

# University Reforms vs. Academic Beliefs and Attitudes. Towards Universities as Organizations

30th EGOS Colloquium, Rotterdam, June 3, 2014

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# Introduction (1)

- Reforming universities does not lead to their completed reforms (major European higher education systems). Reforming - leading to further waves of reforms as “reforms generate reforms” (Brunsson and Olsen 1993: 42-44).
- This is the Polish case - the most recent (2010-2012) wave of reforms is not perceived by policymakers as making universities finally “complete” or “true” or “fully fledged” organizations (Brunsson 2009, Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000).
- More legal changes and a new national strategy for higher education are expected to emerge in the next few years.
- Currently, visions of the university proposed by the academic community and visions of it proposed by reformers and policymakers (within ongoing reforms) are worlds apart.
- A study of recent reforms in the context of traditional academic self-protective narratives (at the collective level of the academic profession) and in the context of the Ivory Tower university ideals predominant at the individual level (as studied comparatively through a large-scale European survey of the academic profession).

# Introduction (2)

- Empirical evidence: about 3,700 returned surveys of Polish academics. The European dataset we use was produced in two international research projects focused on the academic profession (CAP: “Changing Academic Profession” and EUROAC: “The Academic Profession in Europe”). The data for eleven countries – Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.
- From a full weighted sample of 17,212 cases across 11 countries - only the cases of full-time academics (13,633) and academics working in universities (10,777). Excluded all part-timers and all academics employed in “other higher education institutions” (“universities” were defined by national research teams).
- Consequently, the data - about 9,000 (N = 8,886) cases. Polish academics analyzed - only those employed full-time in “comprehensive universities”.

# Introduction (3)

- A structural perspective of funding and governance: until 2010 Polish universities have remained largely unreformed (following the initial radical changes in 1989).
- Their adaptations to new postcommunist and market realities were much slower than adaptations of other public sector institutions (including social assistance, pension schemes, healthcare provision, and primary and secondary education - reformed in the period from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s).

# Introduction (4)

- Polish universities are viewed as - Johan P. Olsen's visions of university organization - "instruments for national political agendas" rather than as "institutions" (Olsen 2007: 26-28). They are no longer viewed by Polish policymakers as "specific organizations" (Musselin 2007: 78-79).
  - Recent reforms in Polish higher education – as well as decade-long reforms of the healthcare system – can be interpreted
    - as a way of "constructing organizations" out of public services,
    - as a way of "turning public services into organizations, or at least into something closer to this than ever before", or as systematic "organizational reforms" (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000).
    - as part of large-scale global attempts leading to "the rationalization of universities as organizations" (Ramirez 2006).
- As other organizations, universities in the new law of 2011, new accompanying regulations, and national strategies are increasingly expected to have clear goals and plans for attaining them, and are urged to become more formally organized.

# Rational, modern organizations

- Polish universities - as they emerge from new governance and funding architecture introduced in 2010-2012 - are no longer being viewed as traditional academic institutions:
  - they are increasingly being viewed (and urged to view themselves) as rational, modern organizations.
- Polish universities since 2010
  - involved in the process of being “turned into organizational actors” and
  - on their way of achieving “full organizational actorhood” (Krücken and Meier 2006: 253).

# Reformers and reformees

- Polish academics are expected to change their beliefs and behaviors in accordance with a new, instrumental university vision:
  - the value-based conflict between those reforming and those being reformed has been intensifying.
- The reformers and reformees are worlds apart.
- Our empirical research demonstrates that the Polish academic community holds beliefs
  - fundamentally incongruent with ongoing reforms; and
  - their views set them apart from European academic communities as well.

# Ivory Tower

- A shift in Polish policy thinking, clear direction:
  - away from the traditional Ivory Tower, faculty-centered and professorially-coordinated model,
  - towards the model in which the university's role is to consistently follow national political agendas.
  - with growing emphasis on socially- and economically-relevant research in ever more concentrated academic fields and institutions, according to strict national governmental priorities.



# Conflict about „basic values”

- The emergent conflict between the vision of the university shared by the academic community (the value-based “community of scholars” model, the model most strongly supported in Europe by Polish academics, as empirically shown through a study of CAP data) and its vision shared by the policy-making community (instrumental, externally-driven, extremely weakly supported by Polish academics)
  - is a conflict about what Howard R. Bowen and Jack H. Schuster’ (1986: 53) term “basic values”.
- Western European systems: this conflict has a tradition of several decades, Poland: this value-driven conflict only begins to emerge.
- One of the most collegial and a very much “professorially-coordinated” system in Europe is expecting to be brought in line (through current reforms) with other European systems, already driven increasingly by instrumental logics.

# Conflict and reforms

- The logics of current reforms dooms both models to be in a powerful conflict, grounded in the incommensurability of traditional academic values and rules shared by the academic profession - and values and rules promoted by higher education policymakers and reformers.
- Academic values and rules will be gradually gravitating towards the second, instrumental model.
- Organization and funding mechanisms in Polish universities are already becoming fundamentally transformed, most often along “global scripts” (Halliday et al. 2010) and a “worldwide and rationalized vision of progress” (Ramirez and Christensen 2013).
- Polish HE, one of the last European remnants of the collegially-coordinated “republic of scholars”, highly insensitive to external calls to be increasingly interacting with the society and the economy, is exposed to powerful national and international reform pressures.
- Polish reforms clearly meet the four basic attributes which make it easier to pursue reforms: reform ideas are simple, reforms are normative, they tend to be one-sided, and are future-oriented (Brunsson 2009: 91-92).

# Reforms (1)

- Universities and their management teams were given greater control over resource allocation and operations (still rarely used in practice).
- There is increasing institutional awareness that full costs for such resources as buildings or equipment and for own personnel need to be borne.
- For the first time, institutions are preparing elaborate missions and visions, short- and long-term strategic plans, define their customers and recognize competition in their strategic thinking.
- Increasingly, they elaborate their individual profiles and formulate their policy statements, performance reports and formulate their own objectives (as a way of “constructing their identity”, Brunsson 2009: 46-49).
- Clumsy as they often are, current strategy plans and performance reports are new to Polish university culture and begin to make all stakeholders think about universities in much more structured way.

# Reforms (2)

- New hierarchies are being constructed: rectors and their management teams have more freedom of choice but are increasingly held responsible for their institutions. A success of a university unit (or a university's staff member) is a success of an institution as a whole.
- Rectors, willy-nilly, increasingly become managers, and their central organizational units are being enlarged; accountability pressures, unknown until recently in Polish universities, grow every semester: all units and all academics are made accountable for what they do, in teaching, research, and third missions activities.
- New management accounting techniques and new auditing techniques, with new sophisticated software, are being massively introduced.

# Reforms (3)

- Universities are constructed as “rational” organizations (Brunsson 2009: 51-54): Polish rectors have to systematically forecast goals and objectives, as well as action alternatives and their preferences. “The subject for organizational rational analysis” is no longer faculties or department: it is a university as a whole, with its brand and reputation, position in national and international rankings, and local, regional, national and international “clients”.
- Objectives and actions are being systematically connected in strategic plans, and all results are being increasingly controlled by evaluation systems, so far mostly restricted to research outputs.

# The Ivory Tower empirically (1)

- The unfading power of the traditional Ivory Tower ideal in Poland.
- We analyze here four statements directly related to the Ivory Tower ideal (viewed here as the low connectedness of universities to the outside social and economic world
  - (percent “agreeing”; we refer to percentages of answers 1 and 2 combined, on a five-point Likert scale: from 1= strongly agree to 5= strongly disagree and from 1= very much to 5 = not at all, depending on the question; full-time academics, universities only):
    - ● “Scholarship includes the application of academic knowledge in real-life settings” (B5/2): Poland, together with Austria, ranks the lowest (59 percent agreeing vs. the European average of 74 percent).
    - ● “Faculty in my discipline have a professional obligation to apply their knowledge to problems in society” (B5/8): Poland ranks the lowest (40 percent agreeing vs. the European average of 57.3 percent).
    - ● “Emphasis of your primary research: applied/practically oriented” (D2/2): Poland ranks the lowest (45.5 percent very much vs. the European average of 60.9 percent).
    - ● “Emphasis of your primary research: commercially oriented/ intended for technology transfer” (D2/3): Poland ranks the lowest (9.8 percent very much vs. the European average of 15.4 percent).

# The Ivory Tower empirically (2)

- Conclusion: Polish universities differ substantially from universities in the ten comparator European countries: they seem much more isolated from the needs of society and economy.
- They are closer to the ideal of the Ivory Tower than universities in any other European system studied based on academics' beliefs.
- Limited „academic entrepreneurialism” (index) and the lowest „government influence” (index).
- Our study shows an uncommonly low – compared with other European countries – level of readiness on the part of university academics to professionally connect with the outside world. It is demonstrated at the level of academic beliefs and attitudes.

# Confrontational reforms

- From a cultural-institutional perspective on university reforms, as summarized by Christensen (2011: 506), there is a major difference between reforms that are “compatible” with the basic cultural norms and values and reforms that are “confrontational”.
- Polish reforms: clearly “confrontational”, they bring about “cultural incompatibility”, and consequently, they are more likely to be bounced back, modified or only partly implemented.
- Their underlying norms and values are incompatible with cultural traditions of Polish universities: they are, in fact, aimed at changing academic cultures.
- The arguments behind reforms powerful, though: Polish universities are not viewed by either international reviewers (the OECD, the World Bank), the Polish society, or the policymaking community as “broadly inclusive”, “socially useful”, and “organizationally flexible”, to use the three core elements of Ramirez’ “universalistic model of progress and justice” (Ramirez 2006: 239).



# Reforms - details

- Reformers' message was clear:
  - socially embedded universities will be more open to public funding, albeit allocated according to fundamentally new rules of the game (increasingly individualized, highly competitive grants provided by new, peer-driven, independent national councils).
- To be “broadly inclusive”, universities will have to be “organizationally flexible”, and hence much more autonomy was given to universities and their top research performing basic units:
  - no limits in the list of study programs,
  - university councils legally possible (although still not required),
  - deans elected or nominated,
  - rectors from the outside of the university as an option,
  - institutional structures left at institution's discretion (mergers and abolishment of faculties and departments), public-public and public-private institutional mergers as an option, and more.

# Conclusions (1)

- The clash between the two divergent university visions in the coming years seems therefore unavoidable, leading to powerful and potentially increasing backlash on the part of the academic community to ongoing and further reforms.
- At the same time, the reformed system is already in place, it is changing academic beliefs and attitudes and academic behaviors much faster than the academic community wishes to imagine.
- The passage from (Olsen's) one order to another order is already in place: adaptation processes are beginning to be felt in the system, e.g. through massive turning to new funding bodies for research funds.
- Until recently, Polish universities were relatively immune against both market forces and competition pressures. They are now being increasingly viewed from an instrumental, rather than institutional, perspective.

# Conclusions (2)

- As elsewhere in Europe, Polish reforms are leading to gradual construction of universities as ever more formal organizations (rather than socially-rooted, traditional, and distinct institutions).
- Also as elsewhere in Europe, “institutional reforms breed new demands for reforms rather than making reforms redundant” (Olsen 1998: 322).
- Some gains, some losses; huge, consequential processes in progress:
  - Polish HE will be becoming ever less isolated from the problems of the outside social and economic world.
  - At the same time, its organization and funding mechanisms will become fundamentally transformed.
- Thank you!

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