

12 Constructing universities as organisations

University reforms in Poland in the light of institutional theory

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The changing social, economic, cultural, and legal setting of European universities increasingly compels them to function in a state of permanent adaptation to renewed funding and governance modes (Krücken, Kosmützky and Torka 2007; Paradesi *et al.* 2009). Reforming universities does not lead to their complete reform, however, as examples from major European higher education systems show, reforming, instead, is leading to further waves of reforms as ‘reforms generate reforms’ (Brunsson and Olsen 1993: 42–44). This is the case in Poland where the most recent (2009–2012) wave of reforms is not perceived by policymakers as making universities finally ‘complete’ or ‘true’ or ‘fully fledged’ organisations (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. Thus universities are thought to be ever more ‘complete’, without a belief that modernisation policies will make them ‘complete’ soon (Seeber, Lepori and Montauti 2015).

This chapter shows that apart from changes at the systemic and institutional levels, successful reform implementation struggles with a gradual change in academic beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Currently, visions of the university proposed by the Polish academic community, and visions of it proposed by Polish reformers and policymakers (within ongoing reforms), are worlds apart. I shall study recent reforms in the context of specific academic self-protective narratives being produced in the last two decades (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).

Institutions change both swiftly, radically – and slowly, gradually. Until recently, research literature on institutional change was focused almost exclusively on the role of radical changes caused by external shocks, leading to radical institutional reconfigurations. Research literature about the gradual, incremental institutional change has been emergent for about a decade and a half now (Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Streeck and Thelen 2005, 2009; Thelen 2003). Polish higher education provides interesting empirical grounds to test institutional theories.

1 Both types of transformations (radical and gradual) can lead to equally permanent
 2 changes in the functioning of institutions, and equally deep transformations of
 3 their fundamental rules, norms, and operating procedures. Questions about
 4 institutional change are questions about characteristics of institutions under-
 5 going changes. Endogenous institutional change is as important as exogenous
 6 change (Mahoney and Thelen 2010: 3). Moments in which there emerge
 7 opportunities for performing deep institutional reforms are short (in Poland these
 8 moments occurred in 2009–2012), and between them there are long periods of
 9 institutional stasis and stability (Pierson 2004: 134–35). The premises of theories
 0 of institutional change can be applied systematically to a system of higher education
 1 which shows an unprecedented rate of change and which is exposed to broad,
 2 fundamental reform programmes.

3 4 **Universities: under construction as organisations –** 5 **and under siege as institutions?** 6

7 *The urgency of reforms and the ‘rationalisation of universities as* 8 *organisations’* 9

0 Until 2009, Polish universities were largely unreformed, following the initial radi-
 1 cal changes right after the collapse of communism in 1989: their adaptations to
 2 new postcommunist and market realities were much slower than adaptations of
 3 other public sector institutions, including social assistance, pension schemes,
 4 healthcare provision, and primary and secondary education. The latter were sub-
 5 stantially reformed in the period from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. In the
 6 1990s and 2000s, the higher education system was steered by 1990 and 2005
 7 laws on higher education. The core of the system, including its relatively non-
 8 competitive funding modes, heavily collegial governance modes, and a complicated,
 9 obsolete, multi-level system of academic degrees and careers, remained largely
 0 untouched until the early 2010s (see Kwiek (2014a) on ‘structural reforms’).

1 Universities were not a high public priority and the global and European
 2 standing of Polish academic research and of Polish institutions was not publicly
 3 debated until the last wave of reforms. The key policy terms were expansion and
 4 massification (and major change processes were related to privatisation; as Pinheiro
 5 and Antonowicz (2015) classified this period: ‘more is better’, as opposed to the
 6 next two periods of massification in Poland: ‘more is a problem’ and ‘more but
 7 different’). However, the expansion period characterised by privatisation is over
 8 – and Poland experiences a contraction period increasingly characterised by
 9 de-privatisation or, alternatively, re-publicisation (see Kwiek (2015d) for a detailed
 0 account). Importantly, in the absence of convincing ideas about the future of
 1 universities produced by the academic community in the 2000s, new ideas were
 2 produced by governments involved in reform programmes.

3 In these new government-produced ideas about the urgency of reforms,
 4 universities were viewed as, to use Olsen’s seminal visions of university organisa-
 5 tion, ‘instruments for national political agendas’ rather than as ‘institutions’

(2007: 26–28; see Fumasoli and Stensaker (2013) on universities as instruments vs. institutions and Diogo, Carvalho and Amaral (2015) on institutionalism and organisational change). They were 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, 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: 721). They can also be interpreted – in a different set of concepts – as part of large-scale global attempts leading to ‘the rationalization of universities as organizations’ (Ramirez 2006). As with other organisations, universities, according to the new law of March 18, 2011 and in new accompanying regulations, were expected to have clear goals and plans for attaining them, and were urged to become more formally organised. As Ramirez argues in a global context, ‘the idea that an entity should be influenced by the “best practices” of other similar entities is more likely to take place if the entities are imagined as formal organizations rather than as historically rooted social institutions’ (2006: 240–41). And this was the Polish case. Polish universities, as they emerged from a new governance and funding architecture introduced in 2009–12, were no longer being viewed by the policymakers as traditional academic institutions: they were viewed, and urged to view themselves (with limited success), as rational, modern organisations. Thus, since 2009, Polish universities have been clearly involved in the process of being ‘turned into organizational actors’ and have been on their way to achieving ‘full organizational actorhood’ (Krücken and Meier 2006: 253).

The changing academic profession

However, apparently, it is one thing to change the university and it is another thing to change the academic community. But the academic community in fact *is* the university: reformed universities cannot function without academics embracing reforms. Thus Polish academics are expected to change their beliefs and behaviours in accordance with a new, instrumental university vision: the value-based conflict between those reforming and those being reformed has been intensifying since 2009. The reformers and reformees are worlds apart as never before following 1989.

We shall explore the roots of the conflict, analysing empirical data on academic beliefs and attitudes: what Polish academics think about their academic work. Empirical research tends to demonstrate that the Polish academic community holds beliefs fundamentally incongruent with ongoing reforms; what is more, their views set them apart from European academic communities as well.

The empirical evidence comes from a study of a large-scale Polish dataset (CAP ‘Changing Academic Profession’, 3,704 returned surveys, and 60 in-depth, semi-structured interviews). Our analysis shows that Polish universities are still operating according to traditional, Humboldtian rules of the game, that is, the rules of the

1 university as a ‘rule-governed community of scholars’ – referring to the four
2 visions of the university organisation presented by Olsen (2007: 29–31) – as an
3 institution based on academic values, to an extent unparalleled in Western
4 European higher education systems. While, in Western Europe, the co-existence
5 of different models is prevalent, in Poland reform attempts are intended to replace
6 a still ruling traditional model, transformed only marginally in the last 20 years,
7 with Olsen’s model of the university as an ‘instrument for national political
8 agendas’. The Polish policymakers did not seem to have envisaged any co-existence
9 of various models; instead, a revolutionary replacement of models seems to have
0 been proposed, in theoretical terms. I strongly believe that, considering the
1 circumstances (low national research production, low international research
2 visibility, low individual research productivity, and a high share of research non-
3 performers), the model proposed in 2009–12 is the best fit for the Polish system
4 today. Furthermore, the current reforms should be viewed as a first step only;
5 more consistency, determination, and public funding are needed to pursue them
6 further. Consequently, I share a belief that a long line of incremental changes may
7 finally turn out to be transformative (Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Streeck and
8 Thelen 2009).

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Institutional and instrumental views of the university

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A shift in Polish policy thinking about the university has a clear direction: away from the traditional Ivory Tower, faculty-centred 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).

The Polish reform programme, as in most other European countries, is driven by an instrumental view of the university, while the logic of changes suggested by the Polish academic community is institutional (Olsen 2007). The instrumental/institutional divide is where powerful tensions related to new reforms have their roots. In Poland, as opposed to Western European systems, it is academically driven institutional logic in the last two decades that seems to have deinstitutionalised the research mission in public universities. It is with the new institutional logic of the recent reform package that the research mission can be reinstitutionalised in top research universities, but under new conditions, with new funding modes, and guided by strict national priorities; for a full picture of the deinstitutionalisation/reinstitutionalisation cycle, see Kwiek (2012). The traditional research mission seems to have been only recently defended by policymakers. The emergent conflict between the vision of the university shared by the academic community (see Kwiek 2015b) and its vision shared by the policymaking community (instrumental, externally driven, extremely weakly supported by Polish academics) is a conflict about what Bowen and Schuster (1986: 53) term ‘basic values’.

The logics of current reforms doom both models to be in a powerful conflict, though. The conflict is 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 probably gradually gravitate towards the second, instrumental model. Organisation and funding mechanisms in Polish universities are already becoming fundamentally transformed, most often along ‘global scripts’ (Halliday, Block-Lieb and Carruthers 2010) and a ‘worldwide and rationalized vision of progress’ (Ramirez and Christensen 2013). Polish higher education, one of the last European remnants of the collegially coordinated ‘republic of scholars’, highly insensitive to external calls to be increasingly interacting with society and the economy, is exposed to powerful national and international reform pressures. Polish reforms clearly meet the four basic attributes that make it easier to pursue reforms: reform ideas from 2009–12 are simple, reforms are normative, they tend to be one-sided, and are clearly future-oriented (Brunsson 2009: 91–92).

Reforms as the reinstitutionalisation of research

Current reforms, among other things, bring about the powerful reinstitutionalisation of research practices. Institutionalisation includes the following three dimensions: increasing clarity and agreement about behavioural rules, increasing consensus concerning how behavioural rules are to be described, explained and justified, and increasing shared conceptions of what legitimate resources in different settings are and who should have access to, or control over, common resources (Olsen 2010: 127). Deinstitutionalisation, in contrast, implies that ‘existing institutional borders, identities, rules and practices, descriptions, explanations and justifications, and resources and powers are becoming more contested and possibly even discontinued. There is increasing uncertainty, disorientation, and conflict’ (Olsen 2010: 128). And, finally, reinstitutionalisation implies, inter alia, ‘a transformation from one order into another, constituted on different normative and organizational principles’ (Olsen 2010: 128). Deinstitutionalisation is a process by which the legitimacy of an established or institutionalised organisational practice erodes or discontinues (Oliver 1992: 564). Institutionalised organisational practices can ‘fall into disfavor or disuse’ (Oliver 1992: 566). Polish universities as organisations were largely unable to reproduce its previously taken-for-granted (research-related) actions. For about 15 years (1990–2005), especially in soft academic areas, major research-related sets of practices were widely questioned; teaching-related sets replaced in academic imagination previously well-established research-related sets of organisational practices. Now, with two new national funding agencies with competitive research funding, and with the introduction of new research assessment exercises of all academic units (termed ‘parameterisation’, a Polish version of the British Research Excellence Framework (REF)) with results directly linked to the level of state subsidies, the research mission of Polish universities seems to be back in the centre of the academic enterprise.

Polish universities are increasingly viewed by policymakers today from an instrumental policy perspective, and one of the reasons is the perceived failure in the growth in internationally visible knowledge production. The failure results

1 from the processes of the deinstitutionalisation of research practices in top
2 universities: practices continued but they were very weak, by international
3 standards. Current Polish reforms re-construct and re-invent research activities
4 through new research funding modes and new parameterisation exercises. They
5 view the disappointingly low research productivity of the 1990s and early 2000s
6 as a foundation for the construction of new research architecture. In fact,
7 policymakers ‘rationalize universities as organizations’ (Ramirez 2006) and are
8 leading to their gradual construction as ever more formal organisations (rather
9 than socially rooted, traditional and distinct institutions). The new law on higher
0 education seems to guide universities to become substantially more research-
1 intensive. The recent legal change can be interpreted as the reinstitutionalisation
2 of the research mission of Polish universities, or a passage from one normative and
3 institutional order to another (see Kwiek 2012).

4 The national focus on increasing student numbers following 1989 came at the
5 expense of the research mission of top Polish universities and the relative decline
6 of national academic research output in 1995–2010, especially in ‘soft’ as opposed
7 to ‘hard’ research fields, when compared with the major Central European systems
8 of Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. The relative decline of
9 the national research production in 1995–2010, and its gradual increase between
0 2010 and 2014 – which can be clearly linked to the reforms and new, competitive
1 research funding – are presented in Figures 12.1 and 12.2 for the three strongest
2 academic fields and the three weakest academic fields in Poland according to the
3 SCImago Journal & Country Rank dataset (2015). Polish research, from a global
4 bibliometric perspective, is invisible in the global research communication
5 networks, although it has had a stable position in the number of publications in
6 the last decade of 2004–2014 (in 2004, Poland was ranked 19th, and in 2014,
7 20th, as the SCImago Journal & Country Rank dataset 2015 shows). While the
8 number of publications in Poland is indeed increasing (by 74 per cent in
9 2004–2014), so it is in other competing countries from ranks 10–20. From a
0 regional bibliometric perspective of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Poland
1 is ranked 2nd, following Russia, but the gap between Poland and other CEE
2 countries, in most areas, has been closing in terms of publication numbers. The
3 2014 data clearly show that the number of publications increased substantially in
4 the 2010–2014 period in both hard and soft fields. Although there may be several
5 interrelated reasons for this surge, I link it to reform processes started in 2009.

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The potential for changes

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Organisation studies show that no matter how strong external discourses
surrounding the institution are (here: global, transnational and EU-level), the
potential for changes and a range of possible reforms is always relatively limited,
and the period for institutional adaptation – relatively long. It is therefore difficult
to assume that the intentional direction of changes in the academic sector as a
whole will coincide with their actual direction of changes. Often in the history of
the university, the significant scope of changes remains determined on the one

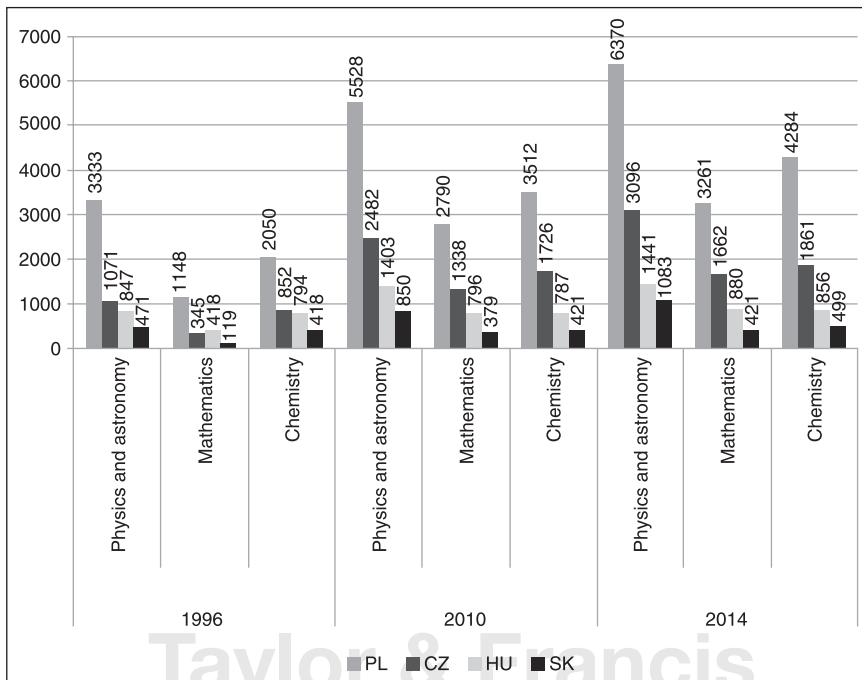


Figure 12.1 The number of publications in physics and astronomy, mathematics, and chemistry, by country, 1996–2010–2014

Source: author's calculations based on the SCImago Journal & Country Rank dataset (2015)

hand, by redefined tradition, and, on the other hand, by sheer contingency. 'Great expectations', as shown three decades ago by Cerych and Sabatier (1986), often lead to 'mixed performance'. On the one hand, policymakers tend to view institutions, higher education institutions included, as still 'incomplete'. Reforms can be interpreted as renewed attempts to make universities 'complete' organisations. But on the other hand, universities are heavily path-dependent, reform-resistant institutions, with strong roots in their (national) organisational heritage (Schreyögg and Sydow 2010). In the Polish case, reforms are clearly rooted in what Ramirez (2006: 25) terms 'universalistic models of progress and justice that transcend the national ecologies of universities'. Polish reforms are heavily reliant on global (and EU-level) concepts of the university in a postindustrial age: in particular, they are rooted in the OECD discourse, transmitted via international and national experts and ministerial staff.

In ongoing reforms across Europe, there is a hidden dynamic of changes in relationships between the state, or the major sponsor of teaching and research, and academics, or the major beneficiary of state sponsorship of the academic enterprise and the core of all higher education systems. The academic profession has a fiduciary role to play, though: constitutive rules and practices are not easily

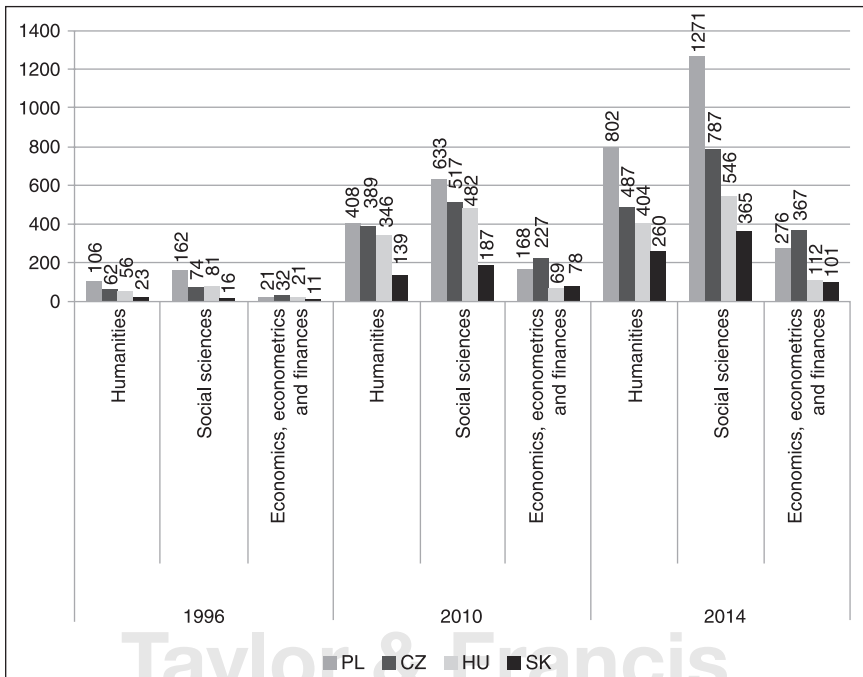


Figure 12.2 The number of publications in humanities, social sciences, and economics, econometrics and finances, by country, 1996–2010–2014

Source: author's calculations based on the SCImago Journal & Country Rank dataset (2015)

changeable – they take time to root and take time to change. The modernisation agenda of European universities means a change in rules constituting their identity. Institutions are defended by insiders and validated by outsiders and because their histories are encoded into ‘rules and routines’, their internal structures cannot be changed or replaced arbitrarily (March and Olsen 1989). From this perspective, Polish reforms may be leading to a head-on collision between the academic and policymaking communities. recent higher education reforms

The clash between different logics

Public sector reforms across the Western world have been viewed as attempts at ‘constructing organizations’, as Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) argue:

Constructing organizations involves the setting up or changing of entities in such a way that they come to resemble the general and abstract concept of organization . . . [T]raditional public services in many countries have lacked some of the key aspects of organization. They can be described, at the most, as conspicuously ‘incomplete’ organizations . . . In fact, many public sector

reforms can be interpreted as attempts at constructing organizations. This interpretation provides some clues as to why the reforms occurred at all, why they acquired their particular content, and how they were received.

We shall interpret here Polish reforms as (1) constructing Polish universities as organisations, with the three relevant elements of identity, hierarchy, and rationality (Brunsson 2009) and (2) turning Polish universities into organisational actors, with the four relevant elements: accountability, the definition of goals, the elaboration of formal structures, and the rise of the managerial profession (Krücken and Meier 2006). Such an analytical framework is very useful for the interpretation of the when, the why, and the how of Polish reforms.

In general, reforms, and the public debates accompanying them, in Poland are driven by an instrumental view of the university: in this view, the university

is involved in a set of contracts. Support, economic and otherwise, depends on contributions. Change reflects a continuous calculation of relative performance and costs, and the University, or some of its parts, will be replaced if there are more efficient ways to achieve shifting objectives.

(Olsen 2007: 27)

The logic of the policymaking community as expressed in Polish reforms is clearly instrumental – while the undeclared and not explicitly formulated logic of the Polish academic community is traditional and institutional.

An institutional perspective, in contrast to an instrumental perspective, assumes that constitutive rules and practices have a value in themselves and that ‘well-entrenched institutions reflect the historical experience of a community, that they take time to root and that they are difficult to change rapidly and radically, except under special circumstances such as widely agreed-upon performance crises’ (Olsen 2007: 27). In the last two decades, universities in Central Europe have been operating under specific conditions linked to their past: prior to 1989, they had been operating under communist regimes for almost three generations. Therefore, in the region, the basic underlying ideas of the university, its rooted constitutive rules and practices, are less socially relevant than in Western systems. In Western Europe these ideas, rules, and practices have been taking root for the last half a century, together with the emergence of the post-war Western European welfare systems in their different forms (see Kwiek 2015a).

From the state to the intermediary level: funding and governance reforms

In the wake of 2009–12 reforms, major aspects of funding and organisation of higher education were moved from the level of the state to the intermediary level of the new institutions. New governance arrangements encompass new important national bodies. They include: two independent and publicly funded national research councils, one for fundamental research (NCN) and another for applied

1 research (NCBR); the renewed Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA); and
2 the national Committee for the Evaluation of Scientific Units (KEJN). The two
3 national research councils allocate funding on a competitive basis to individual
4 academics and research teams for all research areas; the accreditation committee
5 evaluates and accredits study programmes (and, since 2012, institutions) across
6 all public and private sectors; and the evaluation committee provides a large-scale,
7 periodical assessment of the research output of all basic academic units (about
8 1,000, usually at the faculty level) through ‘parameterisation’ and ‘categorisation’
9 procedures. The new bodies either directly allocate public funding (in the case of
0 both national research councils), or provide input to the national Ministry of
1 Science and Higher Education which is then directly linked to funding levels (in
2 the case of both accreditation and evaluation committees).

3 While before the 2009–12 reforms, the state (through the Ministry) was
4 directly involved in coordinating higher education, in the new governance
5 architecture, higher autonomy for both institutions and academics is combined
6 with substantially higher levels of accountability. The new intermediary institutions
7 are, in principle, independent from the state in that they are either directly
8 managed by academics elected by the academic community at large or indirectly
9 influenced by academics through their powerful governing boards. Thus either
0 directly or indirectly, the four new institutions are managed and/or governed
1 by academics through their democratically elected representatives. There is,
2 however, a substantial cost resulting from higher levels of autonomy; namely,
3 stronger accountability through rigorous systems of reporting and increasing
4 bureaucratisation of the whole higher education system.

5 Increasingly, academic outputs in both teaching and research are being assessed,
6 benchmarked, and linked (at an aggregated level of academic units or at an
7 individual level in the case of project-based research funding) to public funding
8 levels. Detailed bibliometric assessments of individuals and academic units
9 increasingly matter in financial terms. Overall, Poland is gradually implementing
0 a performance-based research funding system, with funding levels linked either
1 directly (institutional funding for academic units) or indirectly (grant-based
2 funding for academics) to research outputs. The level of public research subsidies
3 is declining, while the level of public competitive research funding is increasing,
4 which lies at the core of ongoing changes. Consequently, the role of the four new
5 bodies located in the coordination system between the universities and the state
6 is becoming crucial. In simple terms, the state leaves most funding decisions to
7 the quasi-market of competition forces institutionalised in new intermediary
8 institutions. That said, it continues to define the levels of public funding, research
9 priority areas, and the primary division of public funds between the three broad
0 areas of life sciences, natural sciences, and social sciences and humanities.

1 A new national ‘research assessment exercise’ body, KEJN, formed in 2010, has
2 been crucial for the implementation of recent reforms. It is a consultative body
3 to the Ministry and consists of experts from the academic community, nominated
4 by the Ministry. Its role is a comprehensive assessment of research (and research
5 and development) activities conducted in all ‘basic units’, that is, institutes of the

Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS), research institutes and (mostly) faculties in higher education institutions (through sophisticated bibliometric tools). The assessment process is termed ‘parameterization and categorization of basic scientific units’. Units are being assessed in the so-termed groups of common assessments, with respect to specificities of each group as well as the size, types, and profiles of units.

With the 2009–12 reforms, a new multi-level system of higher education governance has been introduced. The state has diminishing power in the organisation and management of individual institutions and in allocating public subsidies for teaching and research grants. The role of intermediary peer-run institutions is heavily increasing, as is the role of students conceptualised as consumers with consumer rights guaranteed by the state. As part of the reforms, the role of national-level institutions which are governed by academics selected by their peers is on the rise: academics are responsible for the allocation of research funds in the NCN and the NCBR; for the form and execution of the national research assessment exercise performed by the KEJN; and for the national accreditation and quality assurance schemes governed by the PKA.

Higher autonomy . . . or lower?

Thus, in theoretical terms, Polish universities in the 2009–12 period of reforms were given more autonomy (the ongoing passage is from prior ‘low formal autonomy but high actual autonomy’ to ‘higher formal autonomy . . . but lower autonomy in reality’ (Christensen 2011: 511)). They were also given more funding – but it was made available according to new rules of the game. More generally, OECD-inspired reforms in Poland were heavily influenced by globalised rules of the game: in a kind of ‘catching-up’ process, Polish reforms are bringing universities closer to what Ramirez and Christensen (2013) termed ‘global rules of the game’ that increasingly impinge on universities.

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 their own personnel need to be borne. For the first time, institutions are preparing elaborate missions and visions, short- and long-term strategic plans, defining their customers and recognising 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: 46–9). 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 a much more structured way. Also, new hierarchies are being constructed: rectors and their management teams have more freedom of choice but are increasingly held responsible for their institutions which means, among other things, an erosion of trust-based relationships in universities, as Samier (2010: 68–71) rightly argues. The success of a university unit (or a university’s staff member) is one of an

1 institution as a whole. Rectors, willy-nilly, increasingly become managers, and
 2 their central organisational units are being enlarged; accountability pressures,
 3 unknown until recently in Polish universities, grow every semester: all units and
 4 all academics are made accountable for what they do, in teaching, research, and
 5 third mission activities. New management accounting techniques and new
 6 auditing techniques, with new sophisticated software, are being widely introduced.
 7 Universities are constructed as ‘rational’ organisations (Brunsson 2009: 51–4):
 8 Polish rectors have to systematically forecast goals and objectives, as well as action
 9 alternatives and their preferences. ‘The subject for organizational rational analysis’
 0 is no longer faculties or department: it is a university as a whole, with its brand
 1 and reputation, position in national and international rankings, and local, regional,
 2 national and international ‘clients’. Objectives and actions are being systematically
 3 connected in strategic plans, and all results are being increasingly controlled by
 4 evaluation systems, so far mostly restricted to research outputs.

5 In Krücken and Meier’s terms, Polish reforms are aimed at turning the university
 6 into ‘an integrated, goal-oriented entity that is deliberately choosing its own
 7 actions and that can thus be held responsible for what it does’ (2006: 241). For
 8 the first time since 1989, Polish universities were ‘conceptualized first and
 9 foremost as *organizations*, having typical *organizational* problems and being in
 0 need for efficient *organizational* solutions’ (2006: 242). The trend towards
 1 accountability is powerful at all levels, from individual academics to universities as
 2 a whole. The definition of universities’ ‘goals’ increasingly replaces centrally
 3 imposed ‘tasks’, and mission statements and strategy plans are required by the new
 4 law. New offices are being opened, and the best example is the institutionalisation
 5 of technology transfer offices, also required by the new law, although present in
 6 Poland since at least 2000. Finally, ‘turning university into an organizational actor’
 7 refers also to the academic profession: Polish professors are increasingly involved
 8 in ‘rationalized administrative tasks beyond teaching and research’ (to use Krücken
 9 and Meier’s terms (2000: 242)) and there emerges a new, still scattered across
 0 Poland, cadre of university management profession, dealing with new auditing,
 1 accounting, quality assessment and other functions emergent with new law
 2 requirements (e.g. audits of European projects or ‘parametrization’ reports for
 3 individual faculties).

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 5 **Academic self-protection modes against reforms:**
 6 **‘national academic traditions’ and ‘institutional exceptionalism’**
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8 Comprehensive university reforms were not being introduced in Poland in the
 9 1990–2009 period. There were various reasons for the inability of the state to
 0 adjust universities more effectively to the changing environment but a crucial role
 1 was played by academic self-protection narratives produced in the period to let
 2 universities operate under the status quo. There is a clear link between academic
 3 beliefs (at an individual level – discussed in the next section) and what I term here
 4 ‘academic narratives’ (expressed at a collective level: publicly presented arguments
 5 in support of the status quo in academic governance and funding modes over the

last two decades). These self-protective narratives of the academic profession are still powerful enough to block a more positive approach to the implementation of reforms (see Kwiek 2014b, 2015c).

The academic community in Poland, as well as in other Central European countries, has been successfully producing powerful self-protecting narratives about universities as institutions which should be heavily guarded against any influence of market- or competition-oriented mechanisms. Throughout the region, the narratives of ‘national academic traditions’ and of ‘institutional exceptionalism’ were extremely successful. It is only in the last few years that supranational ideas (especially of the European Commission and the OECD) have been gaining enough strength to become gradually translated into national legislation, as in the Polish – and the Czech, Hungarian, and Romanian – cases. Consequently, self-protective narratives seem to be losing ground, especially among young academics strongly supported by new competitive funding mechanisms, and their social appeal is diminishing. Both narratives have become considerably weaker in the last few years, due also to prolonged public debates about the extremely low positions of Central European universities in global and European university rankings, which led to higher social pressures to reform higher education systems, eagerly used by governments.

The narratives of ‘national academic traditions’ and ‘institutional exceptionalism’ existed in internal and external versions: with respect to other public sector institutions locally (‘Polish universities are radically different from other Polish institutions’), and with respect to Western European universities internationally (‘Polish universities are radically different from Western European universities’). The message of the two narratives was that no cross-sectoral comparisons in Poland or intrasectoral and cross-national comparisons beyond Poland should make sense. The narratives were so powerful that, in general, privatisation policies, so widely spread all over the region and public sector, were basically not applied to the higher education sector except for revenue-driven, autonomously self-imposed, internal privatisation: charging fees from part-time students (Kwiek 2013). While pension systems in the region were widely privatised, and while healthcare systems in the region were also reformed and opened to privatisation through such means as the encouragement of emerging private, individual policy-based healthcare – the public higher education sector was relatively immune to both privatisation and marketisation trends, owing to the two socially convincing narratives, often in national variants. The narratives in question managed to keep the higher education sector practically unaffected by external pressures to reform and undisturbed by external stakeholders – including the state, students, and labour market representatives – for more than a decade. However, universities in Poland are no longer able to produce convincing social narratives in defence of their traditional roles in society. They are perhaps interesting but largely irrelevant for current and future challenges as defined nationally and internationally.

What is especially interesting in this context is the examination of the micro-level of academic beliefs and attitudes in order to see to what extent, if any, Polish academics differ from their Western European colleagues (see Kwiek 2015c). As

1 I shall demonstrate, the individual and collective levels studied here do converge
2 and Polish academics differ significantly.

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Academic beliefs and attitudes from a European comparative perspective

The low connectedness to the outside world: society and economy

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There is far-reaching congruence between academic self-protective narratives produced in the last two decades, discussed above, and current academic beliefs as empirically studied on a substantial sample of Polish academics, presented below. The narratives reflect what most Polish academics (or at least their most powerful segments) think about academic work. They are the emanation of individual beliefs to a collective level of publicly produced documents and publicly promoted views on the university as an institution.

I shall briefly explore here the persistence of the traditional Ivory Tower ideal in Poland which is in stark contrast with the very foundations of ongoing reforms. The clash between academics' visions of what constitutes academic work and policymakers' visions of it is striking. Even though reformers and reformees are on a collision course, reforms are being implemented in a 'business as usual' manner. Our empirical evidence comes from 3,704 returned surveys of Polish academics. The European dataset I 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 11 countries – Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom – were cleaned and weighted in a single European data set (I have worked on the final data set dated June 17, 2011 and created by R. Kooij and F. Löwenstein from the International Centre of Higher Education and Research – INCHER-Kassel, Germany). The survey questionnaire was sent out to the CAP countries in 2007 and to the EUROAC countries in 2010. Overall, the response rate differed from over 30 per cent (in Norway, Italy, and Germany), to 20–30 per cent (in the Netherlands, Finland, and Ireland), to about 15 per cent in the UK and about 10 per cent or less in Poland, Austria, Switzerland, and Portugal. From a full weighted sample of 17,212 cases across 11 countries, I analysed only the cases of full-time academics (13,633) and academics working in universities (10,777). I excluded all part-timers and academics employed in 'other higher education institutions' ('universities' were defined by national research teams). Consequently, the data here are drawn from about 9,000 (N = 8,886) cases. The international sample characteristics are given in Table 12.1.

We analyse here four statements directly related to the Ivory Tower ideal (defined as the low connectedness of universities to the outside social and economic world – which was one of the major arguments in favour of reforms in the governmental policy documents) and the percentage of academics 'agreeing'

Table 12.1 Sample characteristics by country

	<i>N</i>	<i>Universities%</i>	<i>Other HEIs%</i>	<i>Full-time</i>	<i>Part-time</i>
Austria	1,492	100.0	0.0	65.8	34.2
Finland	1,374	76.5	23.5	82.4	17.6
Germany	1,215	86.1	13.9	70.7	29.3
Ireland	1,126	73.3	26.7	91.2	8.8
Italy	1,711	100.0	0.0	96.9	3.1
Netherlands	1,209	34.4	65.6	56.0	44.0
Norway	986	93.3	6.7	89.7	10.3
Poland	3,704	48.3	51.7	98.0	2.0
Portugal	1,513	40.0	60.0	90.3	9.7
Switzerland	1,414	45.6	54.4	58.5	41.5
UK	1,467	40.8	59.2	86.5	13.5

Note: In Austria and Italy there was no distinction between ‘universities’ and ‘other higher education institutions’ in the sample.

with them; I refer to percentages of answers 1 and 2 combined, on a five-point Lickert scale:

- ‘Scholarship includes the application of academic knowledge in real-life settings’ (question B5/2): Poland and Austria rank the *lowest* (59 per cent agreeing vs. the European average of 74 per cent).
- ‘Faculty in my discipline have a professional obligation to apply their knowledge to problems in society’ (question B5/8): Poland ranks *lowest* (40 per cent agreeing vs. the European average of 57.3 per cent).
- ‘Emphasis of your primary research: applied/practically oriented’ (question D2/2): Poland ranks *lowest* (45.5 per cent very much vs. the European average of 60.9 per cent).
- ‘Emphasis of your primary research: commercially oriented/intended for technology transfer’ (question D2/3): Poland ranks *lowest* (9.8 per cent very much vs. the European average of 15.4 per cent).

As we can see, Polish universities differ substantially from those in the ten comparator European countries, as viewed from the micro-level perspective of individual academics: they seem to be much more isolated from the needs of society and economy. This micro-level picture of low connectedness to the outside world is complementary to the macro-level picture provided by institutional and national higher education and research and development statistics.

Compatible or confrontational reforms?

From a cultural-institutional perspective on university reforms, as summarised 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

1 ‘confrontational’. Polish reforms are clearly ‘confrontational’; they bring about
2 ‘cultural incompatibility’, and, consequently, they are more likely to be bounced
3 back modified or only partly implemented. Their underlying norms and values
4 are incompatible with cultural traditions of Polish universities: they are, in fact,
5 aimed at changing academic cultures. The arguments behind reforms are power-
6 ful, though: Polish universities are not viewed by either international reviewers
7 (the OECD, the World Bank), Polish society, or the policymaking community as
8 ‘broadly inclusive’, ‘socially useful’, and ‘organizationally flexible’, to use the three
9 core elements of Ramirez’ ‘universalistic model of progress and justice’. As he
0 argues (2006: 239),

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2 universities change not only to remain solvent in the short run but also to
3 become or to continue to be legitimate in the longer run. Net of other
4 factors, the more universities embody broad views of progress and justice the
5 more legitimacy they enjoy.
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7 In the Polish context of postcommunist financial austerity of the first decade
8 and a half of the market transition, ‘legitimacy’ means most of all ‘public
9 subsidisation’. The reformers’ message was clear: socially embedded universities
0 will be more open to public funding, albeit allocated according to fundamentally
1 new rules of the game (increasingly individualised, highly competitive grants
2 provided by new, peer-driven, independent national councils). To be ‘broadly
3 inclusive’, universities will have to be ‘organisationally flexible’, and hence
4 much more autonomy was given to universities and their top research-
5 performing basic units: no limits in the list of study programmes, university
6 councils legally possible (although still not required), deans elected or
7 nominated, rectors from outside of the university as an option, institutional
8 structures left to an institution’s discretion (mergers and abolishment of faculties
9 and departments), public–public and public–private institutional mergers as
0 options, and more. The academic community views this increased ‘formal
1 autonomy’ as endangered by de facto decreased ‘actual autonomy’ (Christensen
2 2011) introduced by new funding formulas linked to periodic, detailed research
3 assessment exercises, decreased block grants for research (termed so far ‘statutory
4 funds’, and spread evenly among academic faculty regardless of their research
5 outputs) and transparent rules in competing for external research funds from
6 national funding bodies.

7 While, today, Olsen’s (2007) instrumental model of the university (an
8 ‘instrument for shifting national political agendas’) can be clearly viewed as
9 very weak in Poland on empirical grounds, it is the model powerfully pro-
0 moted by the international community of experts appealing to such umbrella
1 terms as the ‘knowledge-driven economy’; this model is also strongly pro-
2 moted by the policymaking community, heavily influenced by the OECD
3 report on Poland, swiftly translated into Polish (see Fulton *et al.* 2007).
4 This is *the* model of the policymaking community in the current reform period
5 in Poland.

Government influence and academic entrepreneurialism

I have assessed elsewhere in more detail (Kwiek 2015b) the applicability of this model to the Polish case through two composite indices. A high ranking of Poland in the ‘Index of Government Influence’ and its high ranking in the ‘Index of Academic Entrepreneurialism’ would mean a good fit between the model and the current Polish academic reality as perceived by academics. But the actual extremely low ranking of Poland in both indices clearly shows that Polish academics do *not* perceive this model as important, compared with academics in other European systems.

Poland ranks by far the lowest in Europe in the ‘Index of Government Influence’: the index is the aggregated and averaged value of answers to the question ‘At your institution, which actor has the primary influence on each of the following decisions?’ (question E1), with answers indicating ‘Government or external stakeholders’. The alternative options to choose from were ‘institutional managers’, ‘academic unit managers’, faculty committees/boards’, ‘individual faculty’ and ‘students’ (a list of all 11 decisions studied is shown in Table 12.2). What is important here are not absolute index values for particular countries but the relative ranking of Poland among others studied: for Poland, the composite index is by far the lowest. In other words, the influence of the government (and ‘external stakeholders’) on the functioning of universities in the 11 aspects selected for a cross-national analysis is very small, and certainly the lowest in Europe. The only significant difference in this index is that between Germany and that between Poland and all other countries. Poland is slightly above the European average in only two academic decisions: faculty promotions and determining budget priorities; in all others, it is either the lowest, or one of the lowest.

Also in the second composite index linked to the second of Olsen’s models of university organisation (2007) – the ‘Index of Academic Entrepreneurialism’ shown in Table 12.3 – Poland ranks the second lowest in Europe (following only Italy). This index is composed of five items usually linked with academic entrepreneurialism in research literature. Polish institutions do not emphasise academic entrepreneurialism as viewed through the above five dimensions. The index is the highest for Germany, followed by a cluster of three countries: Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK.

The conclusion is that this model does not seem to fit the realities of the Polish higher education system as perceived by Polish academics. Compared to other European systems, it is perceived by Polish academics as the least applicable. But a detailed analysis of the Polish higher education reform agenda shows that this is the dominating model at the level of official reform justifications and in the policymaking community.

Importantly, the reformed system is already in place; it is changing academic beliefs and attitudes and academic behaviours much faster than the academic community wishes to imagine. Adaptation processes are beginning to be felt in the system, for example, through widespread turning to new funding bodies for research funds.

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Table 12.3 'Index of Academic Entrepreneurialism'. Question E1: 'To what extent does your institution emphasize the following practices? (answers on a scale from 1 'very much' to 5 'not at all'). Figures in the table are percentage of full-time faculty in universities who responded 1 'very much' or 2 'a lot'.

	<i>Austria</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Ireland</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>Portugal</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Performance-based allocation of resources to academic units	43.9	61.3	55.3	28.0	29.4	63.9	54.1	36.6	18.6	39.6	43.1
Considering the practical relevance/applicability of the work of colleagues when making personnel decisions	21.6	27.1	20.7	13.9	10.1	19.4	18.1	14.4	9.2	25.9	18.0
Recruiting faculty who have work experience outside of academia	19.5	15.4	29.1	13.5	7.0	17.7	12.7	9.8	25.7	14.2	16.5
Encouraging academics to adopt service activities/entrepreneurial activities outside the institution	9.0	17.1	53.2	25.6	14.6	17.3	14.0	9.4	29.0	29.2	21.8
Encouraging individuals, businesses, foundations, etc. to contribute more to higher education	34.7	21.8	49.7	45.7	22.3	23.7	20.4	19.5	34.6	34.2	30.7
Total (Index)	128.7	142.7	208.0	126.7	83.4	142.0	119.3	89.7	117.0	143.1	130.1

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1 **Conclusions**

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3 Until the recent wave of reforms, Polish universities were relatively immune from
4 both market forces and competition pressures. Now, they are being increasingly
5 viewed from an instrumental, rather than institutional, perspective. As elsewhere
6 in Europe, current reforms rationalise universities as organisations and are leading
7 to their gradual construction as ever more formal organisations (rather than
8 socially rooted, traditional, and distinct institutions). Also, as elsewhere in Europe,
9 ‘institutional reforms breed new demands for reforms rather than making reforms
0 redundant’ (Olsen 1998: 322).

1 The chapter shows that the traditional pact between universities and society in
2 Poland is weak and narratives produced by academics about the future of universities
3 are no longer socially appealing. New ideas presenting universities as ever more
4 ‘complete’ organisations being produced by rational, comprehensive reforms are
5 promoted; they are being produced by national governments and rooted in
6 supranational ideas produced by the OECD and the European Commission.
7 Consequently, in view of large-scale reform attempts throughout the public sector,
8 Polish universities are vulnerable to changes with possibly undefined long-term
9 effects. To a higher degree than elsewhere in Europe, there is a strong need for
0 Polish universities to re-examine their social and economic roles, their contributions
1 to societal and economic needs, their fundamental allegiances and loyalties, their
2 norms and behaviours, ethos and foundations, in the face of changing legal and
3 financial environments that can determine their developments for the next decade.

4 While universities in Poland are increasingly being constructed as organisations
5 functioning according to the instrumental model of serving national policy
6 agendas, the academic community needs to scrutinise national variations of this
7 model, and be able to assess its long-term consequences.

8 At the same time, the 2009–12 wave of reforms is an important first step only:
9 the changes being introduced in Poland are both late and slow (in most EU
0 systems, they are one to two decades older and heavily supported with public
1 funds). In Poland, they have just started and are clearly underfunded. The
2 European comparative context matters substantially: if all competitors are running
3 fast, Poland cannot be satisfied with running slow just because until 2009 it was
4 merely walking. The distance between higher education, research, and innovation
5 systems in Poland and in major Western European systems is still increasing,
6 as all macro-level aggregated data show. This chapter demonstrates that at the
7 disaggregated micro-level of academic attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, the
8 differences between Poland and the ten European comparator countries are being
9 underestimated; possibly, these individual-level differences are as important as
0 differences in national funding efforts and governance structures.

1 A critical mass of institutional reforms in higher education, combined with
2 investments of public funding, has not been reached. And as long as it has not
3 been reached, a process of the accumulation of disadvantages will still be at work
4 in the Polish system: ever more national efforts may be leading to ever lower
5 national results. This chapter shows that Polish universities and Polish academics

differ from their Western European counterparts to degrees that might no longer be socially acceptable and, consequently, the self-protective discourses produced by Polish academics in the last two decades should no longer be accepted in discussions about current and especially future reforms. The global (and European) rules of the academic game have been rapidly changing – and Poland, in view of the mounting empirical evidence of its lagging behind, has to follow suit, even if it means constructing universities as organisations to a higher degree, and more consistently, than in other European countries.

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