015). While there is no explicit evidence that new policy innovations in Germany and France were deliberately copied, the KNOW appear to be a 'hybrid' of recent reforms in Germany and France, in particular, the German *Exzellenzinitiative* (Hartmann, 2011), and the French legislation aiming to 're-Humboldtize' universities (Dobbins and Knill, 2014) and create local conglomerates of research-focused HE institutions (*pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*). What is noteworthy, however, is that the KNOW initiative – unlike the German *Exzellenzinitiative* – considers individual faculties, and not universities, to be the overarching institutions. Thus, in terms of their elitist nature, the Polish KNOW faculties are structurally similar to the German elite institutions, although Germany places a stronger focus on entire institutions, graduate schools and research projects. What is apparent in each case, however, is that there are state-driven efforts to financially, structurally and institutionally reward top-class research through market mechanisms.

This state-driven push for research excellence was reinforced by the establishment of a National Science Centre (*Narodowe Centrum Nauki*) in 2011 to support fundamental research in Poland on the basis of 11 types of funding schemes targeting both aspiring and well-established researchers. One additional effort to strengthen the research mission of universities is the so-called Diamond Grant system, which rewards students for conducting research during their university studies and opens the way to faster doctorates (Science in Poland, 2015).

However, it would be imprudent to describe this development solely as the 're-Humboldtization' of Polish universities. We can indeed observe large-scale efforts to enhance the research mission within the Humboldtian administrative structures that were reinvigorated after 1990. Yet, we are also simultaneously witnessing a *substantive* de-Humboldtization, as the notion of isolated communities of scholars dedicated to non-utilitarian inquiry has begun to give way to more utilitarian governmental target setting. For example, the state now devises National Research Programmes, which define priority research areas, in consultation with the Academy of Sciences, CRASP, the General Council and other interested parties. These aim to foster not only research of high cognitive value, but also of high social, economic and technological usefulness (Government of Poland (2011)). While the National Science Centre is tasked with administering projects involving university researchers that are related to fundamental research, the National Centre for Research and Development bears responsibility for applied research. The latter includes, for example, energy-related technology (e.g. clean coal), state security and defence, as well as social science projects related to Poland's position in globalizing markets (National Research Program, 2010: 6).

Unlike Humboldt's university vision, the reforms also reinforce the principle of external stakeholdership. For example, during the 2000s, the ministry of science and higher education was already pushing for modernized university management systems incorporating employer representatives into curriculum design. The 2011 HE Act, however, mandates the inclusion of employer stakeholders in university management and consultative bodies such as the General Council, while also requiring the establishment of professional career follow-up systems for university graduates (Art. 46). In line with similar attempts in France, the government is creating databases consisting of information from the national social security office regarding the employment history of former students.

This more assertive stance of the state to better link universities with the labour market is also reflected in the newly configured State Accreditation Commission. The new HE law mandates a minimum degree of external stakeholder participation of *c.*10% (Art. 46), thus enabling influence over study programmes. Moreover, we are also witnessing a shift towards *ex post* accreditation mechanisms, meaning that focus is placed on concrete institutional performance and output during re-accreditation procedures. Similar to the British Research Assessment Exercise, research and, increasingly, HE institutions are subject to evaluation based on publications, patents, registered contacts with industrial partners and awarded degrees. Thus, the emergence of the ‘evaluative state’ in Polish HE (Neave, 1998) serves to further institutionalize both fundamental research in the true Humboldtian sense as well as research of a more utilitarian nature aimed at fostering greater economic independence (Science in Poland, 2016).

Regarding personnel matters, the state has also begun chip away at some of the privileges of the academic profession. Reminiscent of recent changes in France and Germany, the 2011 HE law enables universities to now employ academic teachers temporarily and subject them to performance evaluations, generally every two years. This applies to students pursuing a PhD or post-doctoral *habilitacja*. These modifications create the legal foundations for universities to terminate contracts of academic staff members based on their own performance-based regulations. In fact, the law goes so far as to introduce evaluations every four years for those holding the title of ‘professor’ (Art. 132, see also Dakowska 2015). Importantly, the 2011 legislation also empowers university rectors to reject affiliations of academic staff with multiple HE institutions (Art. 129), which in the past was a significant practical impediment to effectively balancing teaching and research responsibilities.

Altogether, the reform script mirrors an isomorphic shift towards current trends in other parts of the world, most notably in Germany and France (see Dobbins and Knill, 2014), including expanded state mechanisms to evaluate institutions and individual researchers, the clustering of resources into institutions deemed as excellent, and vertical differentiation. However, the newly emerging policies are not necessarily mere emulation, rather they can be seen as tailor-made solutions to enhance Poland’s economic and geopolitical viability and liberate itself from economic overdependence (Board of Strategic Advisers to the Prime Minister of Poland, 2009; Morawiecki, 2016). These shifts are guided by a widespread *leitmotiv* that ‘Poland should be innovative and not imitative’ (see Science in Poland, 2016, Interview with Minister of Science and Higher Education Gowin) and that universities must become bastions of economic innovation to facilitate the growth of high-tech industries.

Hence, the pre-existing Humboldtian notion of universities as secluded ivory towers operating exclusively in the service of the academic profession has been gradually replaced with the idea of universities as service providers operating in the interests of both science and society as a whole. Measures to promote external stakeholdership and compatibility with labour market demands have been further cemented by the state, while the newly introduced output-based funding mechanisms (e.g. KNOW, bibliometric evaluations, competitive grants, etc.) have reinforced competition for state research funds and prompted individual institutions to reflect critically on their development strategies. The result has been a new hybrid academic landscape in which the state is more assertively designing a framework for research innovation with a heavier accent on economic utility.

Case study: Romania

The history of Romanian universities essentially began with the opening of the universities of Iași (1860) and Bucharest (1864), which were viewed as a crucial step in the Romanian nation-building process. Many of the ‘founding fathers’ of Romanian universities were educated in France, so that

the state-centred French system provided inspiration for the structure of Romanian HE (Scott, 2002: 140–141). For example, all substantive and personnel issues were presided over by the state. The proximity to the French model, in particular the *grandes écoles*, was also reflected in the elitist nature of Romanian HE, the traditional role of which was to train elites for high-level positions in state bureaucracy. However, Humboldtism became more prominent between 1920 and 1950, as academic freedom in teaching and research, as well as the rights of academic senates, were strengthened. The late 1930s and early 1940s thus heralded disputes between those who viewed universities' main responsibility to be the cultivation of science and those who viewed them as instruments for professional training and national economic development (Sadlak, 1990: 16). However, the remaining traces of academic autonomy were completely abolished under communism, as universities were transformed into state-controlled industrial breeding units (Mihailescu and Vlasceanu, 1994: 76). Yet, after Ceaușescu's 'divorce' from Moscow in the late 1960s, some liberalization did occur. Academic cooperation with the West took root, enabling academics to participate in international activities and technology transfer.

Immediately after 1990 Romania did not pursue any extensive reforms aimed at uprooting the state-centred governance logic (Nicolescu, 2002: 92–93). Most substantive matters, e.g. curricula, remained highly bureaucratized. The ministry of education continued to design the overarching framework for HE, while the academic community was unable to mobilize and push for self-management powers. Public HE was still fully state funded, while individual institutions functioned under the pressure of corruption, instead of accountability, competition and transparency (Marga, 1998).

At this point, however, Romania began to follow a remarkably different trajectory from that of Poland, as the forces of isomorphism rapidly began to topple historically embedded institutions. Starting in 1997, a combination of pressure due to domestic problems, lessons drawn from the European platform, and ministerial activism resulted in an unprecedented reform package under the leadership of Education Minister Andrei Marga. The starting point was the broad perception of crisis and stagnation and the perceived necessity of education reform as a stepping stone and stimulus for Romania's integration into the global economy (Marga, 2002). Subsequently, Romania strived to implement what it perceived to be a 'European' concept of education reform, largely based on the '*marketized*' model. The speed of change was facilitated by the ministry of education ability to exert its executive capacity over the weakly consolidated academic community (Interview with the Deputy Director of UNESCO-CEPES. December 2006. Bucharest.). Thus, unlike in Poland, the ministry of education was able to draw on its historical tradition of strong executive leverage over HE matters.

Specifically, the state abandoned its role as a 'system designer' and introduced a series of isomorphically inspired performance-based and entrepreneurial mechanisms (Marga, 2002: 130). For example, the reform package introduced global lump sum funding based on the British model, which increased university managers' capacity for autonomous action. The ministry of education also encouraged HE institutions to attract additional private sector funds and introduce tuition fees. Again, in contrast to Poland, historical legacies were actually somewhat conducive to market-based governance in Romania. For example, the forced collaboration between universities and industry under Ceaușescu provided a template for closer collaboration between universities and external partners. Drawing on its historically privileged position, the state also aimed to instil more competitiveness and entrepreneurialism in Romanian universities. This was reflected, for example, in the abolition of the state salary system and giving complete autonomy over personnel and salaries to university management, which in turn was able to draw on external non-state funds to adjust salaries to performance-related criteria (Marga, 2002: 129).

During negotiations, Romanian HE policy-makers feared looking like laggards under European scrutiny and thus continuously referred to international 'best practice' (Interview with the Former

Romanian Minister of Education. December 2006. Cluj-Napoca.). Here, the ministry of education drew on its historically strong position to 'lure' universities to support the reforms with the promise of greater autonomy and new financial resources (e.g. tuition, research grants). Analogously to Poland, however, a sort of 'academic oligarchy' did emerge in the late 1990s. Yet, it was not as organizationally consolidated as the Polish academic community and has by no means exerted the same level of influence. In fact, the academic community was simply too late in mobilizing, as the universities were quicker to establish overarching management structures based on strategic leadership to counterbalance the professorial lobby (Interview with the Director of UNESCO-CEPES. December 2006. Bucharest.). Nevertheless, the academic community did succeed in promoting the establishment of professorial chairs at many large universities and has traditionally resisted policies to increase external economic stakeholdership and abolish tenure privileges for professors.

By and large, the evidence shows that Romania imported distinctly Anglo-American governance instruments in the 1990s, even before the Bologna Process, but – like Poland – severely lacked capacity for top-class research. To what extent did the Bologna Process reinforce the market-oriented trend? Romanian governmental policy-makers largely saw the Bologna Process as a means of preparing Romanian universities for globalization and the knowledge economy – and not as a framework for merely cosmetic changes to the system (Interview with the Director of the Unit of Higher Education, Ministry of Education. December 2006. Bucharest.). During the 2000s, Romania enhanced universities' autonomy with regard to substantive, procedural and funding issues, thus bringing them in line with the Polish system. The government relinquished control over accession criteria, size, personnel affairs and research profiles, while an accreditation body (ARACIS) was established in 2006. This carried out university evaluations based on an all-encompassing catalogue of performance indicators, including a combination of self-evaluation, external assessment and peer review, as well as student evaluations.

Following a Western trend, the entrepreneurial capacities of university rectors were also strengthened, allowing for the internal allocation of funds on a performance basis. Forced by the ministry of education to attract external funding and compete for complementary state funding, universities were compelled to build up the managerial abilities of their governing bodies in order to secure and manage adequate funding for sustaining and expanding operations. One additional symptom of marketization was the active incorporation of external stakeholders into university programme design. Here, numerous Romanian universities followed the models that emerged at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca and the University of Iaşi, which involved employers' representatives in designing strategic university plans based on anticipated economic and administrative developments in Romania (Marga, 2000: 252).

However, the 2000s also heralded to some extent the reawakening of the academic profession, which attempted to more effectively assert its collective interests. For example, the Bologna Process was referenced by leading Romanian academics as an argument against the marketization of HE and as a justification for Humboldtian notions of academic freedom (Deca, 2015). With this in mind, the government was increasingly perceived by leading academics as an enforcement agency, which was instilling a neo-liberal educational paradigm incompatible with the historical traditions of the country and the notion of academic autonomy (Interview with the Deputy Director of UNESCO-CEPES. December 2006. Bucharest.).

A new direction in Romanian HE?

As for the most recent phase, I argue that Romania is following a similar policy trajectory to Poland, albeit from a different starting point. While Polish HE until recently essentially pursued a model of structural Humboldtism without the capacity for world-class research, Romania rapidly

embraced numerous market-oriented instruments, but also lacked a strong research component. To an even greater extent than Poland, Romania has struggled economically both before and after EU accession in 2007. Despite the emergence of a vibrant service sector, it has proved unable to establish domestically owned high-tech industries based on Romanian human capital.

In this regard, recent observers have argued that Romania has increasingly demonstrated core features of the *dependent market economy* paradigm in the 2000s (Ban, 2013; Tarlea, 2015). This is reflected in an increasingly large share of inward foreign direct investment as a percentage of GDP, the sell-off of domestic industry to foreign enterprises and a focus on labour-intensive, low-scale commodities instead of upgrading domestic research, development and industrial innovation (Ban, 2013; Ioan and Ioan 2015). Despite this, the Romanian economy grew even more rapidly than that of Poland in the 2000s and deindustrialization was essentially halted. Thus, the *dependent market economy* model initially seemed vindicated. However, the financial crisis after EU accession shed severe doubts on the competitive viability of this model. These existential fears were compounded by the extremely weak performance of Romanian universities in essentially all international HE rankings (see Boyadjieva in this issue) as well as EU research programmes.

Against this background, policy-makers are currently focusing on the HE system as a means of shrugging off Romania's status as a new market economy excessively dependent on Western technology, innovation and investment capital (Bacila, 2015; National Research and Development Strategy 2007–2013, 2007). Like in Poland, we are witnessing a multi-directional strategy, which is specifically aimed at reviving the research capacities of universities and enhancing scientific production for the sake of greater economic independence through re-industrialization. This reform catalyst is explicitly referenced in the National Pact for Education from 2008, which was signed by the leaders of all the larger political parties and then President Băsescu: 'Convinced that without a firm and coherent intervention, without a permanent effort, we are risking a stagnating economy, and that our dependence on innovations that come from outside the country will grow' (National Pact for Education, 2008: 1).

Nearly simultaneously, Romania laid out a strategy for advancing national developments and innovation through research. Here, the government bemoaned the fragmented and underfunded research and development system, the high average age of researchers, the low scientific public output and, in particular, the weak synergies between the research profession, its socio-economic environment and technological enterprises. The lack of domestic risk capital and technology transfer was viewed as a major impediment to research productivity (National Research and Development Strategy 2007–2013, 2007; see also Bacila, 2015). Explicitly referencing the EU's Lisbon strategy (National Research and Development Strategy 2007–2013, 2007) the paper calls for a substantial increase in Romania's research and development capacities and increased international visibility of Romanian science, as well as the application of knowledge for the sake of socio-economic development (National Research and Development Strategy 2007–2013, 200; Sandu, 2013).

How is this discursive turn reflected in the HE governance model? Like its Polish counterpart, the 2011 Romanian HE Act aims to further embed the research mission of the universities according to the lines of action addressed above. Driven by the new discourse centred on notions of knowledge transfer and capitalization, reforms not only aim to enhance scientific production per se, but also explicitly push for a stronger orientation towards the economic utility of research output. Specifically, the law pursues a policy of explicit structural differentiation by developing three separate categories for Romanian public HE institutions: advanced research universities, teaching and research universities and teaching-oriented universities. Hence, each university is called upon to draw up a mission statement and consolidate internally along the proposed lines.

As with the case of France (Dobbins and Knill, 2014) and Poland, the government is also relying on new financial incentives to expand both the utility-oriented and fundamental research mission of universities. Specifically, it is pushing for multiple HE institutions to merge into university

consortia, in order to not only combine their fundamental research capacities, but also better cater to the needs of external stakeholders (Curaj et al., 2015). With this in mind, the state is providing new funds for universities and university consortia to create business start-ups.

At the same time, Romania has introduced several pilot projects for doctoral education which are roughly aligned with individual components of the German *Exzellenzinitiative*. The perceived need for excellence in HE has led to an increasing focus on doctoral research in universities based on a new set of indicators to evaluate the progress of dissertation projects. As a result, the government is promoting thematically distinct doctoral schools affiliated with individual universities to enhance scientific production (Curaj et al., 2015).

Like Poland, however, Romania is also experiencing multi-directional development. For example, the 2011 law brings Romania somewhat more in line with the academic self-rule model. While in the 1990s and 2000s the managerialization of university administration was promoted, leading to the formal separation of academic and administrative management, the new law introduces various administrative modifications which strengthen the academic research profession and increase its means for self-governance. Importantly, the academic senate, which generally consists of 75% teachers and researchers and 25% students (Law of National Education 2011, Art. 208), is elevated to the highest decision-making and deliberation forum at university level (Law of National Education 2011, Art. 213). As a result, universities are now de facto given the opportunity to choose their own internal governance model and, in most cases, have opted for a more collegial leadership system and thus 'structural Humboldtism' (Curaj et al., 2015). Importantly, and contrary to a previous focus on managerial skills (Dobbins, 2011), the new law stresses the academic qualifications of the rector as a prerequisite for employment. Moreover, the academic senate is given new means of controlling and auditing executive management and, interestingly, is even given powers to reorganize or dissolve poorly performing departments or university institutions (Law of National Education 2011, Art. 195). As a result, senates are encouraged to draw on the university budget to create new independent research units within the university (Law of National Education 2011, Art. 131). Hence, by strengthening the position of the academic community there are visible efforts to structurally reinforce the Humboldtian character of universities, with a focus on both instrumental research and knowledge (i.e. substantive de-Humboldtization) as well as non-utilitarian research (i.e. substantive re-Humboldtization). Simultaneously, we can also observe a re-emergence of the state as a 'designer' and 'evaluator' (Neave, 1998) of the university system, leading to the perceived state-imposed overzealous marketization of the university and research system. Specifically, the Romanian government has doubled down on the use of bibliometric data (Sandu, 2013) and expanded domestic ranking systems not only for entire HE institutions, but also study programmes and individual university researchers.

Subsequently, the relationship between the state and the academic profession has become more antagonistic. This was reflected, in particular, in newly embraced and then revoked meritocratic practices of the National Research Council, which aimed to attract émigré researchers back to Romania. In 2011 the research budget was increased by 50% and allocated for the first time based on performance under Minister Funeriu. At the same time, the Council introduced strict minimal qualifications for researchers competing for grants and incorporated foreign peers into the proposal review process. However, the subsequent government partially reversed this policy and imposed deep retroactive cuts to the grants already awarded in 2011 (Abbott, 2013), leading to the mass resignation of all 19 members of the National Research Council (Laursen, 2013). In addition, the government again sought to gain a grip over university governance structures by reversing a ban on members of parliament holding positions as university rectors. The widespread outrage among the academic community was compounded by the fact that the government also revoked the previous requirement for international peer review of grant proposals, which was largely seen as a concession to crony, non-meritocratic academic circles in Romania. However,

the grant competition held in 2013 attempted to appease the academic community by focusing on research which catered to ‘real socio-economic needs’ and incorporated private sector capital (Laursen, 2013).

Comparative conclusions

As shown above, the HE policy trajectories of both countries provide an interesting case for assessing and reassessing the phenomenon of policy convergence in the age of globalization, Europeanization and rapidly changing economic dynamics. While the Polish economy underwent a phase of shock therapy and liberalization in the 1990s, its public HE system proved relatively immune to pressures for stronger marketization. Instead, the academic community quickly re-consolidated to reinstate a pre-communist Humboldtian ‘skeleton’, i.e. a structural framework largely in line with academic self-rule without strong capacities for research excellence. By contrast, Romania, a country which initially stood out with its slowly developing market economy, essentially implemented a form of shock therapy in public HE. This resulted in the introduction of a myriad of market-oriented steering mechanisms at governmental and university level. In other words, the Romanian government drew on its historical tradition of all-embracing control and imposed a series of isomorphically inspired Western policies with regard to universities, while the Polish government took a more restrained stance and only injected market mechanisms into the academic heartland in small doses.

As argued above, neither of these countries significantly departed from the policy frameworks chosen in the 1990s during the Bologna Process. However, what both governance models had in common was that they proved inept in channelling academic outputs and scientific production into global economic competitiveness based on domestic human and industrial capital. I argued that new economic hierarchies reinforced by EU accession, combined with the weak performance of CEE universities in international rankings, have blatantly exposed the vulnerabilities of both countries and – at least on paper – have to a degree triggered the re-convergence towards a similar mixed model. Put simply, we can essentially observe ‘more state’, ‘more market’ and ‘more Humboldt’ in both systems. Romania is visibly converging towards the (previously weakly institutionalized) Humboldtian ideal of the research university, while Poland, whose research capacities were hollowed out in the early post-communist phase, is re-converging towards the same ideal. In both systems, we are simultaneously witnessing an assertive re-emergence of the state, after it largely retreated from the inner workings of universities in 1989 in Poland and the late 1990s in Romania. In both Poland and Romania, the state has taken a more assertive stance to the extent that it is imposing new competitive, market-oriented mechanisms to boost university output and ensure more utilitarian linkages with the business community. Thus, the state is increasingly functioning as the ‘market engineer’ of autonomous universities geared towards both fundamental and utilitarian research.

Figures 1 and 2 now offer a simplified overview of the market-oriented and Humboldtian structures as well as policy instruments implemented in the first phase (c.1990–2005) and in the more recent period (c.2005–2015). For the sake of simplicity, the *state-centred model* is omitted, as traces of it largely vanished in the post-communist period – in Poland immediately in 1990 and in Romania with Marga’s large-scale reform package (1997). As for the present phase, we observe a new form of state steering to the extent that the state – in contrast to the traditional ‘process control’ model – is increasingly becoming the ‘enforcer’ of the new hybrid model and ‘evaluator’ (Neave, 1998) of university output. In Poland, which was previously largely in line with the Humboldtian model, the state is now adding more ‘market’ to the mix while also (re-)institutionalizing both the fundamental and utilitarian research mission of universities. Romania, which rapidly shifted from



Figure 1. Signs and symptoms of (state-enforced) marketization and Humboldtization in Polish public HE.

the *state-centred model* to the '*marketized*' model in the late 1990s, is now adding an extra dosage of both Humboldtization (i.e. strengthening the research mission of universities, more academic self-rule) and state-enforced market measures (i.e. bibliographic data, performance-based research funding) to boost research capacities.

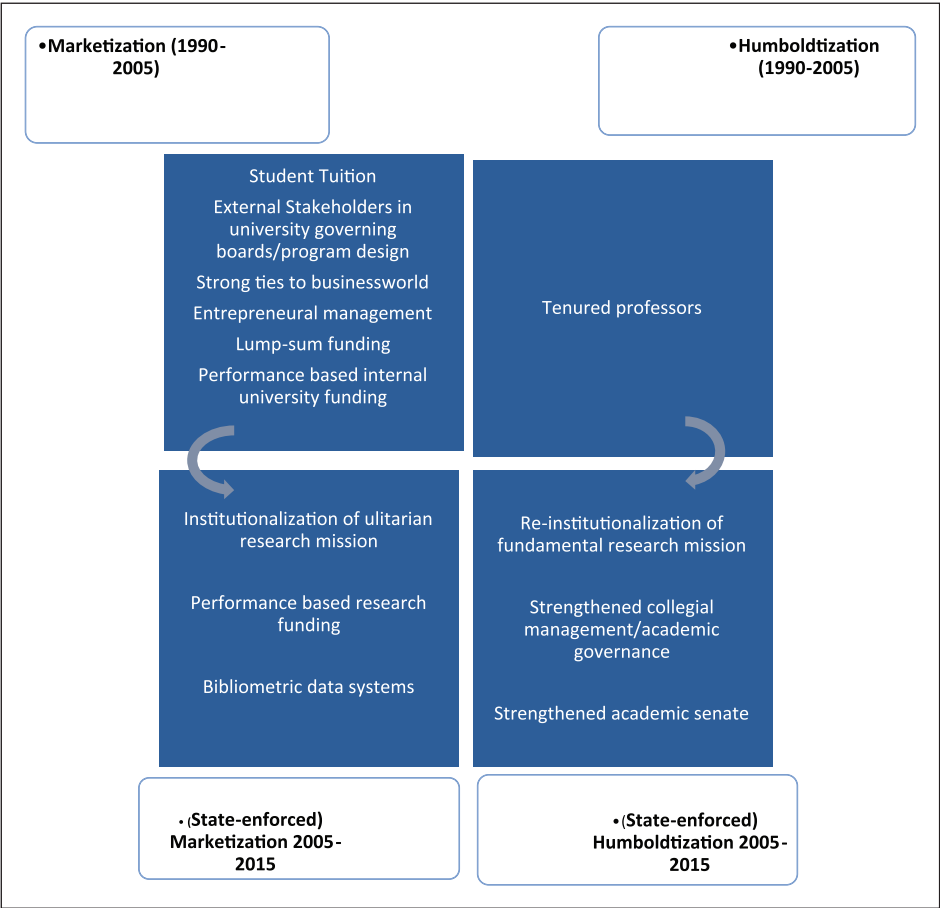


Figure 2. Signs and symptoms of (state-enforced) marketization and Humboldtization in Romanian public HE.

As outlined above, the forces of isomorphism and historical institutionalism are still visibly at play in CEE, but have more recently produced a different outcome, as both systems are ‘re-converging’ towards a new hybrid governance model which could be defined as ‘state-enforced competitive Humboldtism’ with a stronger fundamental and applied research mission. On the one hand, the new hybrid steering strategy reinvigorates the historical ideal of the research university with new competitive incentives for the academic community. Thus, it caters to historical sensitivities by enabling academics to reclaim the ‘research university’ (see also Dakowska in this issue). On the other hand, isomorphism, i.e. the implicit or explicit alignment with what is perceived as best practice, appears to still be a virulent force, as the institutional modifications in both countries are visibly reminiscent of the reform trajectory of France and Germany. Unlike in the 1990s and 2000s, however, the main reform driver is no longer that of coping with uncertainty, rather it is emancipation from the economic hierarchies that European integration has reinforced.

These observations will, hopefully, inspire future researchers to assess how this new governance paradigm has enhanced the innovative and industrial capacities of both countries and bolstered their standing in the global political economy. Scholars should focus, on the one hand, on

actors' responses and responsiveness to the new governance structures, in particular whether universities acquiesce to new state demands and incentives for more industrial collaboration and applied research, and whether national businesses systematically invest in education. On the other hand, scholars may draw on concrete indicators of the success of the new governance model, for example potential increases in the number of patents, the number of domestically owned firms, and public and private expenditure on research and development. Finally, researchers should assess whether the aspired strengthening of the Humboldtian fundamental research mission is reflected in enhanced publication output, thus increasing standing in international (research-based) HE rankings and EU research funding programmes.

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Notes

1. In 1811 the institution merged with Viadrina University (Frankfurt/Oder) and was renamed *Schlesische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Breslau*.
2. Funding was weighted according to the number of academic titles of doctor, *habilitowany doktor* and professor (Jongbloed, 2003: 132). It hence partially rewarded institutions for employing highly qualified academics.
3. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Art. 70) guarantees that education is free of charge in public sector institutions, but that tuition may be levied for certain educational services offered by public HE providers.
4. It consisted nearly exclusively of high-ranking academic staff, including 35 professors, 10 university lecturers and a small number of student representatives (OECD, 2006: 77).
5. *Konferencja Rektorów Akademickich Szkół Polskich*.
6. In exchange, the 2005 HE law granted universities more extensive autonomy over personnel, devolving discretion with regard to appointments and staffing complements to the university level (Duczmal, 2006: 948).

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