

## A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON NEW MODES OF UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND ACTORHOOD

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Georg Krücken  
International Center for Higher Education Research (INCHER)  
University of Kassel, Germany

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### ABSTRACT

Higher education systems in Europe are currently undergoing profound transformations. At the macro-level, there is an increase in the number of students enrolled, subjects of study offered, and university missions that have gained legitimacy over time. At the second level changes are evident at the level of university governance. New Public Management reforms have put into question the traditional mode of governance that was based on the interplay of strong state regulation and academic self-governance. Under the current regime, new actors like accreditation and evaluation bodies or boards of trustees are emerging. At a third institutional level, profound changes can be observed at the university level itself. The university as an organization is transforming into an organizational actor, i.e. an integrated, goal-oriented, and competitive entity in which management and leadership play an ever more important role. In the following paper empirical evidence for social inclusion, new modes of governance and the organizational actorhood of universities will be presented. Furthermore, I will outline an agenda for comparative research. Although the United States is in all three respects a forerunner of what we are observing in Europe, the label "Americanization" is misleading. Instead, a global frame of reference as well as national path-dependencies need to be taken into account.

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The following paper discusses major trends in higher education that are shaping higher education discourse and practice in Europe. In order to depict these trends and stimulate some discussion for further empirical research, I will simplify enormously, not taking into account the heterogeneity and complexity of national higher education systems and organizational formats. An important point worth emphasizing is that we see some general trends in higher education that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. The concrete contextualization of the trends, however, might vary strongly, according to both national and organizational path-dependencies. The paper should first and foremost be seen as an agenda for comparative research between European states, Europe and the United States as well as other parts of the world.

Higher education systems in Europe are currently undergoing profound transformations. At the macro-level of society we can see an increasing inclusion of persons, subjects of study, and university missions. The second level where we can find changes is at the level of university governance. New Public Management reforms have put into question the traditional mode of governance that was based on the interplay of strong state regulation and academic self-governance. In this process, new actors like accreditation and evaluation bodies or boards of trustees are emerging. A third level where profound changes can be observed is at the university level itself. The university as an organization is transforming into an organizational actor, i.e. an integrated, goal-oriented, and competitive entity in which management and leadership play an ever more important role. Although the United States is in all three respects a forerunner of what we are observing in Europe, the label "Americanization" is misleading. Instead, both the embeddedness in a global frame of reference as well as national and organizational path-dependencies have to be taken into account.

### INCLUSION AT THE MACRO-LEVEL OF SOCIETY

The first level at which changes can be observed is at the macro-level of society. The common denominator used to capture different trends at the interface of higher education and society is the concept of "inclusion". Inclusion relates to the number of students enrolled, the subjects of study offered, and missions that have gained in legitimacy over time. This process is, firstly, a historical one that can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is critical to explaining current macro-level changes in

universities. Second, “inclusion” is a global trend in higher education that cannot be limited to Europe. Rather, European universities are part of this global trend.

Both points, the long-term historical development and the global character of “inclusion” are illustrated in the quantitative analysis by Meyer and Schofer (2007). What we cannot see in their macro-statistical data is the diversification of the student body that underlies the dramatic inclusion of people in the higher education sector. The diversification, on the one hand, relates to the social class background of university students. Since the late 1960s an increasing number of students with a working class background have gained access to universities (Trow 2010). Nevertheless, strong social inequalities remain, as aptly described by sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu. Although there is cross-national variation, social inequalities continue to be a persistent feature of all higher education systems, not only in Europe, but world-wide (Shavit et al. 2007). In Germany, for example, recent statistics indicate that 83 children out of 100 parents who have an academic degree enroll at universities, compared to only 23 out of 100 enroll whose parents do not have an academic degree.

Inclusion relates not only to social class, but also to gender. Researchers provide evidence of the historical and global dimension of this change (Ramirez and Wotipka 2001). Only about a hundred years ago women were not entitled to be enrolled at most European universities. In 1862 Paris became the first place to allow the enrolment of women in Europe and it took decades for other European universities to follow suit. Nowadays, we have a rather equal balance of male and female students enrolled at university in most European countries. In fact, women now outnumber their male counterparts in many institutions. In this regard, the inclusion process is far more advanced in relation to gender than social class background. Strong inequalities persist, however, with regard to the career trajectories of women at university. While the “glass ceiling” has become the dominant metaphor to describe the persisting inequalities between men and women in business firms, in higher education the “leaky pipeline” seems to be an equally appropriate metaphor to describe the persisting inequalities that limit the inclusion of women in academic careers. Both metaphors describe the experience for many women in the university environment. The “leaky pipeline” metaphor describes the equal inclusion of women in higher education at the undergraduate level (though choice of major can still be gendered), but equity is called into question when it comes to full professorships or even the presidency of universities. But here strong national variation can be observed as the so-called “She Figures” by the European Commission clearly indicate (European Commission 2009).

A second more general aspect of inclusion is related to the subjects that can be studied at universities. In his famous book from 1930 Abraham Flexner, one of the harshest critics of American universities, praised European universities for limiting university studies to the sciences and the humanities (Flexner 1930). He supported the fact that subjects like journalism, public health or business studies, which at that time were being institutionalized within American universities, were still unthinkable in most European universities. This has changed, too.

In European universities many fields of studies such as engineering, social work or teacher education that were previously taught outside the realm of universities yet are now a taken-for-granted aspect of university studies. For instance, health care is currently becoming a part of higher education studies in more and more European countries. Historically, there has been a similar trend in engineering and business studies. As Lars Engwall, Matthias Kipping, and Behlül Üsdiken have shown, in a wide range of European countries academic business studies to a great extent emerged in specialized schools that stood apart from the traditional university sector (Engwall et al. 2010).

The same holds true for engineering. Engineering did not gain academic recognition before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and from a historical perspective it is striking to see how important engineering disciplines have become within less than a century. The global dimension of the increasing inclusion of subjects worthwhile of study at university has been broadly described by David Frank and Jay Gabler (2006) in their book “Reconstructing the University: Worldwide Shifts in Academia in the Twentieth Century”. Here, a general trend toward the scientization or academization of society is evident. With regard to Europe, I foresee that the Bologna process will further accelerate the inclusion of subjects of study. At Master’s level, in particular, one can observe more and more specializations that go far beyond the traditional disciplinary studies. Likewise, the organizational format of universities is expanding, as is evident when considering the integration of formerly independent research institutes into the higher education system. This is particularly apparent in France, but also in other European countries.

A third aspect of the far-reaching and ongoing inclusion processes concerns the missions of universities. Following the German von Humboldt model, which was influential across very different regions of the world, universities basically have two missions – teaching and research, and social benefits ultimately result from universities’ focussing on these two missions. Over time, and especially over the last two decades, more and more university missions have been explicitly formulated and become legitimate parts of what it means to be a university. The most prominent one is the so-called “third academic mission”, i.e. the direct contribution of universities to economic development. Teaching and research contribute only indirectly, and due to high levels of

uncertainty one can hardly know in advance what the exact contribution of academic research and teaching to economic development will be. With the “third academic mission” universities have become an integral part of regional, national, and global innovation systems.

Many policy-initiatives in Europe focus on strengthening the link between universities and their socio-economic environments. One need only consider the Lisbon strategy, with its aim to make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic economic region of the world. I foresee that this will not be the end of the inclusion of further societal missions for universities. For example, some European and American universities already claim to be spearheading a global trend toward “ecologically sustainable development”.

## GOVERNANCE

The second level where we can find change is at the level of governance. In recent years in most OECD countries — and especially in Continental Europe — the traditional forms of university governance have come under pressure. There has been a considerable loss of confidence in the capacity for self-governance by the academic community. At the same time, strong state regulation has become subject to a fundamental ideological critique, in higher education as in other domains. In Europe, New Public Management reforms have led to changing modes of inter-organizational steering as well as institutional governance of universities. Concepts and instruments borrowed from the corporate sector play an important role here. Despite all the differences among countries and their universities, the relationships between universities and the state, as well as with other social actors, are undergoing profound changes and new governance regimes are being established. We can currently observe changes regarding four aspects in the governance of European higher education. These four aspects reinforce one another and have become increasingly important in a diverse range of European countries (Paradeise et al. 2009; Jansen 2007).

Firstly, the traditional mode of governance as exercised by the state is evolving. Instead of direct and top down regulation of the concrete behaviour of universities and their members, the state is increasingly taking a more supervisory and “steering at a distance” approach, in which more indirect ways of governance play a larger role. The management by objectives approach, for example, is of importance here, i.e., objectives are defined by the state, ideally in cooperation with the universities. The manner of reaching these objectives, however, is left to the universities. Please note that state regulation is not decreasing in this process. The state continues to play a strong role in university governance. Careful analyses of the Bologna process, for example, show the persistent strength of state regulation in Europe (Amaral et al. 2009).

Second, we can see an amazing increase in the number of actors involved in university governance, one which goes far beyond the traditional dualism of state governance and academic self-governance that is so well-known in Europe (Clark 1983). This makes the picture much more complex than twenty years ago. For instance, we see in all European HE systems an increase in the number of accreditation and evaluation bodies both with regard to teaching and research. Additionally, institutional boards or boards of trustees are currently being established. There is a lot of controversy around this issue as well as very heterogeneous practices among European universities.

Third, Europe is increasingly becoming a relevant level for university governance. The Europeanization of higher education has been spurred first and foremost by the so-called Bologna process, which aims at a common European higher education area. The importance of the Bologna process has been stressed by many analyses, and am in agreement. I would, however, rather stress the symbolic value of “Bologna”. From my point of view, the Bologna process is less a hard-wired rational political decision-making process leading naturally to outcomes upon implementation. Bologna is rather a myth or a symbol that different actors can invoke in order to pursue actions which otherwise would have been less probable. The Bologna process, in other words, grants legitimacy to a variety of actions in European countries, actions that do not directly derive from the explicit political statements, goals and procedures to be found in the policy documents. By invoking the Bologna myth, different and sometimes contradictory attempts at change get the symbolic value and societal legitimacy they require.

Fourth, competition as a distinct mode of governance is becoming more important. Competition in higher education is different from competition in the business area. Peers, i.e. other competitors on the supply side, play a decisive role, while actors on the demand side for academic goods (like firms or potential students) play a more indirect role. In the university sector, evaluation by other academics and ranking tables, which are at least in part also based on academic judgements such as peer review, shape competitive processes over scarce resources such as money and prestige. Historians and sociologists of science have shown that competition among scientists had been deeply embedded in scientific life for centuries. However, competition among scientists is currently aggravated through rankings, evaluations, and indicators of all kinds.

Likewise, competition is seen to be of prime importance as a mechanism to stimulate research excellence within EU member states and at the EU level. In a recent Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Working Group, representatives from 17 EU member

states agreed on the importance of fostering competition by a variety of instruments, including benchmarking processes and sharing of best practices (CREST 2009). Furthermore, we can currently witness the transformation of university organizations into competitive actors that increasingly behave like strategic actors, and less like loosely coupled systems. This leads me to the third level where we can observe profound changes: the transformation of universities into organizational actors.

### UNIVERSITIES AS ORGANIZATIONAL ACTORS

The university as an organization is transforming into an actor with distinct inherent properties this entails. The university sector in Continental Europe is currently a laboratory for experimenting with stronger competitive forces that include related managerial capacities. At the organizational level this implies the construction of organizational actorhood. This is by no means a trivial process when taking into account comparative and organizational research. Beginning with the foundation of the University of Bologna in 1088, universities are among the oldest formal organizations that are still in existence. But traditionally universities were not conceived of as important decision-making entities in their own right. Caught between the state and the academic profession, there was not much legitimate space for organizational management.

Universities are currently being transformed, with a new emphasis on the organizational level as an important and independent level of decision-making. This allows us to conceive of universities as “organizational actors” (Krücken and Meier 2006). By the term “organizational actor” Frank Meier and I try to evoke the image of an integrated, goal-oriented entity that is deliberately choosing its own actions and that can thus be held responsible for what it does. Conceptually, we strongly relate to the more recent work of neo-institutional sociologist and globalization theorist John Meyer and his collaborators (Krücken and Drori 2009). Meyer’s work on actorhood tries to expand neo-institutional theorizing by reconstructing modern actors, be they individuals, organizations, or nation-states. A modern actor is conceptualized as “a goal oriented, bounded, integrated, technical effective entity” (Meyer 2009: 38) that is nevertheless not an autonomous decision-maker. Instead, modern actors can only be understood by reconstructing “their practical embeddedness in taken-for-granted culture and relationships” (Meyer 2009: 39). But there is other important work to quote here. In a rather general discussion of public sector reforms, Niels Brunsson and Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson claim that public sector organizations are transforming into “real organizations” that, among other features, are based on identity, hierarchy, and rationality (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000). Richard Whitley has recently developed an important typology of universities as strategic actors, while he also highlights their limitations and variations (Whitley 2008). Other key European scholars who have contributed to this discussion include Harry de Boer, Jürgen Enders, and Liudvika Leisyte (de Boer et al. 2007).

The organizational turn in higher education is obviously closely linked to university governance, but it is also connected to broader changes at the macro-level of society as the increasing inclusion of people, subjects of study and missions leads to processes of differentiation and identity-building. The university as an organizational actor implies that it is seen less as an institution – i.e., it is less taken-for-granted what it means to be a university; identity is instead part of an ongoing construction process. In this process two hitherto unquestioned features of universities are challenged: the uniqueness of the national university system and the uniqueness of the university as a specific type of organization. These two features are also highlighted in traditional university concepts in comparative and organizational research. This can be seen by taking a brief look at the traditional German, French, and American HE models.

According to the traditional German university concept, the German model was an example of a system based on strong state authority and an equally strong academic oligarchy. There was hardly any room and legitimacy for the organization as an independent decision-making actor. Although universities collegial bodies produce collective decisions, the German full professor was, traditionally, an autonomous prince who could legitimately refuse attempts at “top down” governance within the organization. Although the strong position of the full professor has gradually faded since the 1970s, the university as an organizational actor was to come only later.

The French model was even further away from one in which intra-university governance and strong leadership could be fostered. Christine Musselin has shown that in the French case there was hardly any organizational backbone within universities. Correspondingly, university professors did not identify with their organization and the state focused on disciplinary, but not on organizational, boundaries when it came to regulating universities. Musselin (1999: 45) concluded that, “nowhere was a university considered as an entity”.

At first glance the United States seemed to be very different. As early as 1905 Henry S. Pritchett observed that, “the American university has tended more and more to conform in its administration to the methods of the business corporation” (Pritchett 1905: 294). A closer look, however, shows that such a statement was hardly an indication that a full-fledged model of organizational actorhood was then in operation in the United States. On the contrary, the community character of universities was stressed in much of the academic writing (Musselin 2007). In the 1970s, organizational researchers in the United States characterized

educational organizations as “loosely coupled systems” (Weick 1976). In a similar vein, Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) pointed to “garbage can” decision-making processes and labelled universities as “organized anarchies”.

To summarize: In universities, according to comparative and organizational research, centralized power was limited and strong internal governance was mostly absent. Although cross-national variation exists, this pattern can be found in very different national systems. Being torn between internal (departments, professors) and external (state) forces, university organizations have only very little in common with the state bureaucracy as described by Max Weber (1978) or with the powerful organizational actors that historical and sociological research, for example by Alfred D. Chandler (1977) and Charles Perrow (2002), on business firms has shown.

Against this very general backdrop, five highly interrelated elements of the university as an organizational actor can be distinguished, again in very different national settings. New “frames”, to borrow a concept from Erving Goffman (1974), structure the perception of actors so that they perceive themselves as organizational actors that compete with other organizational actors. “Frames” are both established by “others”, to quote George Herbert Mead (1934), and within the field through mutual observation. Good examples for such “frames” are rankings that are increasingly reshaping higher education (Hazelkorn 2011).

Firstly, against the backdrop of the loosely coupled-system tradition it becomes obvious that decision-making structures within universities are becoming increasingly hierarchical, both at the departmental and the overall level of the organization. There is increasing concern for leadership in academia, and traditional collegial bodies of decision-making like the academic senate are losing importance. Rectors and deans are increasingly understood as powerful decision-makers that position ‘their’ organizations within competitive fields, not as collegial parts of the overall professoriate.

Accountability is the second central feature. Academic work has to be submitted to standardized techniques of counting and accounting. In this, a broader societal trend toward what Michael Power (1997) has called “the audit society” is reflected. Furthermore, the attribution of responsibility, which traditionally has been much more individualized, is now transforming into an organizational attribute. As organized actors, universities have to be understood as units, which produce decisions for which they are held accountable. These decisions, which also include omissions or “non-decisions”, are negatively sanctioned by the rector and his or her deputies, who more and more are seen as heads of an organization. To give you an example from my country: The attempt of some departments and/or professors in Germany to opt for “non-decisions” and thereby to *not* change their study programs to the Bachelor and Master scheme or to *not* participate in the federal competition for research excellence and related grants are nonetheless seen as accountable decisions and are negatively sanctioned within universities.

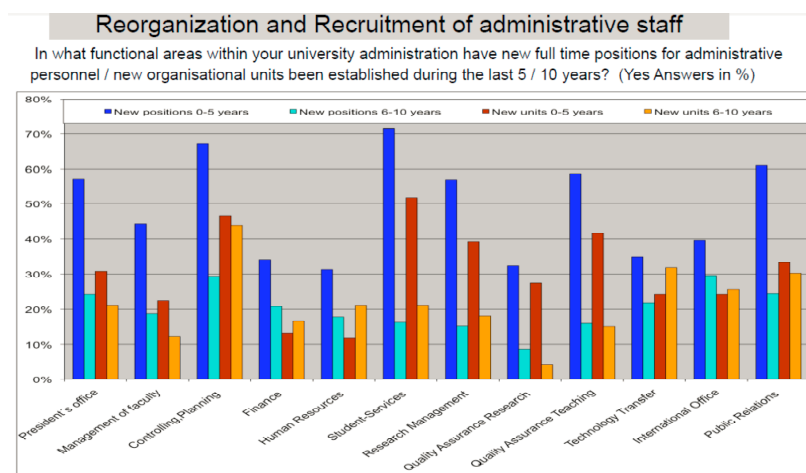
Third, universities must increasingly define their “own” legitimate goals. The most visible sign of this is the development by universities of “mission statements”. In my view, many universities have transformed traditional and standard accounts of what a university is expected to do (like “research and teaching”) into their “own” and explicit mission. Such a mission statement might not add any information concerning the central activities of a particular university. Nevertheless, this transformation of a general institutional account into a specific organizational one confirms the idea that the university is an autonomous entity that deliberately chooses its own destiny as a “real”, organizational actor, and that is responsible for what it does.

A fourth element of the new, empowered, and competitive university is related to its organizational structure, i.e. the ongoing elaboration, expansion and differentiation of a fine-grained formal organizational structure. A contemporary university has offices for a variety of tasks that previously, for the most part, were not regarded as part of the organization’s responsibility. Through the use of quantitative data and analyses it was shown that the concept of the modern nation-state depends on the existence of a broad, yet standardized set of ministries if it is to be recognized as a legitimate actor by the wider social environment (Meyer *et al.* 1997). In a similar vein to what Meyer *et al.* (1997) have shown with regard to the state, I propose that the modern university is equipped with an increasing number of offices and organizational subdivisions that are not just the result of functional requirements but part of its attempt to be granted legitimacy by the wider social environment. Think, for example, of the offices and subdivisions for international affairs, technology transfer, personnel development, public affairs, gender issues, organizational development, and psychological counselling.

This directly relates to the fifth and final characteristic of the new, organizationally empowered university model: the rise of the management profession. Since it is assumed that only a professionalized staff will have the ability to successfully achieve management goals, professional management of the university is established in parallel with the formal statement of university goals and the creation of organizational units. There are numerous indicators for the trend toward professionalized management of universities.

One might think of the emergence of specialized journals, the establishment of academic programs and courses on higher education management, and the emergence of professional networks of higher education managers. Professional management and related networks are of paramount importance for the diffusion of knowledge and models with regard to how to conceptualize and run a university organization. Here one finds very interesting parallels to developments in other societal sectors that allow for cross-sectoral research on institutional and organizational change. Hokyung Hwang and Walter Powell have described a similar trend toward the professionalization of non-profit sector organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area (Hwang and Powell 2009). Moreover, Frank Dobbin, in his book "Inventing Equal Opportunity", has shown how influential the professional networks of personnel managers have been for the development and implementation of equal opportunities standards for the American corporate sector (Dobbin 2009).

**Figure 1 – New administrative positions and units at German universities, results from a national survey (Krücken et al. 2011).**



In a research project called "The professionalization of higher education in Germany" Albrecht Blümel, Katharina Klope and I have gathered and interpreted data on the emergence of organizational actorhood of German universities with regard to changes in their administration (Blümel et al. 2010, Krücken et al. 2011). What we can clearly see is that whole new categories of professional and related academic management positions have been created. Especially in the last five years many new positions have been created in fields like planning, student services, quality control, and public relations, i.e. in fields that contribute to the concept of an integrated, goal-oriented entity that is deliberately choosing its own actions and that is eager to display this new image for others to see. Figure 1 shows the results of a national survey that included the heads of the administration of all German universities (response rate 67 %).

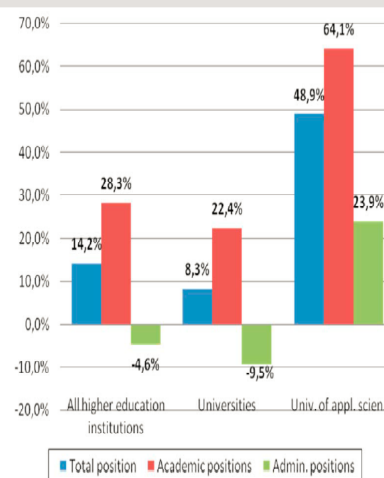
### REORGANIZATION AND RECRUITMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

In addition, we analyzed statistical data on all German universities in order to answer the following questions: Can we, first, see a shift from the academic to the non-academic staff? And, second, what changes occur within the academic staff and within the non-academic staff? To our surprise, and contrary to most studies conducted in other European countries and the United States that are based on smaller data samples, we cannot observe a general shift from the academic staff to the non-academic staff. Instead, two important features stand out. First, the increase of people working at German universities is due to an increase of academic staff, both among universities granting doctoral degrees and universities of applied sciences (See figure 2).

The rise of the academic staff, however, is due to the rise of untenured and temporarily employed junior researchers. Between 1992 and 2007 the number of temporarily employed academic staff increased from 53.310 to 95.452 (+79 %). In particular, the number of post-doctoral researchers increased. The number of

**Figure 2 – Changes in the composition of staff at German universities (Blümel et al. 2010)**

Changes in the composition of total staff between 1992 and 2007 (percentages and absolute numbers of academic staff in comparison to non-academic staff)



- 1 The figures refer to full-time and part-time staff in all fields of study and research except for human and veterinary medicine.
- 2 including universities and universities of applied sciences
- 3 including comprehensive universities, colleges of education, theological colleges, art colleges and conservatories
- 4 excluding colleges of public administration (Verwaltungshochschulen)
- 5 excluding student assistants

tenured professors remained stable in an era of rapid growth in student numbers, and full positions below the professor's level – positions comparable to the lecturer in the British system or the maître du conference at French universities – significantly dropped. Furthermore, there is evidence that the work of academics is increasingly shaped by administrative duties.

Second, within the non-academic staff we can also see a profound restructuring. Lower-level positions like those for clerical work decreased, while higher-level positions in the administration strongly increased (see figure 3). To sum up: While figure 1 and figure 3 indicate a turn toward the organizational actorhood of universities by a more comprehensive and fine-grained formal organizational structure and related educated and trained personnel, the data in figure 2 are not as unequivocal as expected. Based on these data, more detailed and cross-national research might unfold.

Nevertheless, there are also limits to the organizational actorhood of universities. As an example I would like to briefly discuss these limits by focussing on university-business relations and the institutionalization of technology transfer offices. As historians point out, the direct transfer of knowledge and technology between academic researchers and industry has a long history, going back at least to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. But with the creation of university transfer offices in the 1980s and 1990s in most European states, what was previously regarded as an activity of the individual researcher became a mission of the university itself. Informal and personal ties between academic researchers and industry are now explicitly complemented by formal, organized links, while the responsibility for technology transfer has shifted from the individual to the organization.

But upon closer examination, transfer offices in many universities hardly play a major role when it comes to university-industry relations (for Germany see Krücken 2003). Transfer activities or university-business relations remain highly personalized and informal. Because of issues of trust and tacit knowledge, informal transfer patterns have not been replaced by transfer offices. Transfer activities require, on the one hand, a high degree of trust between those involved. Trust can evolve only over time and trust-building involves iterative interactions between specific partners in academia and industry, but not between offices that can act only on behalf of others.

Another reason for the strong personalized and informal character lies in the very nature of scientific work itself. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the British chemist and early thinker on science and society relations Michael Polanyi developed the concept of “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi 1966). Scientific knowledge is formal, public, and explicit when publications are taken as the main source of that knowledge. However, a lot of scientific knowledge remains tacit, as has been corroborated by laboratory studies in the sociology of science (Knorr Cetina 1981). Given these non-formalized and implicit aspects of knowledge, transfer managers and databanks can hardly substitute for the active involvement of the researchers themselves and there are inherent limits to delegating transfer tasks to a formal office and its employees.

This example has two implications with regard to my perspective on the issue of “changing universities”. First, the personalized transfer patterns evolved largely by universities’ fulfilling their core missions, i.e. teaching and research, and not through recent policy initiatives fostering new missions and far-reaching change. In particular, Ph.D. students serve as crucial nodes for connecting academia and industry. In engineering and the natural sciences, it is common that Ph.D. students work on projects sponsored by industry, but most often these retain a clear educational and research orientation by the professors and Ph.D. students involved. Second, one has to be very careful when it comes to identifying appropriate indicators for change. According to my analysis, transfer offices in many cases can be seen as a typical example of what John Meyer and Brian Rowan already nearly 25 years ago called the loose coupling between the formal structure and the activity structure of an organization (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

**Figure 3 –  
Changes in the number of non-academic staff adhering  
to different status groups between 2002 and 2007  
(in% and absolute changes)**



<sup>1</sup> non-academic staff at all types of higher education institutions in Germany

<sup>2</sup> The figures refer to full-time and part-time staff in all fields of study and research except for human and veterinary medicine.

Source: IZELand database (Hochschulpersonalstatistik)



Transfer offices are part of the formal structure of universities. They serve mainly as a display window for the universities' political environment and are only loosely coupled to the activity structure, which implies a heavy reliance on personalized transfer mechanisms. I propose that the current shift toward organizational actorhood of universities implies a lot of window dressing and that we should be very careful not to take such window dressing as indicators of far-reaching organizational and institutional change. One should try to distinguish between different levels of analyses and related change and look for appropriate indicators. Only then can we see whether or not central and increasingly taken-for-granted aspects of the new actorhood of universities – such as, for example, units for quality control, the growing importance of organizational development, and the recent emphasis on strong leadership – follow the pattern of loose coupling that I described in my example above.

### THE AMERICANIZATION OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES?

Should these trends be labelled as the “Americanization” of European universities? Universities cannot be seen as isolated entities confined within their national boundaries. At least since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century intensive exchange processes can be observed and several factors have accelerated these processes over time – from the withering charisma of the nation-state as a source of meaning and identity to the facilitating role of information and communication technologies in the exchange of ideas. These factors seem to play an ever-increasing role. The rapid circulation of trans-national trends and models in contemporary societies can at least in part be traced back to them and one could further investigate the distinct cultural and organizational aspects of the formation of a common trans-national frame of meaning in higher education.

Following the three aspects and levels of change outlined earlier – inclusion at the macro-societal level, new forms of university governance, and universities as organizations – we cannot only identify common trends, but we can also establish that these trends occur in some countries earlier, and in some countries later. It is obvious that the United States is in many regards a forerunner of what we currently observe in Europe. This holds true for all three dimensions. “Inclusion” has certainly been a general feature of American higher education since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. American higher education has been much more open to different subjects, formats, and missions as compared to the Europe of the past. The same holds true with regard to the level of governance. Boards of trustees, whose very existence still sparks a lot of controversy in Europe, first appeared at Harvard University in 1642 and can now be found at literally every American university, be they private or public. Likewise, actors such as accreditation agencies and competition as a governance mechanism could be found much earlier historically in American higher education than in Europe. American universities were a forerunner also regarding the common trend of conceptualizing universities as organizational actors – at least in theory if not always in practice.

Therefore, there is ample evidence to see current changes in Europe as being triggered by American models and some European observers criticize the mega-trend as representing the “Americanization” of higher education. However, I doubt whether this is really the case. On the one hand, the United States and its universities are not just an “independent variable” with regard to the changes we are currently witnessing. They are, rather, also a “dependent variable” when it comes to changes that are mostly global in character and that are not confined to one national system, as I tried to show before. On the other hand, even if one assumes American universities are the forerunners of trends that eventually took stock in Europe, it is striking to see that some very central aspects of American universities and the overall system do not resonate in Europe at all.

College education is still a very particular feature of the American university system that does not have a lot in common with most European university concepts. One might think of the newly created Bachelor programs in Europe as a good example of Americanization and of a move by European higher education toward the American model of college education. But Bachelor programs in Europe typically focus on one subject of study and – at least in theory – often advocate the international exchange of students. This is very different from the American model of college education with its emphasis on a broad, liberal arts-based education and no student exchange at all at the undergraduate level. Other aspects of American universities have also barely diffused. Team sports and the related competitive leagues that have such an enormous relevance in the American system and for the individual university budget do not have any counterpart in Europe – the Champions League is for professional soccer and the annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race is a local phenomenon with its own history.

There are also more profound and systematic differences between Europe and the United States that relate to the role of public and private institutions as well as to aspects of higher education funding and financing (Douglass 2011, Levy 2011). A strong public university sector is by and large taken-for-granted in Europe, while private universities play a much more limited role. Private universities in Europe are mainly focusing on teaching, not on research. Typically only few subjects are taught and a lot of private universities are rather small entities located in particular niches (business and law schools, for example). As such, they do not compare to the highly prestigious, comprehensive and research-oriented non-for-profit private universities in the US among the category “doctoral/research universities-extensive”. Furthermore, private for-profit higher education institutions that currently see a steep increase in enrolment in the US play only a modest role in Europe. In addition, the dramatically decreasing



role of state funding of public higher education in the US does not compare to most EU member states. In Germany nearly 70 % of the university budget comes from basic state funding, while at UC Berkeley it is only about 10 %. In addition, new funding opportunities arise at the national level for many European states that emphasize research excellence and the European Union through its 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for research and technology has become an ever-important funding source (CREST 2009).

But I think it is not only empirically short-sighted to see the different trends as indicating the Americanization of European universities but that also conceptually one should go further than the diffusion model that is implied when speaking of “Americanization”. Diffusion, as we understand from chemistry, implies that cultural and structural patterns diffuse through space like a gas, beginning with regions of high concentration of its molecules; eventually the gas molecules are equally distributed in space, provided the process does not encounter obstacles. This “top down” model implies a clear distinction between the “sender” and the “receiver”; likewise, certain practices are supposed to be adopted or not. We can certainly observe the increasing discursive diffusion of models, ideas, and idealizations that refer to images of American higher education. One has, however, to distinguish between practices and images.

While powerful images rapidly diffuse, practices do not, as they can only be understood within a particular context. More specifically, the culture and historicity of different national settings – including very different academic labor markets (Musselin 2010) – are not taken fully into account by straightforward diffusion models. Rather, the “travel of ideas” (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996) and their enactment create complex situations full of contradictions through which new patterns emerge that cut across the alternatives of adoption and non-adoption.

As Badie (2000) has shown in his analysis of the world-wide diffusion of the Western model of the state, the universalization of its dominant principles remains incomplete (“universalisation manquée”), because of creative deviation (“déviance créatrice”) on the “receiver”-side. Complete universalization typically fails, as elements of transnational and national models merge and give way to creative deviation from a given path. In this, I see a major, yet rather unexplored source of institutional innovation. Historically, the invention of the American research university is a good example as it is the result of such overlapping processes, in particular, of English and German influences that were contextualized in the “new world” (Geiger 1986).

But not only national contexts shape global local adaptation processes of trans-national trends. Although in most comparative research national differences are stressed, one should not underestimate differences that occur at the organizational level. History also matters for organizations. I assume that universities, which in their past showed a high degree of openness toward their social environments, will incorporate new institutional elements that circulate at a trans-national level easier than those whose organizational history was mainly defined by concern with purity and a sense of elitism. Former technical institutes and universities founded in an era of mass education, for example, will differ strongly from the proverbial “ivory tower”. Hence, different organizational formats as well as their historical trajectories further complicate the picture. Comparative research across national boundaries might show that also distinct cross-national types of universities have to be taken into consideration when exploring the enactment of larger, trans-national trends.

Although the construction of images of American higher education will certainly continue to accompany higher education reforms in Europe, when focussing on the concrete enactment of these images I do not see a convergence toward a new and unequivocally accepted model (for science systems see also Hollingsworth et al. 2008). Instead, increasing heterogeneity and differentiation will result from the specific national and organizational enactment of the three large-scale trans-national trends toward inclusion, new forms of governance, and organizational actorhood. Universities all over the world devise diverse solutions in the face of trans-national trends that may appear standard, but that are never standardized in their effects, as they are adapted, incorporated or resisted by universities that are ultimately rooted in particular times and places. Here, a broad agenda unfolds for cross-national research on transnational trends and their national and organizational contextualizations, images and practices, discursive formations and institutional innovations.

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