

The Deinstitutionalization and the Reinstitutionalization of the Research Mission in Polish Universities

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Overview (1)

Argument: top Polish public universities became divided institutions (social sciences vs. natural sciences). There were different individual academic (=faculty) and institutional trajectories in these two research areas in 1990-2010

- the academic fields in which educational expansion occurred (huge numbers of students in social sciences).

- fields in which the expansion was much less pronounced (natural sciences).

- **Conceptual approach:** using the concepts drawn from new institutionalism in organizational studies, we view the 1990s as the period of the **deinstitutionalization of traditional academic rules and norms in public universities**, with growing uncertainty about the core of the academic identity.
- This uncertainty led to different individual academic life strategies (teaching-focused vs. research-focused) on an individual plane; and to different measurable research output at the national level.

Overview (2)

- **Data:** internationally visible publications and research-related academic promotions in different academic fields, changing over time.
- In the expansion era (1990-2005), prestigious public research universities became excessively teaching-oriented; in the period of educational contraction, their currently teaching-oriented segments are expected to become research-intensive or face severe underfunding.
- Social sciences are especially endangered – following the „research orientation” collapsing collectively in the past two decades.
- **Policy dimension:** the new legislation (2010-11) is interpreted as a return to a traditional academic normative consensus, with increased emphasis on, and funding for, the research mission.

Introduction (1)

- The processes of the deinstitutionalization of traditional academic rules, norms and habits in the public sector were closely linked to the individual and institutional focus on teaching prevalent in the expansion era. And in particular linked to the dramatic growth of the private sector, with multiple-employment opportunities.
- We argue that prestigious Polish public universities, after about fifteen years of the co-existence with the demand-absorbing and teaching-oriented private sector, became fundamentally divided institutions (SS vs. NS).

Introduction (2)

- Traditional academic rules and norms in top public universities according to which research was of key importance to the academic enterprise were gradually weakening throughout the 1990s in the expansion-related, soft academic fields.
- The price of this process of weakening of traditional academic rules in soft (as opposed to hard) fields was high, though: it was the prolonged institutional (as well as individual academic) focus on the teaching mission, at the expense of the research mission which becomes crucial in a new wave of reforms.

Introduction (3)

- The teaching-oriented segments of public universities are expected by policymakers to become much more research-intensive.
- Low research engagement in the past two decades in social science segments of higher education institutions may be a substantial obstacle to the implementation of current reforms. It can lead to institutions being heavily internally differentiated by research intensity of their major components.
- The policy challenge today is to implement new, competitive governance and funding approaches to institutions which are internally divided by institutional cultures.

Introduction (4)

- The 1990s: the growing uncertainty about which academic behaviors were legitimate and which were not, and what was the core of the academic identity in research universities.
- Recent higher education legislation reinstitutionalizes temporarily suspended (from a longer, historical perspective) traditional rules and norms. Its implementation is viewed as the beginning of a transformation from one order into another order.
- The new law of March 2011 brings the research and teaching missions in top universities back to a healthy balance, much needed in knowledge-driven economies in which the role of university knowledge production is growing (Bonaccorsi et al. 2007, Kwiek 2013).

Conceptual Framework

- Deinstitutionalization implies that existing institutional rules and practices, descriptions, explanations, and justifications, are becoming more contested. „There is increasing uncertainty, disorientation, and conflict” (Olsen 2010: 128): **Poland 1990-2005.**
- Deinstitutionalization means processes by which “institutions weaken and disappear”; refers to such phenomena as “diluted sanctions”, “eroding norms”, “diminished force of obligatory expectations”, “the erosion of cultural beliefs and the increasing questioning of what was once taken for granted” (Scott 2008: 196, Djelic and Quack 2008: 301-304). **Poland 1990-2005.**
- Reinstitutionalization implies, inter alia, “a transformation from one order into another, constituted on different normative and organizational principles” (Olsen 2010: 128). **Poland: current reforms.**

Empirical Background (1)

- There are no direct indicators to refer to processes of deinstitutionalization of the research mission in universities.
- We suggest here to use proxy indicators by which to “measure” the scale of changes.
- We shall compare the internationally visible knowledge production in different academic disciplines in Polish universities and compare the research engagement of Polish academics across different academic disciplines.

Empirical Background (2)

- The Polish university-based knowledge production: low from a European comparative perspective.
- A simple bibliometric analysis (performed on the basis of the SCImago Journal & Country Rank dataset and referred to the 1996-2010 period) demonstrates a powerful disciplinary divide in Polish universities between hard and soft fields.
- Instead of analyzing Polish research output in all academic fields, we focus on the **strongest and the weakest fields** in the last fifteen years, from global and regional (Central European) comparative perspectives:
 - using the number of internationally recognized publications in a field as a proxy indicator for research engagement of academics in a given field in the countries studied.

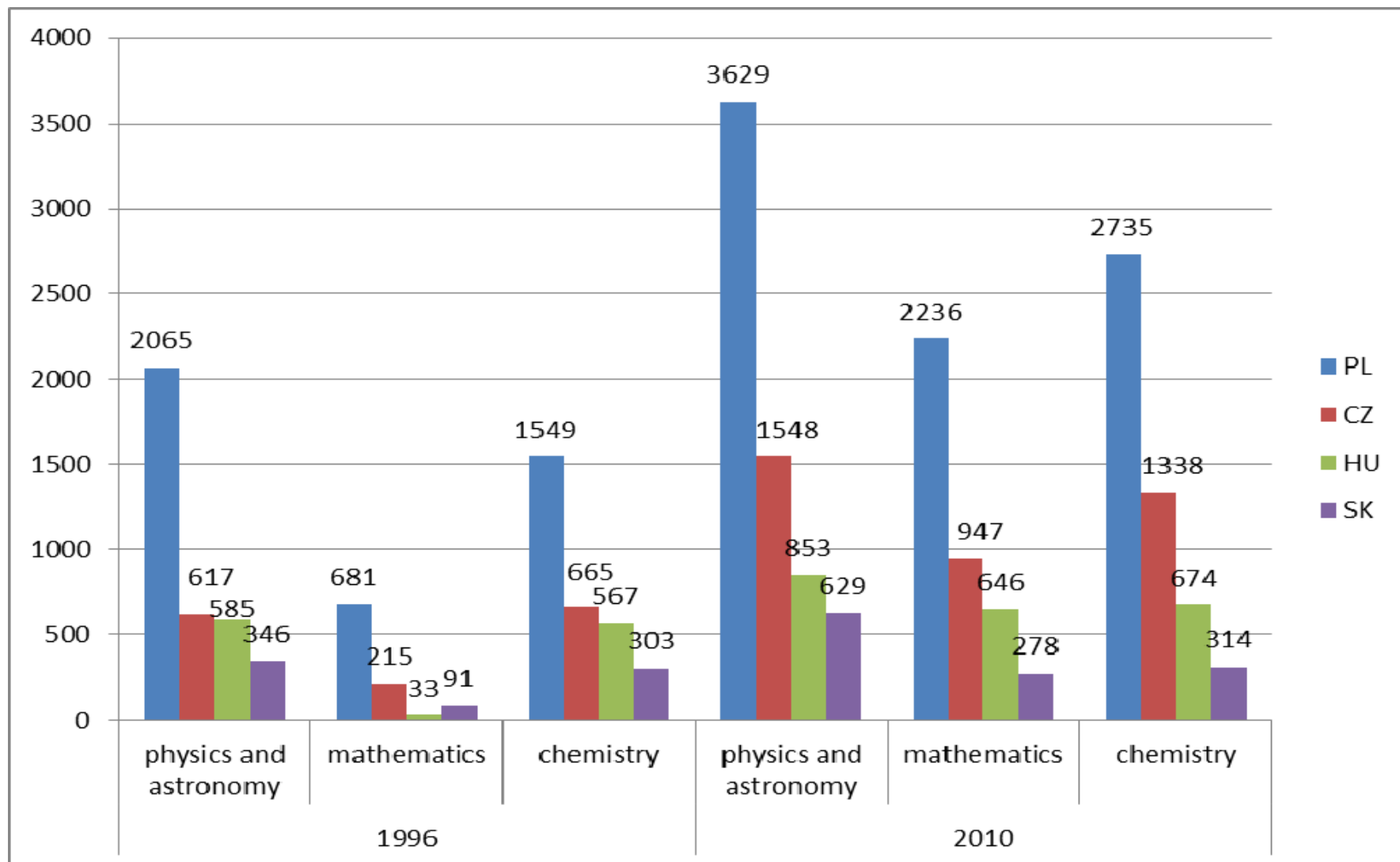
Empirical Background (3)

- The three strongest academic fields throughout the 1996-2010 period have been physics and astronomy, mathematics, and chemistry (globally ranked 13, 13 and 14 in 2010, by the number of publications). In 1996, these three fields were globally ranked roughly in the same, relatively high positions (13, 15 and 12, respectively).
- The weak fields, in contrast, include arts and humanities, social sciences, and economics, econometrics and finance, ranked relatively low in 2010 (39, 39 and 37, respectively). In 1996, two of the three fields – arts and humanities, and social sciences – were ranked much higher (24, 24, respectively; the third field was 37).
- We study here the comparison with three much smaller systems: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.
- We compare the trajectories in the 1996-2010 period in two distinct groups of academic areas (strong performers and weak performers).

Empirical Background (4)

- From a regional CEE perspective, Polish chemists, physicists and astronomers, and mathematicians published more international papers than their colleagues from the three other countries combined both in 1996 and in 2010 (see below). Their publications accounted for 55.7% and 54.3% of all publications from the four countries in respective years.
- The supremacy of Polish academics in NS, in statistical terms, has been maintained throughout the period,

Chart 1. The number of publications in the academic fields of “physics and astronomy”, “mathematics” and “chemistry”, by country, 1996 and 2010 (own calculations based on SCImago Journal & Country Rank, 2012).



Empirical Background (5)

- The cross-country differences in national research outputs in 1996-2010 in soft, expansion-linked fields: data show (see below) that research output in those fields, as opposed to hard fields, has been decreasing systematically compared with research output of regional CEE competitors.
- In 1996, in soft areas, the share of Polish research output in the output from the region was relatively high in both arts and humanities (55.6%) and in social sciences (48.8%). In 2010, though, in the arts and humanities, the number of Polish internationally visible publications was only about half of the number of publications of their colleagues from the Czech Republic and Hungary, and only slightly more than those from Slovakia.

**The share of Polish publications in selected hard academic fields,
1996 and 2010, in %**

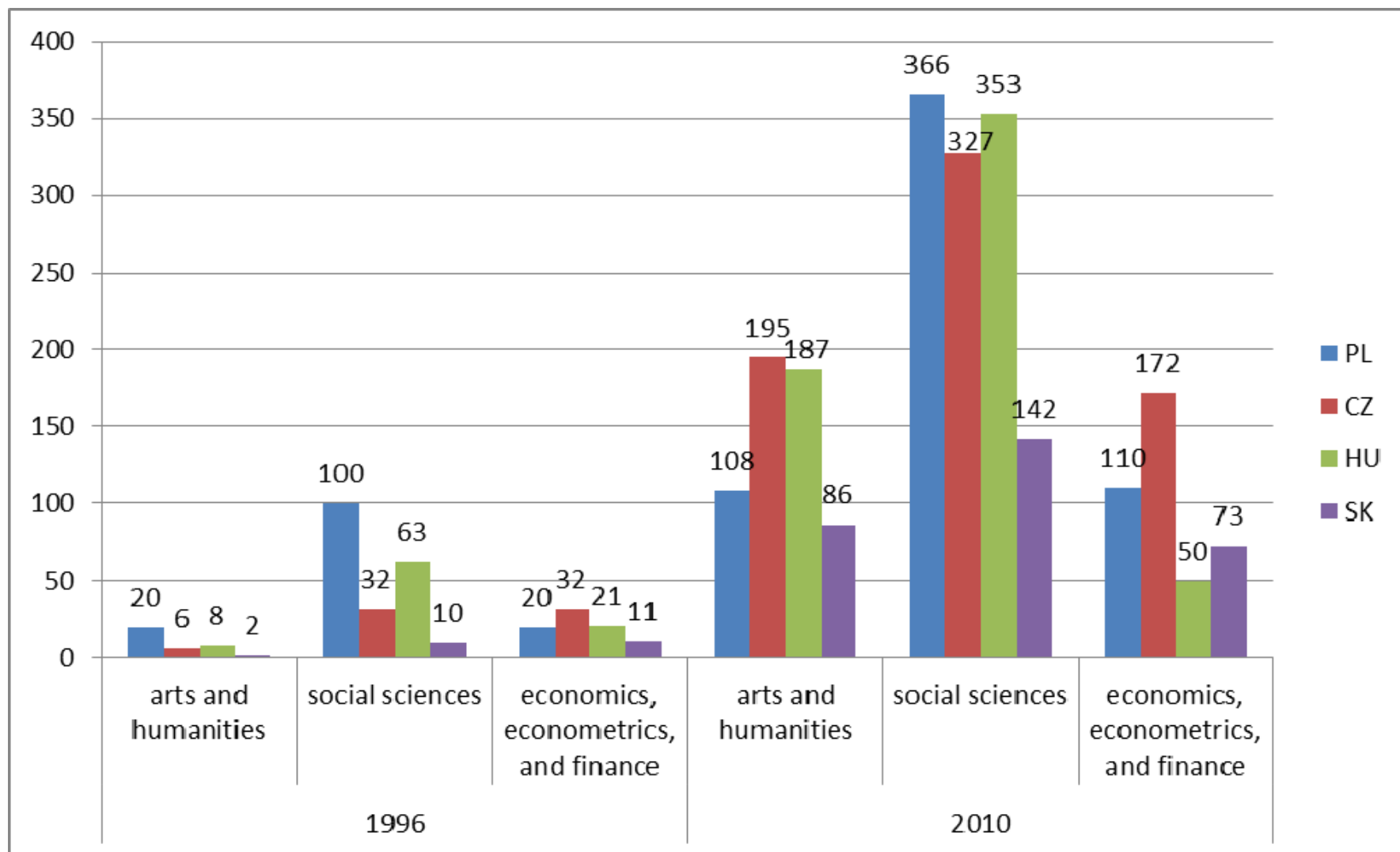
- Table 1.

Academic fields	1996	2010
physics and astronomy	57.2	54.5
mathematics	66.8	54.4
chemistry	50.2	54.0
arts and humanities	55.6	18.8
social sciences	48.8	30.8
economics, econometrics, and finance	23.8	21.4
selected hard academic fields (combined)	55.7	54.3
selected soft academic fields (combined)	43.0	26.9

Empirical Background (6)

- The share of Polish publications in arts and humanities and in social sciences in publications coming from the four regional economies studied slid dramatically from 55.6% to 18.8%; in social sciences it slid from 48.8% to 30.8% in 1996-2010.
- Research productivity across academic areas and across the four regional higher education systems clearly shows that soft areas in Poland were powerfully affected by the processes of the deinstitutionalization of the research mission in universities.

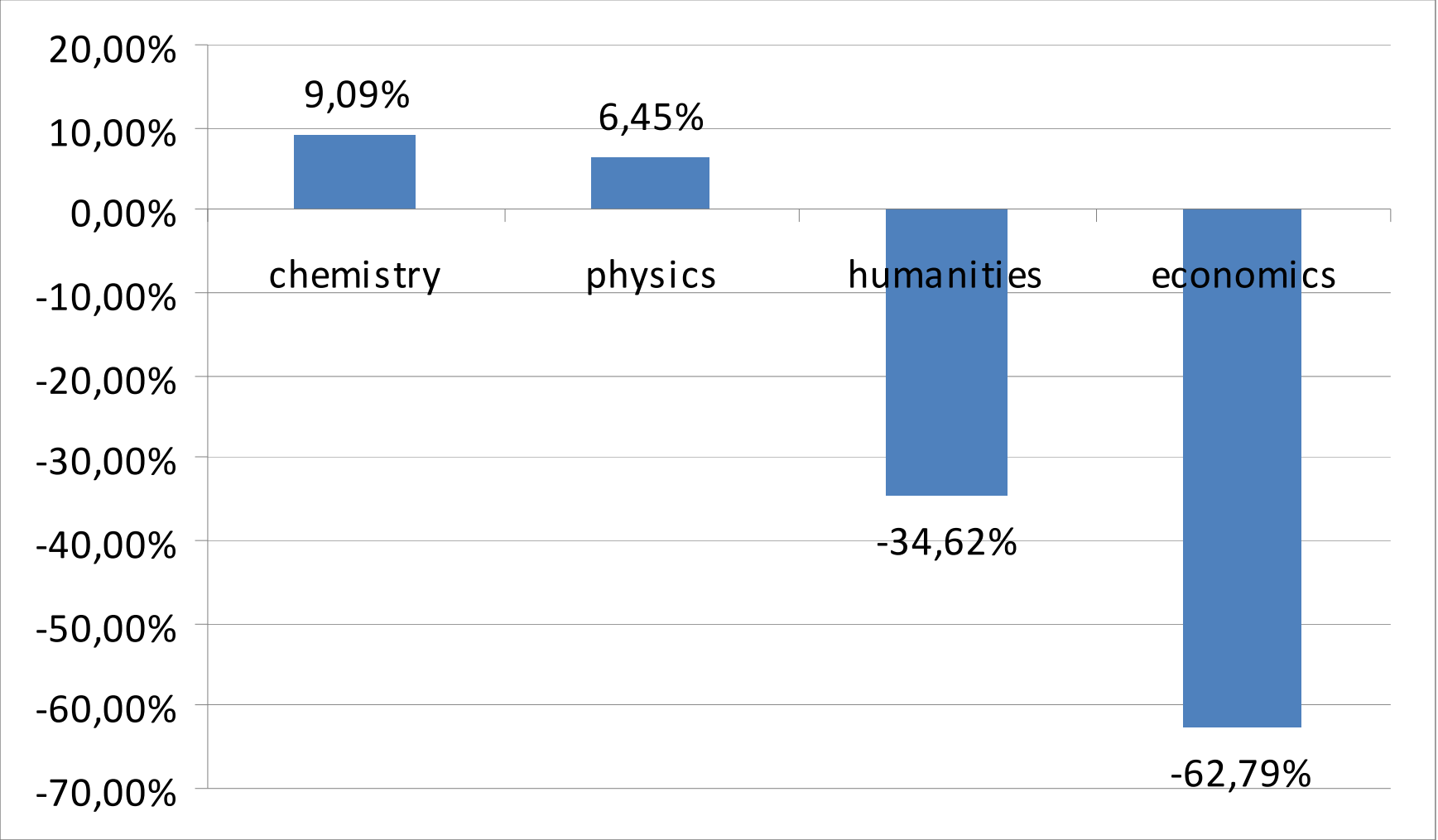
Chart 2. The number of publications in the academic fields of “arts and humanities”, “social sciences”, and “economics, econometrics, and finance”, by country, 1996 and 2010 (own calculations based on SCImago Journal & Country Rank, 2012).



Empirical Background (7)

- Another proxy indicator to measure faculty research engagement across academic fields in the Polish case is the changing annual number of professorship titles (full professor) awarded in Poland in the last decade. We shall demonstrate cross-fields differences between hard and soft disciplines.

Chart 4. The change in the number of professorship titles in 1999-2010 in selected academic disciplines (in %).



Conclusions

- The devalorization of the research mission in research universities refers directly to those fields in which teaching expanded in both sectors.
- Both global and Central European comparisons in research production in 1995-2010 and inter-disciplinary comparisons of academic degrees awarded in Poland in 1999-2010 show the soft academic fields as those in which the traditional academic norms ruling in prestigious universities failed.
- Thus public universities have been increasingly becoming divided institutions, following different rules and engaging in different university missions. The taken-for-granted academic norms prevailing in research universities were suspended in several major academic fields (in soft disciplines) in the transition period of between a decade and a decade and a half.

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