

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

European Educational Research Journal

2017, Vol. 16(5) 519–528

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DOI: 10.1177/1474904117728132

journals.sagepub.com/home/eeerj



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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. Established in 1816 in the Duchy of Warsaw, a Polish state created by Napoleon Bonaparte, the

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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 Musial, 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.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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