Diversification of higher education in Europe. A policy narrative that legitimizes resource concentration

By

Sabic Norbert

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. The thesis contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

Norbert Sabic

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Abstract

The thesis contributes to the study of public policies in Europe, and in particular to the scholarly literature about higher education policies. It investigates the rationales form underneath the discourse on diversifying higher education systems in Europe, as well as the consequences, often furtive, of such a discourse on both policy making and policy implementation.

After the adoption of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, higher education in the European Union and in the larger European Higher Education Area has been put on a track of voluntary harmonization. This process has been backed by officially sanctioned commitments of the participating governments, and by the support, and intervention, of EU institutions as well. Along this process, however, the lack of institutional diversity has also emerged as a European policy concern. Considering that in the past two decades the recognized trend has been towards system level convergence I find it very puzzling, but also important to observe, that some policy makers and important European institutions encourage a direction contrary to harmonisation, that is the diversification of higher education. My thesis investigates and reveals the reasons behind the emergence and manifestation of the powerful, but convoluted diversification policy narrative. I approach the topic from three different angles.

I investigate first how institutional diversity might be affected by the ongoing transnational harmonisation pressure in the EU. In particular, after exploring organisational convergence from a theoretical point of view and after reviewing the literature on diversification, I derive a set of policy recommendations that diversification policies should supposedly take into consideration. This set will be then contrasted with the actual policies promoted as part of the European diversification discourse.

The next part makes the values of diversity themselves, as reflected in the European discourse, an object of inquiry. Using discourse analysis I explore the meaning European policy

narratives convey regarding the diversification of higher education. The analysis rests on a large pool of policy documents produced during the past 15 years and underscores the pioneering role of the European Commission in stimulating policy discussions about the diversification of higher education. The in-depth analysis of four key policy documents issued by the European Commission, in particular, reveals that the policy narrative rests on the assumption that once given the necessary freedom, right information, required managerial skills, and appropriate incentives, higher education institutions are likely to differentiate on a vertical scale to satisfy societal and political demands for global competitiveness.

In the last part of my thesis I look at a specific country case, Romania, and investigate to what extent this European idea has been successful in promoting policy change at the national level. This is in fact the only case when a national government decided to implement explicitly and completely the policy principles and recommendations of the EU with regard to diversification. Moreover, the distinctive endeavour of Romanian policy makers to use transparency tools to promote diversification made the country a noteworthy case to study. I was able to reconstruct the policy formulation process by conducting interviews with key individuals and reviewing policy documents and reports. The findings of the analysis prove that ideational change, driven by a broader European narrative and the engagement of domestic epistemic communities in transferring these ideas, offers a plausible account for the actions of the Romanian government. Moreover, the Romanian experience teaches us that diversification policies in reality act as vessels for legitimizing other changes, such as in the public financing of higher education, usually favouring those institutions that are considered to be more competitive.

Acknowledgements

About five years ago I received a phone call from Hungary. Two professors, one of them being my current supervisor, were questioning me about my doctoral proposal. Little did I know that time, how my decision to do a doctorate at CEU will affect my life. Today, I recognize that it was one of the best choices I could have made. Although, the end of a doctorate marks the beginning of a very uncertain future I am confident that there will be opportunities waiting for me as a young scholar. My confidence comes from the fact that I have grown intellectually and personally during the past years at CEU. Here, I would like to thank some of the people who helped me achieve this.

My deepest gratitude goes to my family and wife, Lídia, for their understanding, patience and support during all these years. Given that I am the first person in my family to do a doctorate, I realise how difficult it might have been for them to comprehend my passionate ambition to spend countless hours researching and writing about a topic, whose significance I could never summarize at the dinner table. However, now that my dissertation is almost finished, I promise I will catch up with all the maintenance work around the house I was delaying since months.

There are a lot of great colleagues at the university, who assisted my work as well. Thank you dear friends in the "trash-lab" for keeping quiet while I was working and being loud when I needed a good laugh. Thank you dear members of the HERG community for offering me an encouraging work environment, but also for being critical with my work and giving valuable feedback on how to improve it. I know you will miss looking at my colourful PowerPoint presentations, but I am confident that this legacy will be continued by our future colleagues.

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Introduction

The centrality of higher education in European public affairs started to surface especially after the turn of the millennium, when the Lisbon strategy was adopted, and was reaffirmed in the EU's subsequent development strategy, Europe 2020. Key EU policy documents asserted that without the general contribution of higher education institutions to social development and economic productivity, Europe is likely to face a competitive disadvantage in a globalized world, which can in turn affect the living standards of its citizens (Commission 2010a). The claim that higher education and social and economic progress are closely tied together become a kind of EU policy axiom. At the same time, bringing higher education to the very core of European policy debates has inevitably resulted in some criticism directed at higher education institutions. Today, an increasing number of member state governments in fact question the motivation and ability of higher education institutions to act as engines of development. Overall, we observe a growing emphasis put by politicians and policy makers on the need to reform higher education, which often includes a search for new policies that could stimulate the performance of higher education institutions. As this thesis will attempt to demonstrate, in our search for solutions, the concept of a diverse higher education system became a particular and particularly important policy objective. Although many policy actors seem to support the idea of higher education diversification, the way in which such policies relate to institutional performance remains largely unclear, in fact often unknown to policy makers themselves and to the other actors involved.

Higher education in the EU is often criticized in terms of its international appeal, that is to say, its ability to attract foreign students and scholars, and its competitiveness, first and foremost in the area of research productivity (Commission 2003; Commission 2006; Commission 2011b; Commission 2013). The problem of institutional homogeneity is often considered to be a major obstacle in meeting societal and political expectations. Consequently,

the lack of differentiation among higher education institutions started to be framed as a policy problem that needs to be addressed by national governments with the support of European organisations. This is thoroughly visible in the contemporary policy discussions on the future of European higher education. The European Commission has come to the conclusion that it needs to support national efforts to diversify higher education systems, which led to several policy initiatives, both at the national and the European level, that favour institutional specialization and question the efficiency of what are considered to be homogeneous systems in which institutions assume roles in all areas of higher education. These policies point to a possible reshuffling of the existing system level arrangements, affecting the institutions' governance, financing and not last their primary activities. However, there is little systematic knowledge about the appropriateness of such policies for achieving their stated goal, namely to increase diversity in higher education. In addition, their potential consequences, which are largely taken for granted and expected to be positive, are in reality far from being fully understood. These considerations stimulated me to devote my research to the study of diversification policies in the European Union.

The fact that some policy makers argue for more diversity does not mean that the European higher education landscape is necessarily a homogeneous one. On the contrary, we could say that it is already quite diverse. There are around 4,000 higher education institutions in the EU, each with distinct characteristics and historical traditions (Commission 2003). We can find large comprehensive universities, technical universities, smaller polytechnics and other specialized institutions operating within different national contexts and trying to meet the needs of demographically, ethnically and culturally diverse populations (Hazelkorn 2012b, 839). Considering the richly diverse cultural heritage of European higher education, it is puzzling why lack of institutional diversity turned into a policy concern at all. This policy narrative becomes even more peculiar when taking into account the Bologna Process, which

sought to overcome national differences by setting common principles for European higher education, and which already "successfully" harmonized the levels of training in Europe ("Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process" 2010). Against this background, rather than looking at whether the European higher education landscape is becoming more or less diverse, the question addressed in my study is why European policy makers encourage the diversification of higher education, when in the past years the dominant trend has been towards convergence. Correspondingly, I aspire to discover the underlying rationales for promoting such a policy, its content, and its possible consequences when applied within national contexts.

Although diversification of higher education appears in many national policy discussions, so far, only a few countries in Europe enacted concrete policies in this regard. Romania is one of those very few that has attempted to implement a thorough diversification policy in 2011, and in fact the only one that has attempted to directly and fully implement what they percieved as the EU policy, by classifying institutions according to their main activities, ranking their programmes according to their performance, and subjecting different categories to different policies and regulations, from funding to quality assurance. In short, this initiative sought to introduce a rigid diversity of institutional missions and establish qualitative differences among programmes in a top-down fashion. Considering Romania's two decade long prior history of pursuing a policy of standardization through a uniform quality assurance practice it is remarkable that the government suddenly decided to focus on the diversification of higher education. While the policy was not fully implemented in the end, due to a government change in 2012, the extent to which it tried to enforce institutional differentiation makes it a unique case to study in more detail. Another reason for studying the Romanian policy initiative is the fact that its approach to the diversification of higher education closely reassembles the one promoted by European organisations. In fact, the intention of the

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Romanian authorities at that time was to implement in its entirety what was believed to be a European set of recommendations on diversification, or "the European model". In other words, Romania proves to be a unique case, which highlights the power of transnational ideas to influence national policy realities.

My dissertation is made up of four chapters. In the first chapter I aim to establish conceptual clarity by looking at the vocabulary used when speaking about diversity in higher education. I then turn to the scholarly literature and explore how public policies relate to the diversification of higher education and present a number of country examples from Europe. The first chapter is followed up by three core parts, each of which is tackling an important question. Chapter two asks the question: *How might institutional diversity be affected by the convergence of European higher education?* This is a theoretical question that I address based on insights from the organisational theory literature. By identifying structural forces that push organisations towards homogeneity, I can not only better assess the extent to which isomorphism is present in European higher education, but also evaluate if diversification policies are appropriately designed or not in tackling the problem of homogenization. Chapter three follows up on the question: *What meaning do European policy narratives convey regarding the diversification of higher education*? In this part, I take a closer look at policy documents issued by various European bodies and institutions to analyse the discourse surrounding the diversification of higher education, and more precisely, how the problem is defined, which solutions seems to be justified, and what kind of policy instruments promoted as part of the European narrative. Chapter four puts forward the question: *In what way do European policy narratives drive the adaptation of diversification policies on the national level?* This chapter is devoted to the study of the Romanian case where a diversification policy has been actually implemented following European ideas, although it ultimately failed. Insights gathered from this special case allow me to revisit the main propositions of diversification

policies and their expected outcomes. Finally, the results of the three main chapters are summarized in the last part of my dissertation.

The thesis contributes to the study of public policies and more precisely, to the scholarly literature about higher education policies in several ways. First of all, it offers a comprehensive definition for the term 'institutional diversity', which is lacking in the contemporary research focusing on diversification policies in Europe. Specifying the aspects that institutional diversity encompasses (i.e. types, profiles, and statuses of organisations) makes it possible for scholars of higher education policies to investigate the concept more systematically. This is especially important, considering that the term 'diversity' has a strong normative bias, often favouring one form of diversity over the other.

Secondly, the thesis provides an alternative analytical approach, beside the widely used population ecology model, to the study of institutional differentiation by building on insights from organisational theory and more specifically, the theory of structuration. In this regard, my work challenges the belief that the harmonization of European higher education structures, which was largely advanced by the Bologna Process, should also necessarily imply organisational level convergence. Establishing common rules on a European level is only one source for organisational isomorphism, besides resources and organisational relationships. The explanatory framework developed in my dissertation takes into account all three sources of isomorphism, and serves as a basis for elaborating policy recommendations that could mitigate such environmental pressures.

Thirdly, the thesis relies on discourse analysis to critically examine the policy ideas promoted by European organisations. After deconstructing the arguments behind the need to diversify European higher education, the thesis concludes that current European policy narratives place more emphasis on vertical diversity then horizontal diversity. They also promote policy measures that seek to enlarge *institutional autonomy*, strengthen institutional

managerialism, implement *transparency tools*, and *concentrate public resources* into a few institutions, most of which neglect the reasons behind organisational isomorphism. Because of this, diversification policies seem to have little to do with creating new types or specialized higher education institutions, and more with enabling a couple of institutions to stand out in what came to be seen as an unexceptional European Higher Education Area.

Finally, based on a detailed account of the rise and fall of the Romanian diversification policy, the thesis concludes that there is much more to diversification policies than first meets the eye. When the Romanian government started to implement its new policy, the reforms were met with significant resistance by many universities. Universities were not contesting the right of the government to define what quality is in higher education or how should it be evaluated. Their opposition to the reform rested on the fear that the policy would change the funding model of higher education by discriminating more sharply between institutions of different quality. Specifically, the policy's aim was not just to identify the best performing institutions based on centrally defined criteria, but also to divert public resources from institutions performing less well, to those performing better. In this regard, the use of transparency tools could have become the vessel for legitimizing changes to public financing of higher education. Therefore, my findings encourage further studies in the area of how transparency tools can be utilized as instruments of governance and funding.

CHAPTER I: Diversity, differentiation and diversification in higher education

1.1. *Exploration of the concepts*

Diversity can mean many different things and can concern many aspects of higher education. Very often people have different aspects in mind when using the term 'diversity'. The term can relate among other things to the variety of study programmes, the kind of students enrolled in higher education, the diversity of institutional missions, the range of funding sources utilized by institutions, and so forth. The available scholarly literature in higher education approaches diversity from many different angles. Therefore, it is not always easy to identify which aspect of diversity we want to look at. Following the classification developed by Birnbaum (1983) there are at least 7 thematic areas in which diversity could be discussed (Birnbaum 1983):

- **Systemic diversity** refers to differences in the type, size and control of higher education institutions.

- **Structural diversity** refers to historical, legal and bureaucratic differences between higher education institutions.

- **Programmatic diversity** refers to differences in degree level, subject area, and types of degrees provided by higher education institutions.

- **Procedural diversity** refers to differences in the way the basic activities (teaching, research, and services) are carried out by higher education institutions.

- **Reputational diversity** refers to differences among higher education institutions based on status and prestige.

- **Constituential diversity** refers to differences according to the role key stakeholders (students, faculty, local community, etc.) serve in higher education institutions.

- **Value and climate diversity** refers to differences in the social environment and culture of higher education institutions.

A similar categorization of the different aspects of diversity has been offered by Reichert in a more recent study. She distinguishes between nine general dimensions of higher education that can be used to assess the existing level of diversity within a system or a single institution (Reichert 2012). They are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Different dimensions of diversity

Institutional size	Usually described in terms of student numbers, the number of academic and support staff, or sometimes based on the institution's budget volume or third party funding.
Subject profile	Ranges from comprehensive universities covering all subject groups, to universities with only groups of subjects (e.g. technical universities) or specialized, single subject higher education institutions (e.g. management schools).
Emphases on types of activity	It is determined by the character of the core activities of higher education institutions. Some institutions emphasize basic research, others applied research. Some institutions are seeking to develop general intellectual capacities, while others might focus more on professional development.
Teaching approaches and methodologies	Refers to the variety of teaching methodologies. It often ranges from traditional lectures to more interactive methods, such as project-based learning or student-centred learning, but can include also technology assisted teaching, such as distance and blended learning.
Student clienteles	Represents different student profiles (school leavers, mature students, students of different ethnic, national and social backgrounds, professional part-time learners, or adult education).
Student selectiveness	This aspect is often used as a criteria in the US and England to distinguish between highly selective to non-selective institutions in terms of student admissions.
Regional distribution	It signifies the distribution of higher education institutions across the national system, as well as their responsiveness to regionally relevant sectors.
Target communities/ stakeholder orientation	Defined by the institutions' orientation towards values and interests of different target communities, e.g. academic disciplinary communities, professional communities, industry, business and public service, civil society, alumni and student community, etc.
Reputation/ quality standards	Stands for implicit or explicit differences in the overall quality of research and teaching of an institution as often conveyed by national or international rankings.

Source: Reichert 2012, 816

As the previous examples have demonstrated, there are many aspects of diversity in higher education. For reasons of simplicity, they can be grouped into two basic categories, namely internal and external diversity. The first category encompasses diversity present within institutional processes and structures (e.g. programmatic diversity, procedural diversity, constituential diversity, and value and climate diversity), while the second one relates to diversity of institutional types, profiles and statuses (e.g. systemic diversity, structural diversity, and reputational diversity). Both sets of diversity are considered to be important in higher education, however, I will be largely dealing with external diversity[1], or better to say the lack of different types, profiles or statuses of institutions in European higher education.

External diversity in higher education has been extensively studied by many scholars and defined more precisely as the variety of organisations according to their dominant function and role within a system in a given moment of time (Huisman 1995; van Vught 2008). A system which is composed of parts with different and distinct roles should be considered a diverse or heterogeneous system. In our case, such a system could encompass higher education institutions like research universities, polytechnics, institutions conducting mostly online education, institutions dealing with applied research, institutions attracting predominantly international students, and the like. The archetypical case of a diverse higher education system is the United States, where we find various kinds of higher education institutions. In contrast, a system with one or just a few sorts of institutions should be considered as a homogeneous one. In such systems a dominant form or model of organisation is conducting all the relevant tasks of higher education. The United Kingdom (UK) could be a fairly proper example of such a higher education system, since in 1992 the division between the different types of institutions (polytechnics and universities) has been abolished, enabling both to engage in similar activities (Huisman and van Vught 2009). However, this does not mean that diversity has disappeared

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[1] In some cases I will be using the terms 'institutional diversity' and 'external diversity' interchangeably.

from the UK system entirely, rather that it cannot be expressed by merely looking at the way higher education is regulated in the country. Instead, one has to look at qualitative differences and the accumulated reputational capital that makes some institutions better than the others. This aspect of diversity, namely status, is at least as important as differences related to the function or role of institutions.

Internal and external diversity reveal a static approach to the study of diversity in higher education (Huisman 1998). By taking these categories and applying some sort of units of measurements we can easily assess the level of diversity that exist within a single institution or across institutions in a given moment of time. One can devise instruments to evaluate differences in terms of institutional size, teaching approaches, reputation, and so forth. Hence, whether a particular university or higher education system is described as diverse or not depends largely from where we focus our attention (Neave 1996). It is possible to conclude that there is a large variety of teaching approaches used by universities, and at the same time identify the system as homogeneous in terms of student clienteles. Therefore, types or aspects of diversity tell us very little about the underlying processes, namely how an institution or a higher education system achieves and maintains a certain level of diversity.

Diversity is not a permanent characteristic of a higher education system. It can increase or decrease. The process through which a homogeneous system becomes more heterogeneous is termed 'diversification'. A system can become more diverse either through the establishment of new types of organisations or through the specialization of existing ones (Vaira 2009; van Vught 2008). The emerging units would be different structurally and functionally from the ones which already populate the system (i.e. from the typical model). Following a biological analogy, this process is comparable to the way cells evolve to become functionally different organs within one organism (Huisman 1998). Therefore, the term 'differentiation' is mainly used to refer to the way single organisations evolve, whereas diversification is used to refer to

system level changes (Vaira 2009). Although the terminologies of differentiation and diversification describe processes at separate analytical levels, they are highly intertwined. As individual higher education institutions shift to be more different, the system in which they are embedded, becomes more diverse as well.

When speaking about differentiation, we can make a distinction between two different, but often related, outcomes of the process (Teichler 2004). On the one side differentiation can lead to the system's fragmentation, which indicates that organisations differ from each other based on the function they fulfil in the system. This is also called *horizontal diversity* and describes a state in which the different tasks of higher education are sorted out between institutions. In this case organisations differentiate by having different priorities or missions. One organisation might focus on conducting applied research in a specific area, while another one on increasing access and educating students for a specific segment of the labour market. The result of such differentiation is the emergence of distinct institutional types or profiles. On the other side, differentiation can lead to the system's stratification, which demonstrates that even similar types of institutions can be qualitatively different. This is also called *vertical diversity* and refers to a system in which organisations are arranged according to multiple layers. In this case organisations differentiate by acquiring better statuses, which could come from making qualitative improvements to their activities. The result of such differentiation is the emergence of distinct institutional classes. The two dimensions, namely horizontal and vertical diversity, are essentially independent from each other, meaning that differentiation of institutions can bring about both outcomes at the same time or only one of them (Codling and Meek 2006).

Each national higher education system is based on a unique horizontal and vertical separation between its institutions. These differences can be expressed either implicitly or explicitly, and to a varying level (Reichert 2012). In many European countries, there are

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universities that engage in a wide range of scientific activities and "other" types of higher education institutions, usually called polytechnics, which specialize by field of study and train students for a specific profession. This example represents a functional division of work on a horizontal level. Commonly horizontal diversity is studied by outlining institutional types and based on the existence of such types within the system one can make claims about the level of diversity in that particular system. On the other hand, there is also a hierarchy of institutions present in each higher education system. Usually the term 'flagship' university is applied to distinguish the best institutions of a country from the rest. Such vertical differences are often based on the perceived quality, prestige and reputation of institutions (Enders and Boer 2009). In most cases national and international rankings are used to assess vertical diversity since they attempt to measure and compare the quality of institutions.

Regarding the horizontal dimension of diversity it is useful to make one more distinction between formal differences, which refers to institutional types that are officially recognized, embedded in national legislations and enforced through various regulations (national law, quality assurance, funding criteria, etc.) and non-formal ones, which refers to institutional profiles that emerge not due to governmental regulation, but as a consequence of deliberate organisational strategy[2]. Consequently, institutional profiles are less obvious than institutional types and can be observed only through a careful examination of organisational activities and structures.

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[2] The same distinction is made by several European scholars. They refer to formal differences, which I call institutional types, as differences defined on the system level, and to non-formal differences, which I call institutonal profiles, as differences defined on the basis of institutions' behavior (van Vught et al. 2005). This distinction becomes especially important in the case of typologies that seek to describe horizontal diversity in higher education.

Figure 1: Breakdown of the concept of diversity as it is commonly used in the higher education literature
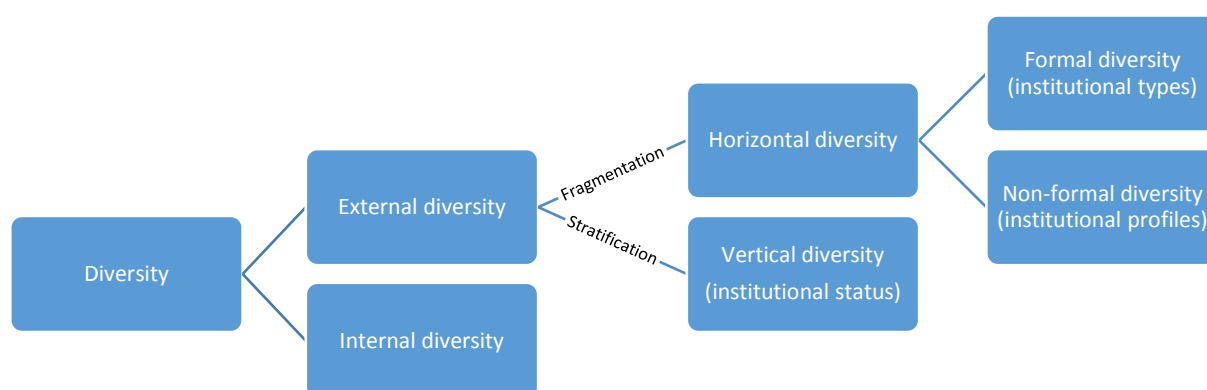
As presented so far, the term 'diversity' is a very broad concept that I have broken down into several analytical categories (see Figure 1). Each of these categories can be studied at a given moment in time (static approach) or one can analyse how they change over time (dynamic approach). Hence, I use the term 'diversity' as determined by the existing variety of institutions in a system in a given moment of time, whereas I apply the term 'differentiation' to describe change in relation to a single institution, and 'diversification', in relation to the whole system (see Table 2). Since my main focus is on external diversity, the study discusses primarily institutional types, profiles and statuses and how they are represented within a system. This approach implies that I purposefully exclude aspects of internal diversity, as well as the theoretical possibility for a higher education system to differentiate itself, or for a single higher education institution to diversify itself. For a single institution to diversify its structures or processes is outside of the scope of my study as is the possibility of a higher education system to differentiate itself from other systems.

Table 2: Meanings of the concepts of diversity, differentiation, and diversification

Concept	Approach	Measurements	Unit of observation
Diversity	Static	Measuring variety	Institution or system
Differentiation	Dynamic	Measuring change in variety	Institution
Diversification	Dynamic	Measuring change in variety	System

Source: adapted based on the work of Huisman, 1998

The outlined terminological distinctions are not used in a uniform way across the scholarly literature and even less across European policy documents. It is very common that authors apply the terms diversity or diversification without specifying which aspect of higher education they refer to. This is especially troublesome in the case of policy making, since one has to guess if those signify change on a horizontal level or vertical level or both. Therefore, I believe that such distinctions are necessary and will continue to use them as guidelines for my own analysis of diversification policies in Europe.

1.2. *Diversity in European higher education policies*

There is gradual shift from looking at the topic of diversity in higher education from a national level to a European wide perception (Hackl 2001). However, it is crucial to recognize that the European dimension not just broadened our view, but also introduced a new approach to how we perceive diversity. For example, policy makers in Europe and the United States (US) seem to emphasize the aspects of diversity differently. Internal differences, like the diversity of the institutions' student clientele, is much more pronounced in the US context, while external diversity tends to dominate contemporary policy debates in Europe. Interestingly, the latter aspect of diversity is often absent from US policy discussions, as is internal diversity rarely part of European policy debates (Reichert 2012). Since the term 'diversity' is used rather restrictively in Europe, the diversification of higher education is often equated with the increasing diversity of institutional missions, which is understood to signify varying emphases

on particular activities (i.e. varying emphases on research, teaching, regional engagement, business innovation, adult education and lifelong learning). Likewise, the lack of diversity in European higher education often signifies no more than the lack of institutional distinctiveness (Vaira 2009).

The establishment of the vocational sub-system in the European higher education is a prime example of a diversification policy with a more or less stable outcome. Today, the most common formal organisation of national higher education systems in Europe follows a binary division between academic institutions and vocational ones[3]. The introduction of the vocational sub-system took place from the middle of 1960s until the late 1990s (Kyvik 2004). During this period, higher education entered into a phase of massification[4] and many policymakers were convinced that traditional universities could not cope with the increasing number of students. The establishment of new types, mainly teaching centred institutions, was seen as necessary (Vaira 2009; Teichler 2011). These institutions were labelled differently from country to country. The most frequently mentioned ones are the polytechnics in the United Kingdom, the fachhochschulen in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, the IUT in France, the HBO in the Netherlands, the AMK in Finland, and we could also add the higher professional schools, established in Eastern-European countries, to the list. In spite of the lack of a common label, these institutions were all designed with a similar purpose, which at the same time was different from the one fulfilled by the more traditional universities. They were meant to be practically oriented and offer shorter training programmes in professions that were needed by the local economy. In this regard, the vocational sub-system was designed to supplement the university sector, and hence, their establishment is regarded as a process of diversification (Kyvik 2009;

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[3] Such a division between institutional types has been established for example in the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Finland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland (Teichler 2008b; Teichler 2011). However, systems like France (highly fragmented one) and Italy (university dominated system) do not fit clearly this division (Maassen 2011).

[4] The challenges posed by the move from an elite to mass higher education has been described in detail by Martin Trow in his work "Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education", published in 1973.

Wittrock 1993). However, not everywhere have polytechnics and like institutions, been considered as part of the higher education system. They were often organized, funded and regulated by the government differently than the traditional universities, and thus, struggled to establish clearly distinct profiles that could be acceptable as different but equal (Teichler 1988).

While the binary system consolidated in many European countries, changes in the higher education environment started to challenge the division, often resulting in an overlap between the activities of the two types of institutions. This trend is referred to as either academic drift or professional drift. In the first case vocational institutions try to imitate higher status institutions, and in the second, traditional universities try to cater for student markets served primarily by vocational ones (Neave 1979; Codling and Meek 2006). As a consequence of these two processes, during the 1990s the traditional differences between the two sub-systems started to disappear and some countries, like the United Kingdom, Spain, and Sweden, moved towards a unified higher education system (Codling and Meek 2006; Vaira 2009). This has occurred either by incorporating the vocational sub-system into the university system (Spain) or by upgrading vocational institutions to a university status (United Kingdom) (Kyvik 2004). Other European countries with a binary higher education system persist to strictly maintain the division, but subtle national and international pressures continue to push towards a unified model. A more latent convergence of different institutional types has been observed in the case of Norway and the Netherlands (Maassen 2011).

As this concrete example has demonstrated, the vocational sub-system has been set up with the aim to diversify higher education. However, the policy failed to produce a sustainable level of diversity in many countries. The blurring of institutional division has been also called a process of dedifferentiation, signifying a possible failure of past diversification policies in Europe (van Vught 2009). Today, the processes of differentiation and dedifferentiation are influenced not just by the socio-economic realities of European countries, but are coupled with

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European level policy developments, such as the Bologna Process, and their success is contingent upon such transnational circumstances.

Historically, the leading axiom in European policy making has been that "Europe's richness and strength lay in the very diversity of the higher education system" (Westerheijden 2007, 89). But, the implementation of the Bologna agreement, which was the first attempt to modernize higher education on European scale, seems to have preferred convergence over differences (Huisman 2009). Although, participation in the Bologna Process remained voluntary, several European and non-European countries joined the "reform movement" and subscribed to its objectives (47 in total). This allowed for the Bologna Process to evolve into an international platform for information exchange and policy transfer even outside the borders of the EU (Vögtle 2014). The lengthy reform process[5] aimed to harmonize the architecture of higher education studies regardless of structural differences among participatory countries. This posed an important challenge to binary higher education systems. Previously, most of the vocational type higher education institutions offered shorter courses (2-3 years) in a limited number of fields and with loose links to universities. Today, as a result of the structural changes brought about by the Bologna Process, these programmes are perceived as complementary to university education (Skodvin 2012). With the equivalence of the length of studies, it became easier for vocational institutions to offer research oriented degrees, as did for universities to offer professional programmes. This change aided a further decrease in differences between the two types of institutions. Teichler (2012) pointed out, that the Bologna approach implicitly opposed any excessive vertical or horizontal differences between institutions, because they could obstruct the mutual trust needed to accomplish student mobility and intra-European partnerships between different institutions (Teichler 2012). As the need for cooperation

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[5] The Bologna Process was initiated in 1999 and in 2010 officially set off to become the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

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increases, so might different higher education systems and institutions come to be more alike, especially as disparities between degrees become outmoded (Kyvik 2004). Considering these circumstances it might not be too surprising that some European organisations, like the European Commission, started to argue that there needs to be a more systematic approach to the diversification of higher education.

1.3.   Diversification as a policy objective

Diversification of higher education is not a brand new item on the European policy agenda, but has gained on importance during the last couple of years. There is no straight forward answer to why did it become a significant policy issue. However, it is more and more evident, that both the EU and national policy makers have acknowledged diversity as a positive and necessary feature of mass higher education systems (Horta, Huisman, and Heitor 2008). The European Commission mentioned the objective to diversify higher education first in 2003 in its Communication on the role of universities in the knowledge society and economy of Europe. Since then, the idea has maintained a steady presence in all major communications of the European Commission concerning the modernization of higher education. Similarly, as the objectives of the Bologna Process broadened the term diversity was more frequently mentioned in ministerial communiqués (Hackl 2012). Initially, the Bologna declaration stated that structural changes in higher education should be undertaken in a manner that pays "full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy" ("The Bologna Declaration. Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education" 1999). The emphasis to uphold diversity across the European higher education systems became even stronger in the subsequent years. According to the Prague Communiqué, attention should be paid to the "benefits of a European Higher Education Area with institutions and programmes with different profiles" ("Prague Communiqué" 2001). The Bergen Communiqué affirmed that: "We must cherish our rich heritage and cultural diversity in contributing to a knowledge-

based society" ("Bergen Communiqué" 2005, 5). The London Communiqué also referred to the importance of diversity in higher education, by stating that: "We therefore underline the importance of strong institutions, which are diverse, adequately funded, autonomous and accountable" ("London Communiqué" 2007, 2). The Lueven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué declared that: "All higher education institutions are responsible to the wider needs of society through the diversity of their mission." ("Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Comminiqué" 2009). All these examples highlight the fact, that the notion of diversity in higher education became a European policy concern. Hence, in the grand narrative of the Bologna Process, diversity of national higher education systems was a prized characteristic, and policy makers argued that diversity needs to be looked after.

Alongside the Bologna Process, a new policy idea emerged that depicted diversity in higher education in a different light. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) revolved around concepts such as harmonisation, convergence and coordination. In contrast to these ideas were the ones promoted by the European Research Area (ERA), which stressed the importance of excellence, relevance, critical mass, and stratification (Enders and Boer 2009). This dualistic set of ideas are in many ways contradictory to each other. While, the ERA envisioned a core of prestigious and internationally visible European universities surrounded by a larger number of national or regional universities, EHEA often perceived diversity as a significant obstacle to the new European political agenda encompassing the principles of free mobility of students and workers (Hackl 2012). Nevertheless, ERA succeeded to add a new supranational level of expectations to the role of universities in the innovation system, which was later reconciled also within the Bologna Process objectives (Enders and Boer 2009). Following the core principles of ERA, the European Commission started to argue that, there is not enough institutional diversity within the EHEA. It stated that "Europe needs universities able to build on their own strengths and differentiate their activities on the basis of these

strengths" (Commission 2006, 4). The illustration suggests that parallel to the ongoing harmonization process promoted by the Bologna Process, some European organisations envisioned a more diversified EHEA.

Institutional diversity was associated with adaptive behaviour of the systems towards environmental conditions (Birnbaum 1983; Huisman 1995; Reichert 2012). The underlying assumption, as Clark (1997) suggests, was that diversification can help the system to cope with student and knowledge growth as the new tasks get sorted out between institutions (Clark 1997). Using the analogy of adaptive behaviour of populations and relying on a previous work of Birnbaum, an extensive list of arguments in favour of diversification has been offered by van Vught (2009):

a) Diversification is an important strategy to meet student needs since it can lead to the emergence of new forms and types of higher education which can increase access for students with different educational backgrounds.

b) Diversification enhances social mobility because it can introduce different forms of entry into higher education and different forms of transfer between these institutions.

c) Diversification supports the needs of the labour market by providing different specializations in line with various market demands.

d) Diversification serves the political needs of various interest groups by providing the opportunity for their own identity and interest to be recognized within the system.

e) Diversification permits the combination of elite and mass higher education because elite institutions will be relieved of the burden to increase access.

f) Diversification increases the effectiveness of the higher education institutions because it allows them to focus their attention and energy.

g) Diversification creates several sub-fields in the system which offer opportunities for experimenting with innovations without disrupting the whole system.

For a long time European policy makers used the term diversity in an affirmative way to describe the cultural and linguistic differences in EHEA (Hackl 2012). More recently, other benefits of diversification started to be emphasized as well. Following the previous example, diversification of higher education is expected to generate social (a, b), economical (c, f), and political (d, e, g) advantages. Therefore, more diversified systems are generally thought to be "better" than less diversified systems (van Vught 2008).

The outlined examples are just some among the many possible explanations why governments would support the idea of higher education diversification. It would be farfetched to suggest that any of these arguments dominates current European policy debates. Rather, they form a joint body of arguments that coexist at the moment, and probably the only commonality among them is, that they all necessitate institutional diversity. In this regard Neave (2000) noted that diversification "from being an analytic descriptor, it took on additional weight. It carries with it a certain normative overload." (Neave, as quoted in Reichert 2009, 12). Similarly, Teichler stated that policy makers came to believe that "high diversity (in higher education) is beautiful" (Teichler 2008a, 21). The European Commission's arguments for institutional differentiation seem also to be largely normative and more a matter of faith than evidence-based policy conviction. This normative approach is further reinforced by the fact that we know very little about the way diversity can be increased in higher education.

1.4. *The dynamics of diversification*

As mentioned before, one can have a static approach to diversity (how much diversity is there?) or a dynamic one (why does diversity increase or decrease?). Considering the latter, we know very little about the internal or external dynamics that work for or against a particular level of diversity. From a historical perspective, the growth of knowledge resulted in an increasing complexity and fragmentation among disciplines (Reichert 2012). This development

also reflected itself in the emergence of specialized institutions, like in medical or technical universities. Secondly, diversification was a key feature of higher education systems that supported the transition from an elite to a mass system (Vaira 2009). During the 1960s there was a consensus among many actors that the large increase in student numbers cannot be accommodated within a more or less homogeneous higher education system (Teichler 2008b). This was especially true in the case of the US, where massification led to substantial differentiation within the system (Wittrock 1993). The diversified higher education system of the US was capable to absorb the increasing number of students via community colleges and at the same time maintain excellence via more selective research universities (Geiger 1999; Turner 2001). Both of these processes continue to be relevant today, but they are accompanied by a combination of new factors.

Building on Keller's arguments, which were formulated almost two decades ago but remain nevertheless relevant today, we can add four new challenges that shape higher education systems (Keller 1998). First of all, **information and communication technologies** transformed the way higher education is conducted. It has enabled distance learning and introduced virtual universities into the traditional higher education system. Secondly, the transforming **labour market demands** made lifelong learning a necessity. This has increased the number of non-traditional students who are looking for practical and specialized educational programmes that can be attended part-time or during weekends. Thirdly, governments are faced with **budget constraints** that also affect the funding of higher education institutions. Universities are encouraged to look for alternative ways to acquire income, often by establishing close partnerships with regional companies, and by engaging in new types of commercially beneficial activities. The last development relates to government's concern with **competitiveness**. Policies are endorsed that require universities to pay much more attention to research productivity. These new challenges show that while knowledge growth and

massification have remained a concern for many higher education systems they have also been supplemented with new societal and political demands that can hardly be reconciled within a single type of institution. In order to respond to the increasing number of functions universities are expected to fulfil, the diversification of higher education systems becomes a necessity (Clark 1997).

Universities today are multi-purpose and multi-product enterprises (Enders and Boer 2009). The demands put on them are no longer confined to the traditional tasks of teaching and research. New roles, such as regional engagement, lifelong learning, or entrepreneurship have enriched these traditional activities, which can result in a too fragmented and dispersed resource allocation. This has been referred to as a 'mission stretch' (Scott 2007). The concept describes the process in which a growing number, and sometimes contradictory expectations, are put on higher education institutions (Scott 2007). Mission stretch effectively calls our attention to a possible overload of activities that could undermine their overall performance of universities and result in system level inefficiencies. Moreover, in times of stagnating higher education funding, many ask whether higher education institutions can do justice to such a wide array of demands (Reichert 2012). In order to avoid spreading institutional efforts too widely, institutional differentiation offers a possible alternative, through which efficiency could be maintained. Therefore, it is not surprising that some European organisations encourage higher education institutions to focus their activities on their strengths, be it teaching, research, regional engagement, or something else. However, there is not much evidence on how institutional differentiation can be best achieved.

In most of the cases the process of diversification has been looked at from the open system perspective. It assumes that institutions interact and exchange resources with their environment and that change occurs as a result of this interaction (Bertalanffy, 1968). Thus, diversification is a response to changes in the environment of higher education institutions. As

the previously mentioned global trends get translated into environmental demands they trigger organisational adaptation (Sporn, 1999). While the theory provides a plausible explanation for the diversification of internal processes and structures, it somewhat falls short on explaining institutional differentiation (i.e. why would certain institutions specialize in one area and others in another?). This is also confirmed by recent criticism from European policy makers who stress out that while the environment has become more diverse, European higher education has not necessary followed the same trend. However, this criticism does not disprove the fact that individual organisations could have adapted internally by supplementing and expanding their core activities with new ones. Due to their loosely coupled nature, higher education institutions are well suited for accommodating different environmental expectations within a single organisation (Birnbaum 1988; Clark 1998). They can easily add new units to their structure which allows them to conduct simultaneously several roles and functions. Therefore, the open system perspective might be more adequate for explaining changes in internal than external diversity. That is to say, it cannot explain fully the processes of institutional differentiation.

1.5. *Policy approaches to the diversification of higher education*

The key question for many countries which seek to diversify their higher education system, is how to achieve a certain level or form of diversity? To answer this question, we have to know what conditions encourage institutional differentiation or its opposite, namely convergence. Without understanding these forces, it is very difficult to design appropriate policy measures, and there is a high risk of achieving counter effects.

Commonly, policy makers speculate whether the best policy intervention is a deliberate institution-building undertaken by the state (in a traditional top-down fashion) or supporting the responsive capacity of higher education institutions to environmental demands (a bottom-up approach) (Vaira 2009). The most obvious example of a top-down policy initiative involves the establishment of a binary higher education system. In this sense the existence of different

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types of organisations and a division of activities between them is guaranteed and specified (Codling and Meek 2006). The bottom-up approach represents a much weaker form of state intervention, and instead of a direct regulation it seeks to provide incentives for differentiation, primarily by altering the conditions under which higher education institutions operate. Increasing institutional autonomy and/or encouraging competition among higher education institutions for resources are typical examples of such an initiative. This illustrates the fact that policy makers tend to approach the question of diversification mainly from a governance perspective, asking which aspect of the triangle of coordination[6] should be strengthened. Are higher education institutions more likely to differentiate (i) under conditions of enhanced market competition, (ii) increased institutional autonomy, or (iii) direct state regulation of institutional types?

Considering the first approach, many governments have decided to move higher education institution closer to the market (Jongbloed 2003). During this process, which is often labelled as the marketization of higher education, strict government control is replaced by market-type mechanisms that encourage organisations to compete for resources with other organisations. This approach has been described also as an informal method for promoting diversification (Reichert 2009). It builds extensively on the Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) and highlights that the way organisations acquire their resources is vital for their survival. The more competitive it becomes for them to secure funding (both public and private) the more likely it is that they will differentiate their products and services. According to classical economic thinking higher education institutions would do so in order to distinguish themselves from the competition (Jongbloed 2004). However, the work of Codling and Meek (2006) points to the opposite, namely homogenizing effect of informal methods. They observed

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[6] The triangle of coordination is a conceptual framework representing different governance models in higher education (i.e. academic oligarchy, state authority, and the market). The typology was developed by Burton Clark in his work Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-national Perspective, published in 1983.

that in competitive environments, where funding regimes are uniform, institutions tend to become more and more alike (Codling and Meek 2006). Similarly Huisman's (1998) findings suggest that legal demarcations between institutional types seem to preserve diversity within the system better then unified but competitive systems (Huisman 1998).

The second method builds on the belief that competition can happen only if actors have some space to move (Jongbloed 2003). Therefore, the first approach is often accompanied with increased institutional autonomy. Such changes in the regulatory environment imply that defining institutional types should be no longer the prerogative of the government. It is replaced by the institutions' self-steering capacity, which enables them to make rational choices in an increasingly competitive environment (Jongbloed 2003; Enders and Boer 2009). The underlying assumption is that in a competitive environment, where the legal context is defined loosely enough to permit institutional efforts to explore and occupy varying market niches, higher education institutions will seek to differentiate by adopting distinct priorities and strategies (Reichert 2012). The main criticism of this assumption originates from the same theory on which it builds. RTD similarly recognizes the dependency of the environment on the organisation in question and introduces the notion of interdependence (Gornitzka 1999). The concept implies that higher education institutions also possess resources on which the environment depends, and highlights their ability to attain a certain level of autonomy from their environment. Therefore, van Vught has already put forward the proposition that the higher the level of autonomy of an organisation, the more it is capable to maintain its form and functioning without resulting in a more diverse higher education system (van Vught 2008). This is mainly because with increased institutional autonomy the influence of academic norms and values also increases, which helps the institution to uphold its core activities.

In contrast to the previous approaches, a formal intervention is when state regulation is utilized to create or sustain distinct institutional types or profiles. This does not refer only to

the legal definition of institutional types, but may also includes separate funding authorities and instruments, as well as particular accreditation and quality assurance criteria for different institutions (Reichert 2009). Such regulations establish clear demarcations between institutions that can relate to differences in teaching hours, curricula, conditions for employee promotion, or even the type of research funded. Traditionally higher education institutions were characterized by a strong symbolic pressure to adhere to such predefined rules and procedure (Scott 2001). Deviation from these centrally imposed rules could lead to the loss of legitimacy and endanger the funding of the institution. Therefore, differentiation appears as an unlikely strategy to be pursued by organisations in a highly regulated system. Instead, organisations choose to adhere to the rules and norms that correspond to the expected level and form of diversity. But in many cases, centrally imposed rules are not capable to account for all the dimensions of diversity. That is why Birnbaum argued that the formal approach to managing diversity is responsible for convergence in several higher education systems. He found that diversification of institutional types was actually hampered by centralized state planning and rigid accreditation criteria (Birnbaum 1983). Consequently, tight regulations can also act as barriers to diversification, especially if they are uniform (van Vught 2008).

Evidently, much of the empirical evidence seems to question the extent to which any of the three policy approaches is capable to advance the diversity of higher education systems. Increased competition might encourage some institutions to differentiate in light of scare resources, but can also easily promote a single model of most competitive institution. Increasing institutional autonomy seems as a complementary action that enables institutional specialization, but can also act contra-productively when shared norms and values outlaw alternative institutional profiles (do not regard them as appropriate). State regulation is probably the most effective way to impose a desired level or form of diversity, but due to its rigid nature, can limit some institutions to excel in other ways. It seems as each of the policy

measure can act as a push and a pull factor. Therefore, the combination of different policy approaches might be the most appropriate solution for the diversification of higher education in Europe.

1.6. Policy instruments of higher education diversification

In order to obtain the full benefits of higher education diversity governments apply various policy instruments to describe and enforce differences between institutions (Kaiser, Faber, and Jongbloed 2012). The most common ones are transparency and accountability instruments. These measures help governments obtain verifiable evidence on the activities of their higher education institutions. They not just hold institutions accountable for what they do and how they do it, but can also mark the existing qualitative differences between higher education institutions (Hazelkorn 2012a). Therefore, they should be considered as policy instruments that relate equally to horizontal and vertical differences. A comprehensive summary of such instruments has been offered by Hazelkorn (2011).

Table 3: Typology of transparency and accountability instruments

College Guide: fulfil public service role, helping and informing domestic undergraduate students and their parents;
Accreditation: used to certify the legitimacy of a particular HEI including the authority to award qualifications, either directly or via another agency;
Quality Assurance, Evaluation and Assessment: used to assess quality of research, teaching & learning, institutional processes and /or governance structures in order to compare and improve performance;
Benchmarking: used to more strategically, effectively and efficiently manage and make decisions through systemic comparison of practice and performance with peer institutions;
Classification Systems: provides a typology or framework of higher education institutions to denote diversity usually according to mission and type;
National Rankings: national comparison of performance to underpin accreditation, aid resource allocation, improve quality, etc.;
Global Rankings: international comparison of institutional performance and reputation.

Source: Hazelkorn 2011, 41

All the outlined policy instruments serve somewhat different purposes, but the main commonality among them is that they operate with the diversity found in every higher education system to satisfy the public demand of students, parents, companies, universities and

governments for more transparency and information (Hazelkorn 2012a). College guides serve to inform students and parents by outlining the different options for continuing education. Accreditation legitimizes institutional operation by taking into account the performance and purpose of different institutional activities. Quality assurance and benchmarking aim to enhance quality by comparing different performance levels of similar institutions. Classifications differentiate institutions based on their activities, while rankings order institutions according to their performance. The outcomes of the latter two instruments are used in various ways, ranging from informing student choice to the allocation of public funding. These examples illustrate the fact that the assessment of diversity is a key component of all the measures. However, they diverge based on the actors involved in carrying them out (e.g. media organisations, government agencies, higher education institutions, etc.), the kind of activities conducted, the variety of indicators assessed, the type and source of data gathered, the target audience the results are intended for, and finally the consequences they imply for the institutions themselves (Hazelkorn 2012a).

Another difference among these policy instruments is the level of their application. While most of them are applied only at the national level, others are increasingly carried out on an international level (Hazelkorn 2012a). The most prominent example would be the international ranking of universities (e.g. Academic Ranking of Word Universities[7], THE World University Rankings[8], QS World University Ranking[9]). Similar tendencies are observable in Europe with cross-country benchmarking projects, common accreditation and

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[7] For more information visit the following website: http://www.shanghairanking.com/
[8] For more information visit the following website: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings
[9] For more information visit the following website: http://www.topuniversities.com/

quality assurance guidelines, or the European classification and ranking of universities (e.g. U-Map[10], U-Multirank[11]).

A final important difference among the outlined policy instruments is that some of them seek to inform about the quality or type of activities undertaken by higher education institutions while others also evaluate and judge those aspects as either good or bad, valid or not, sufficient or not. Considering this, the academic literature makes a further distinction between accountability tools and transparency tools. In this regard, benchmarks, accreditation and quality assurance would fall under the former, while rankings, classifications, and various guides under the latter. However, this distinction is not as clear cut as one would assume. Although the primary function of transparency tools is to provide information for the sake of comparision, they can still support accountability and quality improvements in higher education (Vercruysse and Proteasa 2012).

1.6.1. Transparency tools

Transparency tools are core elements of all policy approaches to diversification. If policy makers want to encourage the marketization of higher education, transparency tools help to address market imperfections. Several scholars point out that due to the lack of standardized and comparable information about higher education institutions and their programmes students often have to rely on proxy information, obtained from parents, peers, school teachers or other significant figures (Jongbloed 2006). This market imperfection creates a principle-agent problem, where universities can take advantage of the information asymmetry between the providers and the consumers (Ciolan et al. 2015; Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). The use of college guides or rankings for example, helps customers make informed choices, which in turn creates

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[10] U-Map is an ongoing project in Europe that classifies higher education institutions according to their activities. For more information visit the following website: http://www.u-map.eu/
[11] U-Multirank is an ongoing project in Europe that offers a multi-dimensional and user-driven alternative to commercial international rankings of higher education institutions. For more information visit the following website: http://www.umultirank.org/#!/home

a more competitive market. If policy makers choose to diversify higher education through increasing institutional autonomy, transparency tools are again very useful. Strategic choice theory implies that organisations are rational actors, following their own goals and their choice is a calculus based on cost-benefit analysis. In this context, being different is often perceived as a competitive advantage and is achieved by adopting a unique profile (Fumasoli and Huisman 2013). Classifications or rankings can help organisations to assess their environment and their own capacity in order to make the best choices. And finally, when policy makers strive to rely on state regulation to increase diversity in higher education, the results of transparency tools can provide the data for evidence-based policy planning. In such cases, rankings and classifications often take on an accountability function that enables a better control of institutional output by governments, but also legitimizes government intervention by choosing the most effective public support strategy (Ciolan et al. 2009). So no matter which policy approach a country would choose, transparency tools are helpful in making diversity visible and comprehensible (Damme 2009, 39). Hence, there is hardly any diversification policy without some form of transparency tool being applied.

Transparency tools are not used extensively in EHEA countries (Vercruysse and Proteasa 2012). However, there are several initiatives taking place in Europe and beyond which seek to provide more detailed information about higher education institutions and to make their diversity more transparent. These initiatives have been summarized by the Transparency Tools Working Group for the 2012 Bologna Ministerial Conference in Bucharest (Vercruysse and Proteasa 2012). One of the initiatives they mention is the AHELO project[12] run by OECD to assess the feasibility of measuring and comparing the learning outcomes of undergraduate students at an international level. They also list the U-Map and U-Multirank projects that seek

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[12] The AHELO project has been initiated by OECD to test student and university performance globally. The project is currently in its feasibility stage. For more information visit the following website: http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/testingstudentanduniversityperformancegloballyoecdsahelo.htm

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to develop a user-driven multidimensional ranking and classification system for European universities. The European Tertiary Education Register[13] is another initiative set out to collect data from national statistical offices about the activities of all higher education institutions, including research activities of those institutions for whom it is relevant. The working group also mentions the work of the IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence[14] who performs assessments of the transparency tools (mainly rankings) against the standards of the "Berlin Principles on Ranking Higher Education Institutions". And finally, they mention the ongoing E3M project[15] financed by the European Commission for developing indicators for the measurement of higher education institutions' third mission. All these international projects underscore the rising demand for more information on higher education provision. However, it is less well known to what extent, and if at all, such information can actually contribute to the diversification of higher education systems.

Transparency tools have their own methodological weaknesses, which are not always compatible with the idea of promoting diversity in higher education. One of the main criticisms that concerns transparency tools is that they spread a crude division between research and teaching, or world-class and regional orientation, and these institutional characteristics come to be seen as oppositional, even though this does not have to be the case (Hazelkorn 2012a). Therefore, we have to realise the simplification that such instruments produce. Classification and ranking exercises, the most commonly used transparency tools, allow for a greater differentiation between and within classes and categories of higher education institutions by presenting differences in an easily readable and understandable form (Hazelkorn 2012a).

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[13] The European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) is a database of higher education institutions in Europe, currently including 36 countries and 2,673 higher education institutions. For more information visit their website: http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/education-register_en.htm
[14] IREG Observatory is an international institutional non-profit association of ranking organizations, universities and other bodies interested in university rankings and academic excellence. For more information visit the organisation's website: http://ireg-observatory.org/en/
[15] E3M is an ongoing project in Europe that aims to create a comprehensive instrument to identify, measure, and compare Third Mission activities of higher education institutions. For more information visit the following website: http://www.e3mproject.eu/

Another shortcoming with using transparency tools is that they compile information based on nationally or internationally available data and only those that can be empirically measured. Limitations in this regard often force those that design transparency tools to define quality based on what data is available or measurable (Hazelkorn 2014). The factors that are usually measured by classification and ranking exercises involve inputs (e.g. number of students and staff, financial resources, academic achievements, etc.), outputs (e.g. graduation rates, number of publications, etc.) and outcomes (e.g. mission attainment, added value) (Shin and Toutkoushian 2011). Beside the fact that certain data cannot be attained, the reliability of transparency tools is also challenged by the way existing data is gathered, weighted, and analysed (Teichler 2011). Although, many shortcoming seem to undermine the perceived benefits of transparency tools, they continue to be regarded as important, if not the most important policy instruments in terms of higher education diversification. Therefore, in the continuation I am going to explore in more detail classifications and rankings separately. I also present some of the most well-known examples of such instruments and the relating ongoing initiatives in Europe.

Classifications

Nowadays, higher education is delivered by a broad array of providers, including public and private higher education institutions, comprehensive and specialized institutions, local, national and even global ones, campus-based and virtual institutions, and so on. Classifications are the main transparency tools to assess this kind of diversity (i.e. horizontal diversity) in higher education. Their main purpose is to deliver a typology that describes, characterizes, and categorizes higher education institutions (Hazelkorn 2012a). To do so, they assess the activities of higher education institutions in different dimensions and try to identify the "dominant profile" or category the institutions belong to (McCormick and Zhao 2005). In theory, these categories are free of qualitative distinctions, meaning that classifications try to offer a rich

overview of diversity in higher education without judging any of the categories of institutions as better or worse.

The different institutional types and profiles have been long studied by higher education researchers. Hazelkorn (2012) offers a comprehensive overview of the ways in which higher education institutions have been classified in the past (see Table 4). In some cases, like the classification of Duderstadt or the classification done by the OECD we are presented with the categories into which higher education institutions were assigned. In the case of the U-Map classification or the one used by Reichert we see a list of dimensions on which institutional activities were assessed. In the case of the Carnegie Classification we have a number of basic categories and a number of dimension, both being applied during the classification process.

Table 4: Different ways to describe institutional diversity

Carnegie Classification System (1973, 2005)	Duderstadt (2000)	OECD (Vincent-Lanerin 2004)	U-Map (van Vught 2009)	Reichert (2009)
Doctoral-granting institutions	World university – international focus	Tradition – catering to relatively small share of youth for credentials	Types of degrees offered	Institutional clienteles or target communities
Comprehensive universities and colleges	Diverse university – social/ethnic diversity, pluralistic learning community	Entrepreneurial – teaching, research and service are well balanced	Range of subjects offered	Mission and functional emphases, i.e. research, teaching, research training, CPD, etc.
Liberal arts colleges	Creative university – university of the arts, media, architecture	Free market – market forces drive specialisation by function, field audience	Orientation of degrees	Programme or subject profiles, e.g. academic, professional, etc.
Two-year colleges and institutes	Division-less university – interdisciplinary approach to learning	Lifelong learning and open education – universal access for all ages w/less research	Involvement in life-long learning	Staff profiles
Professional schools and other specialized institutions	Cyberspace university – open and distance learning	Globally networked – teaching/training institution in partnership with other orgs.	Research intensiveness	Student profiles
Instructional program	Adult university – advanced education and training	Diversity of recognized learning – disappearance of formal institution – distance, "open course" education	Innovation intensiveness	
Enrolment profile	University college – undergraduate provision; the lifelong university – programme provision through lifetime		International orientation: teaching and staff	
Size and setting	Ubiquitous university – new "life-form" linking/connecting social institutions		International orientation: research	
"Elective" classifications	Laboratory university – new "green-field" site experiment in learning		Size; Mode of delivery; Public/private character; Legal status; Cultural engagement; Regional engagement	

Source: Hazelkorn 2012b

As the above table demonstrates there is a wide variety of university classifications around, each using a different number of categories, different indicators and measurements, and last but not least, they apply different terminologies to describe the institutions belonging to one or the other category. Therefore, classifications are best understood as different approaches to understanding diversity (McCormick and Zhao 2005). All these approaches involve several judgements that reflect the normative beliefs of those who apply the tool. One

of these decisions relates to the before mentioned number of categories. This is a dilemma between precision and parsimony (McCormick and Zhao 2005, 53). When categories are defined precisely, the number of categories increases, as does homogeneity within them, while the number of institutions within them decreases. Choosing parsimony results in a smaller, and arguably more manageable, number of categories. However, it increases the number of institutions and the variation among institutions in each category. Therefore, McCormick and Zhao (2005) stress that no classification can be perfectly neutral or objective, as it "necessarily reflects decisions about what is important and meaningful" (McCormick and Zhao 2005, 56).

Classification have also some methodological shortcomings, which should be taken into account when using them as transparency tools for achieving a certain policy goal. In most of the cases, institutions can belong to only one category, and that is why, classifications inevitably overstate one characteristic of an institution and understate others at the same time (McCormick and Zhao 2005). Assuming that an institution can perform well only in one area would be very irresponsible. Although many classifications enforce a rigid system of categories, in reality, higher education institutions may continuously bundle and unbundle their tasks in teaching, research and services, alter their disciplinary profiles, their geographic outreach, and so forth (Enders and Boer 2009). Because, classifications are time-specific snapshots of institutional attributes, long-term policy planning becomes difficult considering the requirement for continuous assessment of shifting institutional activities.

Although classifications are helpful for understanding diversity in higher education, they are often criticized for exerting homogenization effects on the system at large. As McCormick notes in the case of the Carnegie Classification, many institutions perceive one or more categories as having more prestige (e.g. research-type universities) and are tempted to alter their internal practices in order to be classified as one of those (McCormick 2013). In this regard, classification instruments have the potential to stimulate mission drift between different

categories of higher education institutions. This phenomenon can occur regardless of any assurance that there is a parity among the different institutional categories. To ease this adverse effect, Reichert (2009) has specified some conditions, to help governments overcome it. Among them, governments need visible, strong and different reward structures, which help sustain the different orientations and value systems of institutions, and they need to dispose relatively high levels of expenditure in order to provide sufficient incentives to support the diversity sought (Reichert 2009). Without these safeguards, classifications, instead of showcasing diversity, may lead to its reduction in the long run.

Probably the most well-known classification in the world is the US Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education[16]. It was first published in 1973 with the purpose to provide a basis for describing the diversity of US higher education institutions. From the time it was first published, the underlying methodology and the categories of institutions have been continuously updated. In 2005 the six categories of the basic classification were established as follows: Associate's Colleges, Doctorate-granting Universities, Master's Colleges and Universities, Baccalaureate Colleges, Special Focus Institutions, and Tribal Colleges. The classification follows an exhaustive methodology, which has been summarized by McCormick and Zhao as looking at what institutions do (functions) and who (faculty profile) taught whom (student characteristics) (McCormick and Zhao 2005). Beside the categories of basic classification, the Carnegie Foundation introduced additional dimensions for assessment to offer greater analytic flexibility to stakeholders. These were the **Undergraduate** and **Graduate Instructional Program** classifications, **Enrolment Profile** and **Undergraduate Profile** classifications, and **Size & Setting** classification. With the addition of these dimensions, the classification gained a multi-dimensional character allowing users to apply their own priorities, but also allowing institutions to appear in multiple categories

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[16] In the continuation I will refer to it as the Carnegie Classification.

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(Jaschik 2006). These changes made the classification slowly became more complex, which represents a major challenge today to the overall usefulness of the Carnegie Classification (Altbach 2015).

The core values of the Carnegie Classification were simplicity and objectivity. Because of this, policy makers and other stakeholders have recognized the benefits of such a transparency tool, especially in advancing their own priorities and strategic goals. The results of the classification were used by many third parties for providing targeted funding to higher education institutions (McCormick and Zhao 2005). Among others, foundations used the available information as an eligibility criteria for their grant programmes, but also some states have integrated the available information into their funding formulas. These applications demonstrate the public value of the information provided by the Carnegie Classification.

Following in the footsteps of the Carnegie Classification, the European Commission supported the development of a similar classification of higher education institutions in Europe. The project, which is still ongoing and carries the name U-Map, is the first attempt to map out the institutional landscape in several European countries[17]. The classification is based on empirical data gathered from various sources (usually a combination of data reported by institutions and data available from national databases), offers a multi-dimensional perspective, and is non-hierarchical (meaning that it does not imply qualitative differences) (Kaiser, Faber, and Jongbloed 2012). Based on these principles, the methodology of the U-Map classification takes into account six dimensions of higher education institutions: **teaching and learning**, **student profile**, **knowledge exchange**, **international orientation**, **research involvement**, and **regional engagement**. Each dimension involves a number of indicators with clear cut-off points to distinguish between levels of intensity of the specific characteristic. These cut-off

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[17] Until now about 9 regions or countries took part in the U-map exercise. These are: Estonia, Belgium/Flanders, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway), Portugal, and the Netherlands.

points will determine the categories to which an institution can belong. In addition to classifying institutions, the U-Map project also offers a **Profile Finder** and a **Profile Viewer**. The former is meant to help users identify specific institutions within a category of institutions based on user-defined criteria, while the latter visualizes the profile of a single institution taking into account all indicators[18].

The rational for establishing the U-Map transparency instrument was to help policymakers better understand and use diversity as an important basis for the future development of EHEA and ERA, but also to help institutions to better understand their distinctive profiles (Kaiser, Faber, and Jongbloed 2012; Hazelkorn 2012a). Moreover, the results provided by this instrument add a new dimension to policy discussions, especially, since they transcends the traditional dichotomies (vocational versus academic institutions, teaching versus research, etc.) that tend to dominate European policy discussions on higher education diversification (Kaiser, Faber, and Jongbloed 2012). However, it remains to be seen whether individual Member States and different funding agencies in Europe will recognize the value of the U-Map classification as happened in the case of the Carnegie Classification in the US.

Rankings

Another dimension of diversity in higher education is based on the perceived qualitative differences between institutions (i.e. vertical diversity). For a long time, quality was evaluated by implicit reputation without much data to back up perception (Shin and Toutkoushian 2011). This started to change after the very first ranking of higher education institutions appeared in 1983[19]. Since then, their numbers have continuously increased. In 2009 Usher and Medow reported that there were a minimum of 26 different university rankings in the world (Usher and

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[18] For more information on the classification methodology please visit the website: http://www.u-map.eu/methodology.doc/

[19] The first ranking of higher education institutions was published in the United States by the news agency U.S. News and World Report. Since then, the company publishes rankings of universities, colleges, high schools, and study programmes on a regular basis, which can be accessed at: http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges

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Medow 2009). There are national rankings (like in Australia, Canada, Japan, Hong Kong, Italy, Germany, Poland, Spain, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and several international ones. Among the latter, probably the most well-known ones are the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) published by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China since 2003 and the Times Higher Education World University Ranking produced by the British Times Higher Education (THE)[20] magazine since 2004 (Dill and Soo 2005; Usher and Savino 2007; Usher and Medow 2009). In most cases, rankings are produced by commercial enterprises, such as news agencies, but there are examples of rankings being published by academic organisations, non-governmental organisations and government agencies as well.

No matter who produces a given ranking, the primary aim remains to portray the differences in quality that exist between higher education institutions, preferably based on an objective assessment of institutional performance in different areas. Rankings most commonly rely on survey data gathered from institutions, on data gathered from third parties, like citation databases or statistical offices, and also on data from university sources (Usher and Savino 2007). The gathered data is then aggregated into indicators to which weights are applied. These weights represent the importance of each indicator in the possible maximum score an institution can obtain. In the end, an overall score for each institution is generated, which is the sum of all the measured indicators, and a single list is created by ordering institutions according to their score in a descending order. Therefore, the presentation of the results reassembles the league tables used in various competitive sports.

In contrast to classifications, rankings have a built-in comparative element, which they utilize to judge institutional performance. This means, that there is always a hierarchy of institution within a single list, and those that are ranked higher are assumed to be "more

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[20] Originally the first rankings were prepared in collaboration with Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and published with the title *THE–QS World University Rankings* during the period of 2004-09.

productive, have higher quality of teaching and research, and contribute more to society then lower ranked institutions" (Shin and Toutkoushian 2011, 3). Therefore, it is very important for every higher education institution to attain the highest possible position on the ranking.

Criticisms concerning rankings is very extensive, and their methodology is often the most criticized one. Many scholars would argue that authors of rankings are imposing a specific definition of quality (by specifying which indicators matter and to what extent) and force that definition on the institutions that are ranked (Usher and Savino 2007). Therefore, the criteria used to assess quality is probably the most sensitive aspect of any ranking methodology. In a comparative analysis of ranking outcomes, Usher and Savino (2007) concluded that there seems to be a "dark matter" that accounts for quality regardless of the specific criteria applied. These characteristics are the age of the institution, the size of the faculty, and per-student expenditure, and appear to be the most important factors of success in any ranking (Usher and Savino 2007). This finding challenges the basic assumption of any ranking, which is that it can accurately depict differences is quality and performance, since it highlights the drastically important role of environmental conditions (i.e. history, location, or the economic strength of the country), on which institutions themselves have very little influence. Also, many rankings fall short on controlling for particularities of higher education institutions, like differences in terms of institutional size, disciplinary orientation, or institutional mission. Research activity is probably the most easily quantifiable and available data, and is also the most frequently used one in many rankings. However, rankings are quite rigid towards disciplinary differences, and hence, some disciplines can be preferred over others (Shin and Toutkoushian 2011). For example, applied sciences produce more publications then their peers in theoretical fields, and because of this, they will appear as more productive in terms of research activity. This calls into question the ability of rankings to actually meaningfully assess quality (Marginson 2009). Another general problem of ranking methodology relates to the reliability of the data gathered.

Many rankings, at least partially, rely on survey data gathered from experts, institutions, or students. Such data can be manipulated as individuals try to present their institution in a positive light and there is no system of verification of the data (Dill and Soo 2005; Harvey 2008). Problems of reliability are often noticeable by sudden and large fluctuations in the ranks of individual institutions.

Beside the methodological shortcoming, Teichler has summarized some additional scholarly criticism and possible negative consequences regarding the application of rankings in a national setting or internationally (Teichler 2011). These are the following:

- Rankings favour universities of certain countries and thereby propagate them as the role models for those in other countries.

- Rankings disregard different institutional missions by undermining the importance of non-research-intensive institutions.

- Rankings reinforce the reputation of old universities and thus reward past rather than present achievements.

- Networks of elite universities could lead to oligopolistic advantages, weakening the possibilities of regional universities.

- Rankings encourage more selectivity thus undermine access to higher education (not all students have the possibility to study at equally good universities)

- Rankings discriminate against outstanding scholars who are not surrounded by other outstanding scholars.

The criticism by Teichler highlights that one of the main effects of rankings is that they tend to obscure horizontal differences by emphasizing vertical differences between institutions. That is to say, rankings promote a single model of university (the research-intensive and selective model) while neglecting the importance of newer regional universities with fewer

resources. The effect of this is often convergence. As confirmed by Rolfe (2003), even newer universities with a regional focus are intent on improving their positions in rankings, primarily by shifting their activities towards research (Rolfe 2003). This can result in limiting resources for those types of activities, which are less relevant in terms of rankings, like teaching and learning. Rankings can also distort current scientific practices of institutions, as they encourage them to prefer publishing in journals that are included in bibliometric services such as ISI, or use publication requirements for promotion or even hiring of new faculty (Shin and Toutkoushian 2011). Simultaneously, institutions might feel compelled to hire international staff, attract international students, and promote English as the language of teaching and research (Shin and Toutkoushian 2011). Hence, they are "effectively becoming what is being measured" (van der Wende and Westerheijden 2009, 77). This demonstrates that when institutions need to compete on the basis of a common set of excellence criteria, horizontal differences lose their significance (Vaira 2009, Wende and Don 2009; Dill 2009; Teichler 2009).

Most of the commercial rankings claim that their primary purpose is to address the information gap between providers and customers. However, there is little evidence that the various rankings effectively address information deficiencies in the higher education market (Hazelkorn 2012a). That is to say, while many rankings claim that their primary purpose is to inform student choice, students and parents rarely take advantage of this added information when selecting an institution. This underscores that qualitative differences between universities are not always the main determinants of student choice. It is also worth mentioning that such information was always present in the higher education market, but in less explicit ways. Rankings tend to reproduce these subjective perceptions of people about which universities are the best, without revealing substantive misconceptions. Therefore, it might be less surprising

that governments are sometimes more interested in the outcomes of ranking than students and parents.

Rankings are becoming very popular in higher education policy discussions because of their claimed benefits (Deem, Mok, and Lucas 2008). These could be summarized into three broad categories: they provide more transparency concerning institutional quality and performance, contribute to increased competition between universities, and support overall quality and efficiency improvement as a result of the former (Teichler 2011). In line with the latter point, several countries are experimenting with making public funding of higher education institutions more efficient by relying on the information provided by rankings. These countries implement national ranking systems in conjunction with performance based funding (Dill 2009). Some of the most well-known examples are the Research Assessment Exercise in the United Kingdom and the Quantum Research Fund in Australia (Dill 2009). These rankings assess only the research performance of institutions and help governments identify which institutions deserve more public funding for their research activity. Besides linking rankings to funding allocations, some governments have also experimented with linking it to quality assurance. For example, in 2010 the Albanian government commissioned a German non-profit organisation to develop a concept for ranking Albanian higher education institutions. While its primary purpose was to inform student choice, the ranking was also envisioned to inform the government about the performance of the country's higher education institutions allowing it to take action against institutions with poor quality ("Development of a Ranking in Albania. Final Report" 2011). Thus, the information provided by the ranking was supposed to supplement quality assurance practices in the country.

The fact that many governments are eager to support the development of national rankings suggest that policies have shifted from emphasizing horizontal differences to vertical ones. This can easily lead to policy tensions considering that society and the economy continues

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to demand horizontal differentiation with wider opportunities (Hazelkorn 2012b). Therefore, one of the main challenge faced by many governments and policy makers is how to reconcile the two aspects of diversity, without sacrificing the possible benefits of any of them. Such an attempt is being made on a European level by the ongoing U-Multirank project.

In contrast to the US higher education system, where differences in quality, reputation and performance have played a key role for universities competitiveness on the market for a long time, the European higher education landscape displayed only small vertical differences and they were not perceived as overly relevant for students decision or for policy making (Teichler 2011; Dill 2009). However, the results of the first international rankings showcased a very poor standing of European universities in the world, especially when considering the objectives of the Lisbon strategy. Consequently, many Member States and European organisations underlined that mediocracy dominates in EHEA with only a couple of top universities. Promptly, a European project called U-Multirank, was initiated. It was the first attempt to create a European university ranking, but it also intended to be more than just a replica of existing international rankings. It sought to challenge the dominance of global rankings at a conceptual level by following four main principles, often lacking from other rankings. First, it was user-driven, whereby individual stakeholders could rank institutions according to their own preferences. Secondly, it was multi-dimensional with information collected according to five different characteristics. The dimensions or criteria taken into account when generating hierarchies are research, teaching, knowledge transfer, international orientation and community or regional commitment (Ciolan et al. 2015). Thirdly, the project paid attention to comparability, and only institutions with similar mission or similar fields of studies were compared. Finally, it allowed for a multi-level analysis meaning that institutions could be examined as a whole or at disciplinary or departmental level (Hazelkorn 2012a). All four principles were destined to address the before mentioned shortcomings of other ranking

(i.e. did not imply one definition of quality, endorsed institutional differences while addressing the issue of comparability, and took into consideration internal differences as well). The project is still going on and expanding its assessment to new disciplinary fields and institutions across Europe. As it is a voluntary project, institutions and departments are not obliged to take part in it.

1.6.2. Transparency tools in Europe

It is very difficult these days to speak about the diversification of higher education and not to mention transparency tools. These instruments have become very popular in contemporary policy talk in Europe. The need to generate more transparent and reliable data about the diversity of European higher education has been confirmed by the European Ministers of Education in the Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué (2009):

"*These transparency tools need to relate closely to the principles of the Bologna Process, (…) and should be based on comparable data and adequate indicators to describe the diverse profiles of higher education institutions and their programmes*" ("Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué" 2009, 5; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

While it seems that there is a broad consensus about the need for transparency, both classification and ranking instruments still suffer from several problems. They tend to ignore internal differences (differences that exist between disciplines or departments), tend to portray a "best model" of a university (although this is less obvious in the case of classifications), they contain methodological imperfections that allow for the questioning of the validity and reliability of the gathered data, and they simplify institutional activity, either by reflecting quality with a single composite score, or by describing institutional profile by demoting it to one or a few single descriptors. Despite these shortcomings, the growing application of transparency tools in Europe suggests a strong confidence among policy makers that quality can be determined and accurately measured by rankings or classifications. Not surprisingly, this assumption did not resonate well with the beliefs of the European academic community. The Bologna Higher Education Researchers' Conference has outlined:

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"Current policy debates on institutional diversity are strongly influenced by increasing preoccupation with international competitiveness, visibility and position in rankings, which favour one institutional model and one dimension of higher education activities over others, thereby undermining the sort of diversity which is needed to respond to the wide range of demands." (Reichert 2012, 831).

Similar concern has been stated by the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE):

"As a by-product in the provision of public information, easy-to-read league tables and rankings indicate streamlining of communication in the higher education sector, which fails, as such, to describe the necessary diversity of institutions. These shortcomings amount to ready and easy comparatives without the in-depth analysis to inform a broader public of the wider functions of HEIs." ("Policy Paper on Quality Assurance and Transparency Tools" 2012, 5)

In order to challenge the "one-size-fits-all" approach promoted mainly by international rankings European policy makers took a somewhat different, and even a challenging road. The objective of European policy initiatives, like the U-Map and U-Multirank projects, has been to highlight the diversity of the continent's higher education landscape by supporting a multi-dimensional representation of institutional performance and providing the opportunity for stakeholders to apply their definition of quality. However, this is not always the case at national level, where these instruments are often applied more restrictively. Vercruysse and Proteasa (2012) have summarized the application of transparency tools in some of the signatory countries of the Bologna Agreement (see Table 5). Their survey found that there is a diverse approach to applying transparency tools, both in terms of their methodology and in terms of their implications. Considering the latter aspect, some countries use these instruments as a ground for imposing a specific mission on higher education institutions, to aid quality assurance and accreditation, to direct the allocation of public funding, or even to support internationalisation (Vercruysse and Proteasa 2012).

Table 5: Use of different transparency tools by European countries

Name of country	One-dimensional classification	Multidimensional classification	Hierarchically ordered classification (ratings)	Rankings
Bulgaria	X			
Denmark	X			
Romania	X			
Switzerland	X			
Slovak Republic	X			
Belgium/Flemish Community	X			
Norway		X (Flower project)		
Albania			X	X
Bulgaria			X	
Germany			X (CHE)	
Netherlands			X (studiekeuze123.nl)	
FYRO Macedonia				X

Source: Vercruysse and Proteasa 2012

Certainly, this table is not complete, as transparency tools are being devised and introduced repeatedly, and sometimes also abolished unexpectedly. Therefore, it is almost impossible to give a full account of existing transparency tools in Europe. Taking into account also that many are conducted by non-government organisations or for profit companies it becomes even harder to assess their numbers, and probably what is even more important, their relevance.

1.6.3. The implications of more transparency

One of the central policy assumptions surrounding the use of transparency tools is, that by providing more or less accurate information on institutional performance, they can aid governmental decisions, especially in the area of public financing. It is a common perception in Europe that resources are spread much too thinly, and mediocrity prevails over critical mass (Lambert and Butler 2006). This distribution model, beside the fact that it neglects institutional

differences, also undermines the potential for some institutions to excel vertically by improving their performance. To unlock this potential governments strive to link resource allocation to the results of transparency tools. Like accreditation or quality assurance, classifications and rankings can be aligned to public financing too. Because of this they are considered as "policymaker friendly" (Shin 2009). However, one major difference between the two is, that accreditation and quality assurance fall short on creating substantial differences among institutions, most being either accredited or not (Ciolan et al. 2015). In contrast, classifications and rankings operate with more categories or levels allowing for a more differentiated funding model to be applied. The obtained information can also assist how governments allocate student support. For instance, a CHE report from 2011 notes that some countries started to rely on international rankings as a criteria for granting scholarships for their students who want to study abroad ("Development of a Ranking in Albania. Final Report" 2011). Although there are many ways in which governments can take advantage of the increased amount of information, it remains to be seen, whether the aligned financial measures actually contribute to a more diversified higher education or not. Some concern has been uttered that using transparency tools (especially rankings) as a basis for funding decisions could undermine horizontal diversity instead of supporting it (Reichert 2012). Others, for example Skodvin (2012), found that the way funding is distributed and economic incentives applied can play a crucial role in achieving diversity in higher education (Skodvin 2012).

Clearly, the information provided by transparency tools can assist governments in making better funding decisions. In practice, this means that some institutions deserve more public support then others, and not just because they conduct more of a given activity, but because they do it better. Making this decision is often justified on the basis that national governments strive to create world-class universities. Several countries have initiated projects, among others the Netherlands (Focus and Mass) or Germany (Excellence Initiative), that seek

to either merge institutions to create a critical mass or identify the best ones in general or in a narrow field of activity, and based on that information provide additional resources to the selected few. These projects, which I call excellence initiatives, are often a direct policy reaction to the internationalization of higher education. Therefore, Deem and colleagues (2008) emphasize that the term "world-class" can be easily collapsed into meaning nothing more than international (Deem, Mok, and Lucas 2008). Nevertheless, there is a strong normative belief among countries, that they need to stay relevant in a global higher education market, and the way to achieve it is by additionally incentivizing the best performing universities. As Althbach (2004) put it: "Everyone wants a world-class university. No country feels it can do without one. The problem is that no one knows what a world-class university is, and no one has figured out how to get one." (Altbach 2004, 20). Yet, it is clear that transparency tools can play a crucial role in both identifying the best universities and enabling governments to provide additional support for them. Thus, excellence initiatives at national or European level complement the policy debates on diversification with the vision of a hierarchically stratified EHEA (Hackl 2012).

Excellence initiatives and related projects signal that policy attention shifted from regional distribution to creating critical mass (Reichert 2012). Similarly to rankings, they concentrate mostly on vertical differences, portraying a one-dimensional approach with two rival characteristics: research (world-class) universities and teaching (mass) higher education institutions. Enders and Boer (2009) connect the founding of the League of European Research Universities in 2002 also to such developments, as they foreshadow a more stratified higher education system in the future (Enders and Boer 2009). Whether excellence initiatives will be successful in creating world-class universities remains to be seen. Certainly, such a development could have a number of positive outcomes. First, as a consequence of higher education massification many universities lost their elite-selection role. A university degree

became a "necessary precondition, but less clearly a sufficient precondition" for entering high-level careers (Teichler 2008b, 5). Increased stratification among universities might adjust for this selection problem in the labour market as companies would be in a better position to judge the quality of the graduates. Secondly, selecting a few institutions, or '*picking the winners*'[21], could be beneficial for the overall quality of research in a country. This arguments follows the dominant economic reasoning according to which an elite research university is key for every countries economic and social development (Gidley 2012). More differentiation between teaching and research institutions can offer a reasonable solution to current financial problems, because it can make the allocation of public funds more rational by directing it to particular institutional needs which in turn could lead to cost-reduction. However, there is hardly any evidence that the quality of the total system of higher education in a given country might improve as resources for research get concentrated in a couple of institutions and as the system becomes more stratified (Teichler 2011). Moreover, some academic organisations, like the German Science Council, started to raise concerns whether such a policy will eventually sacrifice national and regional engagement aims of universities (Reichert 2012). Excellence initiatives and related projects focus so much on international (and particularly Anglo-Saxon) criteria for excellence that the national role of universities becomes completely neglected in favour of their international one (Deem, Mok, and Lucas 2008). Additionally, such projects seem to strain national budgets at a time when the demand for universal higher education is rising, doubting if both access and excellence are attainable with limited resources, or if it is worth sacrificing one over the other (Deem, Mok, and Lucas 2008; Hazelkorn 2012b). Binding resource allocation to the differences between the institutions remains a contested topic,

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[21] The phrase has been coined by John Irvine and Ben R. Martine in their book: Foresight in Science: Picking the Winners, published in 1984.

especially considering that it is hardly possible for any institution to opt out of their government's quest for world-class universities.

1.7. Diversification policies in national context

Diversification policies point to a structural reorganisation of higher education systems across European countries with the intention to create and maintain different institutional types or profiles, often with distinct qualities. Commonly, this involves a separation between a mass higher education sub-system and an elite one, where the latter is increasingly seen as being crucial for attaining global excellence in higher education. However, countries have different starting points, can select different policy approaches, and apply different policy instruments with a distinctive methodology and with a particular purpose. This variety has been demonstrated by a number of empirical case studies conducted on this topic. Some of them are summarized next.

1.7.1. The case of United Kingdom

The United Kingdom (UK) was the first country in Europe to adopt a binary higher education model in 1965, which created a division between universities and polytechnics (Vaira 2009). Interestingly, it was also among the first to abolish this division in 1993 and polytechnics were upgraded to a university status. Although, the UK has moved towards a unified higher education system there is still a steep hierarchy present between the individual institutions (Huisman and van Vught 2009). For example, Scott (2001) counted at least seven types of institutions in the county, ranging from highly prestigious ones like Cambridge and Oxford, through the redbricks founded in the late 19th and early 20th century, to the new universities that were formally polytechnics (Scott 2001 as quoted in van Vught et al. 2005). After the abolishment of the binary divide evidence suggests that diversity in terms of institutional missions is decreasing, which made diversification of higher education a highly prioritized policy issue in the country (Reichert 2009). To tackle this problem new policy

measures were announced to encourage competition among institutions, especially concerning research funding (Skodvin 2012). One of these measures was the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This exercise can be considered a transparency instrument, because it provides information to funding organisations about the research performance of different institutions. It awards grades for research infrastructure, inputs such as grants, number of research students and research outputs on a disciplinary basis, which then informs the allocation of research funds (Deem 2006). After the introduction of the exercise, many universities were forced to close a number of their departments since their public funding was drastically cut due to a law grade in the RAE assessment (Jobbins 2005). Thus, RAE sought to selectively focus research funding into elite (or world-class) institutions while encouraging the rest of the universities to shift their activities towards applied research, knowledge transfer or teaching (Deem 2006). This measure motivated the Universities UK[22] to publish a report highlighting some of the negative consequences of this policy. The report states that resource concentration generates disparities across various regions in the UK and some might lose dramatically (Deem, Mok, and Lucas 2008). In 2014, RAE was replaced by the Research Excellence Framework, which sought to address some of the major shortcomings of its predecessor.

1.7.2. The case of Germany

In contrast to the UK higher education system, the German one is often described as the least stratified one (Teichler 2008a; Teichler 2008b). The German Fachochschulen started their programmes in 1971, and the formal division between universities and vocational institutions is still maintained. Regardless of the binary divide, some scholars pointed out that there are visible signs of convergence of activities between the two types of institutions (Teichler

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[22] Universities UK is a membership based non-governmental organisation representing 133 higher education institutions. Their core mission is to promote a successful and diverse higher education sector in the UK. For more information visit: www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

2008b). In the 1998 reform of the German higher education system (i.e. the 4th amendment to the Federal Framework Law for Higher Education) a strong emphasis was put on differentiating institutional missions and developing performance related incentives, which followed the assumption that such measures would increase the international competitiveness of the country's higher education system (Deem, Lucas, and Ka Ho 2009). In 2005 the Excellence Initiative[23] programme was launched in Germany with the explicit aim to differentiate world-class universities from the rest in the country. It was a very challenging undertaking, which "meant a departure from a long-cherished – and fatally wrong – conception that all universities are equal and hence should be treated equally."[24] The programme, which is already ten years old, amplified the previously small vertical differences between higher education institutions, as well as, supported the concentration of public funding in a couple of them (Hartmann 2010). Hence, the programme was designed first and foremost to express vertical differences in the German higher education system, which carries a lot of similarity to the UK's RAE exercise. Another similarity between the two countries is the upcoming redesign of the Excellence Initiative programme, which is due in 2017[25].

1.7.3. The case of France

The French system is characterized by a high degree of institutional diversity that cannot be simply encapsulated within the traditional binary divide. During the 1960 the French system established the *Instituts universitaires de technologie* (IUT) as a somewhat separate type of higher education institution, although many of them operate alongside universities today (Teichler 2008a). The French higher education system is also considered to be vertically diversified, with *Grandes Écoles* as selective elite institutions on the one end, and free access

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[23] In German: 'Exzellenzinitiative'
[24] The quote was taken from the website of the Excellence Initiative programme on 05.04.2013.
http://www.excellence-initiative.com/excellence-initiative
[25] For more information concerning the succession of the Excellence Initiative see the website of the German Science Foundation: http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/en/fields-of-activity/excellence-initiative.html

universities on the other (Huisman and van Vught 2009). But, neither of them are typical research intensive institutions, since research is mostly associated with the French National Centre for Scientific Research[26]. Some of these centres operate independently, while others are associated to universities (Reichert 2009).

In contrast to the UK and German cases, the French system is sometimes considered to be too fragmented with a loosely coupled network of traditional universities, IUTs, Grandes Écoles, and CNRSs (Reichert 2009). The separation between these institutions often hinders inter-organisational cooperation and student mobility. While there is a need to overcome the barriers created by fragmentation, policy makers instead seem to be backing objectives to improve the position of French higher education. The French Senate even issued a report arguing that its researchers were disadvantaged in favour of English-speaking institutions, which hinders the competitiveness of French higher education institutions (Hazelkorn 2011). To improve the research performance of the overall system, two programmes, the PRES programme[27] for funding excellent research, and the Campus Plus programme for infrastructure development, were initiated and both are based on competitive funding arrangements, supporting further vertical differentiation within the system (Reichert 2009). These policy measures follow similar paths as in the UK and Germany where selective research funding is perceived as the key to more diversity in higher education.

1.7.4. The case of Norway

The Norwegian higher education system is a binary one with comprehensive universities and teaching focused regional colleges. Lately, there are signs of a strong academic drift present in the system. This tendency is primarily motivated by the fact that both institutional types are regulated by the same law, offer a common job position structure, have

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[26] In French: 'Centre national de la recherche scientifique'.
[27] In the PRES programme (in French: 'Poles de recherche et d'enseignement superieur') different types of institutions are encouraged to cooperate together at regional level and share their expertise, research investment and infrastructure.

joint reward and career systems in place, and share the same academic norms and values (Skodvin 2012). Therefore, it might be less surprising that colleges have been offered the possibility to upgrade to a university status if they reach the required student numbers (Reichert 2009). These developments illustrates a similar trend towards a unitary higher education system as in the UK (through removing legal barriers) or Germany (latent convergence based on academic drift). However, there is no obvious policy intention in Norway to foster vertical differences between institutions. Due to the deeply rooted egalitarian values in the Norwegian society, efforts to introduce diversification policies that could centralize resources in the best performing institutions have not been very successful (Reichert 2009). Instead, the Ministry of Education and Research conducts individual meetings on an annual basis with public higher education institutions to discuss their activities in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. This activity can be regarded as a soft instrument to help promote horizontal differentiation in the Norwegian higher education sector (Reichert 2009; Skodvin 2012). Beside the steering meetings, the Ministry also introduced the so called Flower Project, which intends to describe the diversity of the sector by identifying institutional profiles. The project is a multi-dimensional classification tool, which was inspired by, and hence closely follows the methodology of, the U-Map classification project (Skodvin 2012). It was first carried out in 2010 and although it evaluated institutions along 5 dimension, the results of the project reflected the established divide between universities that are more internationally oriented and colleges which are vocationally oriented (Skodvin 2012). While the results might not seem as very surprising, they were still regarded by most of the institutions as useful for visualizing their own profile in contrast to the more controversial idea of one-dimensional rankings (Skodvin 2012).

1.7.5. The case of Switzerland

Switzerland has three official types of higher education institutions, namely traditional universities, universities of applied sciences (i.e. *fachhochschulen*), and teacher training institutions. In addition, there are two federal institutes of technology (ETH in Zurich and EPF in Lausanne), which are research-intensive institutions and the only ones to offer courses in engineering ("Higher Education and Research in Switzerland" 2011). However, research activity, be it internationally oriented or regionally responsive, is not associated with strong differences in the social status of institutions (Reichert 2012). Therefore, Reichert (2012) argues that Switzerland is one of the countries in Europe with the most horizontally and least vertically diversified higher education systems (Reichert 2012). Switzerland also seems to prefer diversity in terms of institutional profiles over legally defined and regulated institutional types (Reichert 2009). The new higher education act of Switzerland distanced itself from defining specific types of institutions and instead seeks to foster institutional profiles by encouraging the degree of competition between higher education institutions (Reichert 2009). Such a bottom-up policy approach might signal a stronger vertical differentiation in the future. There are already examples of individual universities pursuing a policy of differentiation themselves. Such is the case of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne. The university has gone through major changes during the last ten years to become a world-class university, specifically by changing its internal organisation, accepting more graduate students than undergraduate ones, and attracting excellent students and teaching staff of which many are non-Swiss residents (Noukakis, Ricci, and Vetterli 2011). Therefore, Switzerland might offer a good illustration of how bottom-up policies, which rest on guaranteed institutional autonomy and competitive forces, can encourage diversification in higher education.

1.7.6. The case of the Netherlands

The Dutch higher education system follows a binary divide between universities offering research-oriented degree programmes, and universities of applied sciences (i.e. *hogescholen*) offering higher professional education programmes. There is additional variety among universities as we can find comprehensive universities, specialized universities (e.g. in engineering or agriculture) and the Open University of the Netherlands[28]. Vertical differences in terms of quality are considered to be very low between institutions, which is mainly the consequence of strong government regulation in the past and society's general focus on equality (Westerheijden et al. 2009). In 1985 the Dutch government introduced the concept of 'steering from a distance' that enhanced the autonomy of institutions allowing them to devise their own developmental plans (Westerheijden et al. 2009). However, the analysis of these university plans by Maassen and Potman (1990) did not find evidence that more autonomy resulted in more diversity (Maassen and Potman 1990). Moreover, there were visible signs of convergence. A similar trend has been enforced by the Bologna Process, whereby what used to be a clear demarcation between universities and *hogscholen* started fading away[29] (Huisman and van Vught 2009). As a consequence, in 2011 the Dutch government presented a Strategic Agenda containing its plans to enhance both horizontal and vertical diversity (Kaiser, Faber, and Jongbloed 2012). It required from the institutions to develop their own distinctive profiles, both in terms of their activities and their performances. To a limited extent, these profiles were then attached to public funding through bilateral contracts comprising performance related indicators (Kaiser, Faber, and Jongbloed 2012). Therefore, the Dutch policy approach to the diversification of higher education builds first and foremost on guaranteeing the freedom of

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[28] The Open University of the Netherlands is a distance learning instituion offering accessible tertiary level education for anyone. For more information on the institution see their website: https://www.ou.nl/web/english

[29] Hogscholen also started offering master programmes, preferred to call themselves universities of applied sciences (instead of hogescholen), and engaged more actively in research (Huisman and van Vught 2009).

institutions to define their own mission. Only after this, did the state introduce financial incentives to encourage the profiling of institutions.

1.7.7. The case of Slovakia

Until 2007 there were no regulations or incentives introduced that would have encouraged the diversification of Slovak higher education system. All institutions carried the label of a university (regardless of size, portfolio, or the presence of any research activity) and considered themselves alike in terms of their mission and core functions (Reichert 2012). Following a more recent debate, which stressed that the Slovak higher education lacks international competitiveness, the issue of institutional differentiation has gained importance (Reichert 2009). In 2007 a new law announced the implementation of a classification exercise for higher education institutions. The methodology of the exercise closely followed that of the British Research Assessment Exercise, meaning that the sole differentiation criteria between institutions became the volume and quality of research, and to a lesser extent institutional capacity (Ostrovský 2010; Reichert 2012). There were two categories of institutions defined: a) university-type higher education institutions; b) special higher education institutions. Institutions that offer education on all three levels and conduct basic research were categorized into the first group and called **universities**. Institutions offering only first level degrees and conducting applied research, were categorized into the second group and called **special higher education institutions** instead of universities (Ostrovský 2010). The law specifying the classification procedure defined also a third possibility, for institutions that offer education on the first and second degree levels and conduct basic research. They were supposed to be called **higher education institutions** and could be considered as a middle category between the two major ones. As Ostrovský argues, this has led to a great confusion and the classification exercise resulted in no institution being classified as a **special higher education institution**, but only as universities or as higher education institutions (Ostrovský 2010). After the results

of the classification were revealed, the government, under the pressure of institutional representatives, abandoned the policy before it was fully implemented (Reichert 2012). Nevertheless, based on its one-dimensional approach that rewarded research performance more than other dimensions of institutional engagement, we can suppose that the Slovakian classification exercise was intended not just fostered horizontal differences, but also vertical differentiation.

1.8. Summary

As the above examples suggest, national higher education systems vary substantially according to the extent of institutional diversity (Guri-Rosenblit, Šebková, and Teichler 2007). In most cases the binary divide between academic institutions and vocational ones is their dominant characteristic. Yet, this arrangement is continuously challenged by national and international developments encouraging more and more European countries to move towards a unified system. Concerning the hierarchical composition of their higher education systems, it is fair to assume that it has remained rather flat. The only exception of this rule is probably the British system where there is an obvious monopoly of a few institutions (Huisman and van Vught 2009). In other countries, hierarchical differences are minimal. Considering these trends, it might not be a big surprise that some countries try to implement policies of diversification. However, these policies exhibit distinctiveness in terms of their approach to diversification and the policy tools used to achieve it. Moreover, the same policy approach or instrument might result in a different outcome from one country to the other, and even across institutions in the same country (Paradeise 2012). Despite these apparent differences we can still identify common elements in the way European countries try to deal with diversity in higher education.

First of all, the present situation in European countries demonstrates an apparent tension between the elite notion of quality and the social justice ethic towards greater access to higher education (Gidley 2012). Several countries try to ease this tension by supporting distinctive

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institutional profiles, which shows, that they have acknowledged diversity as a positive and necessary feature of mass higher education systems (Trow 1979, as quoted in Horta, Huisman, and Heitor 2008). Secondly, these policies often demonstrate a striking similarity to the new managerial reforms first attempted in the UK (Deem, Mok, and Lucas 2008). That is to say, they frequently include extensive evaluations (primarily in terms of research activity), emphasize performance improvements and support competition. Thirdly, vertical differences seem to be preferred over horizontal ones. In this regard, Deem and colleagues argue that teaching could become a consolation prize for those institutions who have no chance to engage in world-class research (Deem, Mok, and Lucas 2008). Last but not least importantly, many countries seem to agree that there should be more transparency about the existing level of diversity in European higher education. Their intention is assisted by various transparency tools applied nationally or internationally. Despite these common elements, it is less clear whether European higher education is developing towards a more diverse or homogeneous system (Skodvin 2012). In order to provide a plausible hypothesis for the direction of changes in Europe I have examined the pressures faced by institutions that can act as homogenizing forces in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II: Institutional diversity under converging systems of higher education in Europe

2.1.   Introduction

Scholars often ask the question in which direction are higher education systems moving. Are they converging or diverging? In some way these routes are very similar as they both seem to run on the same track, but towards different destinations. One implies that organisations are becoming more similar, while the other suggests that they are becoming less similar. As I have presented in the previous chapter, institutional diversity in national systems has often moved back and forth on this trail. But today, this question does not concern only national policy makers any more (maybe it never did). International coordination has become more influential over the development of Europe higher education and it is difficult to discuss the direction of changes without considering the motives of supranational coordinative forces as well (Neave 1996).

The European integration process has been especially challenging for the development of national higher education systems. When exploring national policy developments, one has to take into account the transnational policy demands placed upon national governments. Policy changes in national higher education systems have accelerated since the 1990s and were largely driven by two European policy documents, namely the Bologna Declaration (1999) and the Lisbon strategy (2000) (Middlehurst and Teixeira 2012). These two supranational developments were initially separate, but following the Bergen Ministerial conference (2005) increasingly intertwined and many policy goals of the Lisbon strategy transferred into the Bologna Process (Middlehurst and Teixeira 2012). Consequently, both policies aimed to reshape national higher education systems by making them contribute better to the socio-economic goals of an integrated Europe (Vögtle 2014). These processes combined created a new space for policy dialogue in higher education that transcends the national context.

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Nevertheless, convergence of higher education policies across Europe was perceived to be less likely than in other fields, such as the economy or environmental protection (Vögtle 2014). This was mostly because higher education policies were, and still are, regarded as national matters.

Although it is still ambitious to speak about a European higher education system, it is evident that there is an emerging pan-European approach to higher education that transcends the distinct national systems (Huisman and van Vught 2009). This was to a large extent stimulated by the Bologna Process, which came about as the result of supranational coordinative efforts of nation states and which is probably "the only platform where it is possible to look for a common European notion of higher education" (Miklavič 2012). The emerging European Higher Education and Research Area point to the fact that, while the national context remains important, many universities are being transformed, or are transforming themselves, to meet also the expectations of an integrated European higher education system. Harmonization of degree structures, increased student and staff mobility, development of joint study programmes, and enhanced research cooperation, are all processes that pull national systems, and the organisations that populate them, closer together. As the similarity between national systems of higher education increases, the debate on diversity in higher education comes to be regarded as more important. That is why Enders and de Boer (2009) argue that the rise of the EHEA and the ERA added another transnational layer to the struggle of defining the appropriate design for European higher education (Enders and Boer 2009). Hence, the current European integration process provides an inspiring ground for exploring the various forces that might shape the landscape of higher education in the near future.

Looking at the current developments in Europe, one could easily make the assumption that most aspects of higher education are converging. This might be considered either as a

positive trend or a negative one, depending on our interests or expectations. As shown before, the harmonization of different degree programmes was regarded positively within the Bologna Process. Yet, in some other cases, too much similarity or the loss of diversity might be worrisome to policy makers. That is why the development of diversification policies is somewhat understandable. However, in many cases diversification policies are being applied without fully understanding why diversity is lacking or disappearing form European higher education. This is why in this chapter I want to explore the reasons for organisational convergence in higher education. More precisely, I am curious how the existing diversity of institutional types, profiles and statuses in European higher education could be affected by the convergence of national systems and institutions?

Most of the studies concerned with changes in European higher education focus on the converging nature of national higher education policies. In this regard, the Bologna Process coupled with a number of European projects in higher education act as powerful forces for institutional convergence (Neave 1996, Teichler 2012). Moreover, there are a number of internationally binding legal documents, harmonization guidelines, competition regulation, or transnational communications which act as shared signposts for national policy development in higher education (Vögtle 2014). However, building inferences about organisational change based solely on institutional change might be deceiving. Therefore, I argue that the synchronization of national higher education policies, as in the case of the Bologna Process, can hardly imply that European higher education is becoming more homogeneous. A common institutional framework might be one source for organisational convergence, but it might not be all that determinative and probably not the only one. The strategic behaviour that organisations employ in response to institutional influences should not be underestimated (Oliver 1991). It is necessary to go beyond the assumption that organisations are the subject of institutional coercion, and perceive them as active participants in the construction and

enforcement of shared rules and norms. In this respect, organisational theory could offer a compelling explanation for converging tendencies between higher education institutions of different types, profiles and statuses. It reconciles the actions of the agents (their strategic behaviour) with the institutional context, which is rapidly expanding from the national to a supranational sphere.

2.2. *Organisational fields and their structuration*

A higher education system can be situated between the macrosociological world, which presents the space where common rules and norms are expressed, and the microsociological world, where we find the actors with their diverse interests and motivations (Machado-da-Silva, Guarido Filho, and Rossoni 2006; W. R. Scott 2001). These two worlds congregate at the meso level, populated by organisations and networks that are arranged into organisational fields (sometimes referred to as a 'sector'[30]). The organisational field is where the interaction between agency and structure is the most visible, or where public policies link up with the recipients of rules (Scott and Meyer 1991). It is the context in which organisational convergence appears, and allows us to observe the factors that make organisations increasingly similar or different, without disregarding either the internal motivations of organisations or the institutional pressures arising from the environment. This is why the organisational field is a key element of my analysis.

There are several definitions of an organisational field. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) described the organisational field as the totality of relevant actors including key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar services or products (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). They also state that organisational fields represent a recognized area of organisational life and exist only when they are institutionally defined (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 143). This means that every organisational

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[30] Scott and Meyer (1991) use the terminology 'societal sector' to refer to organisational field.

field possesses an institutionalized feature or structure. Similarly, Bertalanffy (1986) describes a system as an 'organized complexity', which also supports the argument that an organisational field is not merely the collection of agents and their diverse interests, but is organized according to some common rules and norms. Such institutional features exist in all national higher education systems that regulate the activities of involved agents (e.g. students, professors, higher education institutions, representative bodies, quality assurance agencies, the ministry responsible for higher education, etc.). Beside its structural aspect, other definitions point to the relational feature of the organisational field. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue that an organisational field is 'a relational configuration' containing a patterned system of forces, and state that a "field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition" in which "participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of capital effective in it" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 17). This shows that an organisational field can be also regarded as an arena where the diverse interests of individual agents get sorted out through interactions among them (Scott 2001). These interactions can be both competitive and cooperative (Scott and Meyer, 1991). Higher education institutions compete for resources, but also make alliances and organize into various networks to promote their own goals. In sum, there is both an important structural and relational dimension to organisational fields (Machado-da-Silva, Guarido Filho, and Rossoni 2006). The relational dimension describes the interactions that the organisations have with each other, while the common institutional structure describes the rules and norms according to which these interactions take place.

In line with the organisational theory literature I would like to mention three additional characteristics of organisational fields. The first attribute describe a field's purposiveness and goal-seeking character. Organisational fields are not simply aggregative constructs of individual organisations, but meaningful constructs in which actors work towards accomplishing a specific function (Machado-da-Silva, Guarido Filho, and Rossoni 2006). This

means that the boundaries of organisation fields are not defined primarily by geographical terms (for example national higher education systems) but by functional ones, which also encompass transnational and supranational dimensions (Scott and Meyer 1991). The second characteristic of any organisational field is that it is capable to evolve, meaning that it can move to more complex forms (Sporn 1999). Evolution usually takes place through differentiation and integration and the resulting greater complexity in the system demonstrates its ability to deal with challenges and opportunities posed by the environment (Sporn 1999). The third important feature of any organisational field is that it shows a tendency towards developing a higher order (Bertalanffy 1968). In other words, there is a tendency to organize the existing complexity within a field in a logical manner. Every change in the organisational field will eventually result in a systematic rearrangement among organisations, who will seek to maintain themselves in that steady state to secure order within the field (Bertalanffy 1968). These three characteristics also apply to higher education systems. They follow an already established purpose, which means that we find more similarity between higher education systems across large geographic areas then between systems with different purposes in the same country. They are continuously becoming more complex by adding new organisational units or new functions to already existing ones to cope with environmental challenges. And last, they seek to structure this complexity in order to provide stability and enable each organisation to pursue its goals.

It is disputed what accounts for the structure of an organisational field. Some argue that how a particular higher education system will look like depends primarily on the institutional framework set in place by the state, something, which is external to the organisational field in which higher education institutions operate. However, it is not always easy to separate the role of the environment from that of the organisations (Zucker 1987). A practical illustration of this problem can be that many policy makers and government representatives are deeply involved in the activities of higher education institutions and their personal interests are not always

separated from the organisational one they are attached to in one way or the other. It would be also difficult to find any higher education policy which did not involve some representatives of higher education institutions. Hence, it is misleading to attribute the structure of higher education systems entirely to state imposed regulations, but one has to consider also the role of organisations that actively shape it. Rather than viewing institutional frameworks as something external, we should perceive them as at least partially generated by the organisations in the field. This means that forces of cooperation between similar or different organisations become at least as important as competitive forces (Scott and Meyer, 1991).

Since organisations can determine the future structure of a system, power relationships become crucial elements of the organisational fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Accordingly, Machado et al. conceptualize a field as "a structured space of position, an arena of dispute for legitimacy, in which agents struggle for the redefinition or appropriation of specific capital that is unequally distributed" (Machado-da-Silva, Guarido Filho, and Rossoni 2006, 40). Organisations embedded within fields do not compete only for resources, but also struggle to define the appropriate rules and norms. In all higher education systems there are well-established (traditional) universities and some which are located at the periphery. Organisational fields that have stable and broadly acknowledged centres, peripheries, and status orders will be more homogeneous, because they have established a structure for diffusion of models and norms (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). This means, that the existence of a dominant group of organisations (like national flagship universities) can contribute to the loss of diversity in higher education. These organisations have not just more power to define the appropriate rules and norms according to which other providers of higher education should operate, but also seek to influence the development of rules and norms in a way that fits their own needs. This can endanger the potential for survival of alternative organisational forms. Therefore, diversity and differentiation can be also approached from the perspective of tensions

inherent in the power relationships between different groups of organisations within the same system.

Every national higher education system has characteristics that make it more or less distinctive from other national systems. Some are regulated more strictly, some have more interaction among its members, some follow different purposes, some have expanded more to meet new challenges, and some operate on a rather flat hierarchy compared to the others. These properties of higher education systems have been previously established through a process of structuration. The structuration of an organisational field describes the process of institutional definition (Giddens 1986). During this process three core elements of organisational fields are recreated (Machado-da-Silva, Guarido Filho, and Rossoni 2006):

- institutional **rules** for the communication of meaning

- unequally distributed **resources** for the exercise of power

- professional **relationship** for the evaluation of conduct

The outlined aspects of the structuration process, namely generative rules, resources and a system of relationships are both applied to action and are constituted as part of it (Machado-da-Silva, Guarido Filho, and Rossoni 2006). They have the potential to influence organisation's actions, but might bear different levels of importance from one system to the other. Nevertheless, all these structural elements constitute institutional pressures whose influence depends on the degree of the field's structuration (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). The more a system is structured the stronger their influence, and the more likely it is that organisations will try to accommodate similar structures, values, and activities (Vaira 2009). Thus, rules, resources, and relationships act as structural conditions under which rational actors try to make their organisations increasingly similar. Why and how this takes place is described next.

2.3. Isomorphism

DiMaggio and Powel have observed that once an organisational field is established, there is an inevitable push towards homogenization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In order to understand the process of homogenization it is necessary to look at how individual organisations function in a system. As mentioned before, organisations are rational actors that are conscious, deliberate and purposeful, which means that they will be determined to attain their goals within the institutional boundaries of the system (Scott 2005). Powell and DiMaggio note that this rationality is what drives actors to make their organisations similar (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). In other words, every organisation in a system will perceive the imitation of other organisations as a rational act, especially when that organisation is considered to be more efficient or legit in obtaining the purpose of the system.

Meyer and Rowan state that organisational change must be justified either by efficiency claims or by claims of adhering to institutional demands (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Accordingly, isomorphism has been related to two processes that take place in organisational fields. One is competition, which requires organisational efficiency, and the other is the institutional pressures that require organisations to adhere to general rules and norms. Hannan and Freeman (1977) argued from a population ecology perspective that isomorphism arises as a result of competitive pressures that force organisations to adopt similar characteristics relative to one another (Hannan and Freeman 1977). Organisations will become isomorphic to each other because the environment is expected to reward those organisations, which appear to be the most viable, and select out the poor performers. This process is very similar to how natural selection works, since only those organisations ought to survive, which are capable to adapt better to environmental conditions. In contrast, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) proposed that isomorphism develops from the structuration of an organisational field into an interconnected set of organisations and that this process pushes the individual units toward homogeneity

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(DiMaggio and Powell 1983). This perspective emphasizes, that in contrast to natural environments, social environments are characterized by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organisations must conform if they want to receive support and legitimacy (Scott and Meyer 1994; Sporn 1999). In both cases the environment remains a crucial source of isomorphism, however, they diverge on the aspect whether competitive forces or institutions encourage organisational convergence (Oliver 1991).

In line with the dualistic perception that competition and institutional pressure could be the main rationalizers of organisational action Meyer and Rowan (1977) describe two contexts. The first one is called **relation context** and is dominated by the logic of consequentiality. In this context networks of organisations interact with each other and diffuse and adopt the most efficient structures to gain competitive advantage over their competitors (Meyer and Rowan 1977). The second one is the **institutionalized context** where the logic of appropriateness dominates. The rationalized structures present an acceptable account of organisational activities and organisations gain legitimacy and resources by following them (Meyer and Rowan 1977). These two environments exercise different pressures. In the relational context organisations are rewarded for effective and efficient production, while the institutionalized one requires conformity with institutionalized rules and norms (Scott and Meyer 1991). This distinction makes us question, in which context do higher education institutions operate. Are they motivated mainly by efficiency gains or by adherence to rules and norms, or maybe both?

Institutional pressures are advanced with the help of state legislatures and the professional occupation. Organisations conform to institutionalized rules and norms defined by these two important agents, not necessary to enhance their performance, but to gain legitimacy, resources, and increase their survival capabilities (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Kondra and Hinings 1998). Hence, from the institutionalized context perspective there is no clear relationship between efficiency and isomorphism. In this

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situation organisations might imitate the actions and structures of others even if no evidence of their effectiveness exists (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), two issues arise from this statement. First, demands for efficiency might be inconsistent with the rules and norms of production. Secondly, because rules and norms arise from different parts of the environment, they may conflict with one another (Meyer and Rowan 1977). In practice, this means that in practice the loss of external diversity, as a consequence of strong institutional pressures to use appropriate procedures, may also reduce organisational and even system level efficiency.

While the productive efficiency of organisations could be threatened by isomorphism, it can nevertheless be regarded as a rational act by the individual organisations. In this regard, Kondra and Hinings (1998) argue that isomorphism can be the outcome of risk-aversion (Kondra and Hinings 1998). Similarly, Scott (2001) states that the process of isomorphism follows the logic of orthodoxy, because organisations do not want to stand out or to be noticed as different (Scott 2001). Hence, imitation of other organisations can be also perceived as an optimal, in other words the most efficient, decision in times of organisational uncertainty (Kondra and Hinings 1998).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) related isomorphic pressures first and foremost to the institutionalized context and they outlined three mechanisms that advance it: **coercive** (stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy), **mimetic** (stems from responses to uncertainty), and **normative** (stems from professionalization). These types are not always empirically distinct and an organisation can be exposed to more than one type at the same time (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Coercive isomorphism results from pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they depend (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Often, these are state authorities who control the activities of public sector organisations through institutionalized rules. In the context of higher education they exercise power through

laws, funding mechanisms, quality assurance criteria, and so forth, to which individual organisations have to adhere (Miroiu and Andreescu 2010). The other type, namely mimetic isomorphism, results from uncertainty in the organisation's environment. It has been argued, that when organisational technologies are poorly understood and the goals of the organisational field are ambiguous, organisations may model themselves on other organisation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; March and Olsen 2004). This mechanism rests on the economy of human action, meaning that organisations prefer to imitate structures that have already proven to be efficient, or as in our case, more prestigious (Amaral, Tavares, and Santos 2012). In this way, higher education institutions can overcome uncertainty with little expense. The final type is normative isomorphism and stems from the professionalization of the members of the organisational field. During this process, members of the organisational field seek to define and control the production procedures and in that way gain legitimation for their occupational autonomy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). It involves the definition of professional norms, which make an occupation distinct from others. The two main sources of professionalization are formal education and the elaboration of professional networks that span across organisations and diffuse these occupational norms and values (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In summary, we can state that all three types of isomorphism encompass processes of reproduction or imitation of organisational structures, activities, and routines in response to legal pressures, market uncertainties, or the professionalization of the occupation. Therefore, they are crucial analytical tools for understanding how external diversity would be affected by institutional changes.

2.4. *A combined analytical approach to organisational convergence*

Based on the previous theoretical explorations, I intend to combine ideas taken from organisational theory, precisely about the structuration of organisational fields and isomorphism. Isomorphism offers valuable insights about the organisations possible

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motivation to imitate other organisations. However, to analyse possible effects of national and international policy developments, only the theory of structuration offers structural characteristics that can be assessed independently form the individual agent's behaviour (i.e. what changes in the higher education system are likely to encourage organisations to imitate each other's structures, activities or professional routines). On the other hand, the theory of structuration falls somewhat short on explaining organisational convergence, beyond the fact, that the degree of structuration of an organisational field determines the homogeneity among its interacting members (Oliver 1991). Therefore, I link the two explanations together, implying that every time a system becomes more structured in the given aspect an appropriate type of isomorphism (i.e. coercive, mimetic, or normative) will be encouraged. The interplay of structuration and isomorphism is explored in more detail hereafter.

During the structuration of an organisational field the rules that provide legitimation, the resources that provide power, and the professional relationships that provide meaning, all of which govern organisational behaviour, are recreated recursively. Rules are continuously devised and applied to guide the actions of organisations. Taking the European integration process as an example, the harmonization of degree structures appears as one factor that can lead to coercive isomorphism between different organisations. In the course of a structuration process, resources are also consolidated, together with the criteria for the allocation of funding. If common funding criteria emerge in Europe, mimetic isomorphism among higher education institutions is likely to increase as each organisation will seeks to mirror itself after well-resourced organisations. Lastly, the European integration process resulted in denser network of organisational ties trough mobility and professional representation. This, created an opportunity for individual organisations to "upload" their own meaning of the academic profession to a European level. These norms and values are supposed to guide the daily activities of the members of the profession and when they get downloaded to the organisational

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level, we can observe a strong pressure for normative isomorphism. This might appear in the form of academic or mission drift (Hazelkorn 2012b). These examples demonstrate that a system's structuration is strongly related to the way isomorphism is going to manifest itself. Therefore, exploring in more detail how the EHEA and ERA are structured could allow us to make predictions about the direction of changes in an emerging European higher education system.

I started out by saying that a reoccurring dilemma is whether differentiation or actually dedifferentiation is taking place in higher education. The concepts of homogenization, convergence, or dedifferentiation all talk about the same process, namely the disappearance of diversity between different institutional types, profiles or statuses. Most of the previous studies on this topic seem to agree that the long-term trend is towards a process of dedifferentiation, but find different explanations for it. Riesman (1956) claims that the dominant behaviour among universities is that lower status institutions try to imitate higher status ones (mimetic isomorphism), thus instead of differentiation, we can actually observe a dedifferentiation process (Riesman 1958). In another study, Birnbaum (1983) confirms that the level of diversity in the US higher education system between the period of 1960 and 1980 has not increased (Birnbaum 1983). Based on his findings, he has concluded that governmental policies, which encourage rigid criteria for institutional operations and their programmes, are the major obstacle to differentiation processes (coercive isomorphism). Rhoades (1990) observes the same trend, but he comes to relate the cause of dedifferentiation to another reason. He states that academics enjoy a high level of autonomy, which helps them to defend their institutions from governmental initiatives that would encourage differentiation (normative isomorphism) (Rhoades 1990). These examples not just highlight the complexity of identifying the reasons behind organisational convergence, but also point to the inherent difficulty in implementing diversification policies successfully.

Diversification policies in higher education express objectives to outline, maintain, or increase differences between more or less similar organisations that populate a single organisational field. In many ways such policies are conflicting with isomorphic pressures, which on an aggregate level lead to lower diversity within any higher education system (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). But isomorphism should not be perceived as a negative side effect of the structuration of an organisational field. It merely reduces external diversity so that the system can persist. Otherwise, if the differences between organisations are substantive, the organizational field could not be maintained due to clashing needs and interests of agents (Bertalanffy 1968). According to this proposition, the level of diversity each system can accommodate is limited, and too much diversity can break the system apart. Diversification policies unavoidably create fractures in the existing structure of the organisational field, whether they seek to introduce rigid regulations, strengthen market forces in higher education, increase institutional autonomy, or if they rely on measures such as transparency tools to support organisational differentiation. Their success in creating a sustainable level of diversity in the system will be contingent on their ability to mitigate pressures of isomorphism. This is probably the only criteria based on which it makes sense to assess current diversification policies in Europe.

2.5. *One system to rule them all. The structuration of European higher education*

European countries vary substantially according to the organisation of their higher education system. Some have one organisational model, which operates as part of a unitary higher education system; others have universities and vocationally oriented institutions that are organized into a binary system; and there are countries that do not fit clearly any of these two, because they have several types of institutions. We find a similar variety considering the hierarchies that exists among institutions. In some countries differences in status are minimal

between higher education institutions, and in others we see steep hierarchies (for more information look at Chapter 1). This proves, that so far there is no common organisational model for European universities and according to the European Commission there should not be one either (Commission 2003). Instead, policy makers argue in favour of maintaining both the internal and external diversity of European higher education. However, the absence of policy initiatives to promote a grand design for higher education does not exclude the possibility that one or a few dominant organisational models will emerge in the near future.

The structuration of the EHEA, and its twin political concept, the ERA, are likely to trigger processes in the organisational environment, which could lead in the long term to the homogenization of higher education systems across Europe. The Bologna Process, which initiated the establishment of a common European space for higher education, has been the most important change driver for many organisations. This was confirmed by the Trends survey conducted in 2009 by the European University Association (EUA), which reported that 78% of the 831 institutions asked in the survey identified the Bologna Process as the main reason for organisational change (Sursock and Smidt 2010). The Bologna Process was supplemented with other European measures to foster the development of EHEA and ERA (the various mobility programmes, the establishment of ERC grants, etc.). All these international policy developments acted as triggers for a new structuration process, affecting higher education systems across many European countries. While the process is far from being over, some scholars already point out that the reforms in the last decade produced institutional pressure towards convergence and resulted in a lower variance of university degrees and research standards (Vaira 2009; Dill 2009). By exploring in more detail how the three structural elements of the integrating European organisational field have been transformed, I will be able to assess which type of isomorphism is likely to prevail and what kind of policies could be applied to mitigate those pressures.

2.5.1. Rules

Based on my theoretical propositions I argue that the elaboration of common rules and their enforcement on a European level can act as a powerful force for coercive isomorphism across national higher education systems. The more aspects of organisational life are regulated coherently within the EHEA and ERA the more likely it is that organisations will be coerced to adopt similar structures and processes. The fact that changes triggered by policy convergence, such as the Bologna Process, may be largely ceremonial does not mean that they are inconsequential (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Neither does the fact that many times implementation is considered to be a voluntary process or that it is not immediate. Therefore, in this part, I look at how the regulation of European higher education has evolved during the last couple of years.

It is appropriate to make a distinction between hard and soft standardization (Hijden 2012). Attempts for hard standardization can be best observed in the Bologna Process. The implicit aim of the Bologna Process was to achieve comparability and compatibility between the higher education systems in Europe, by developing a common framework for higher education. The rules that have been developed during the reform process are expected to be valid for all countries, and consequently for all organisations as well (Matei 2012). However, the degree of convergence was not explicitly operationalized in the Bologna Declaration (Witte 2008). Therefore, hard standardization refers mostly to the applicable degree structure (Bachelor-Master-Doctorate) and measures that aid international comparability of study programmes, like the implementation of the ECTS framework and the degree supplement. Since participation in the Bologna Process is voluntary there are no explicit enforcements of these rules in place. The only binding legislation that exists in Europe regarding higher education actually predates the Bologna Process. The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition

Convention) was developed in 1997 jointly by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and ratified by 45 countries[31]. The document facilitates the recognition of higher education qualifications by requiring from organisations to assess qualifications obtained in another countries in a fair manner and within a reasonable time. Thus, the scope of this rule is very narrow and limited to a specific organisational activity. Concerning the development of ERA, there are no binding legislations at the moment. However, this might change in the future, because the provisions of the new EU Treaty allow for the European Commission to propose to the Council and the Parliament necessary measures to be adopted in order to deliver on ERA, which may include binding legislations as well (Hijden 2012).

Besides the rather few rules that can be mentioned under hard standardization stands a much broader array of soft controls. Soft standardization is observable in areas such as the qualification frameworks (Bologna Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area), quality assurance (European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance), and doctoral education and research careers (European Framework for Research Careers). Although, strict requirements in these areas remain less institutionalized in the framework of the EHEA and ERA, they can still stimulate organisational change.

Among soft regulations, the converging quality assurance principles of the EHEA are probably most prominent. Since the Prague ministerial meeting in 2001, ENQA, ESIB (now ESU), EUA and EURASHE (also known as the E4 Group) started developing common standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance (Sursock 2012). As a result, in 2008 the European Quality Assurance Agency Register (EQAR) was set up to enforce common standards in this area across the EHEA. While most of the principles (diversity of national quality assurance procedures, the political independence of quality assurance agencies, student

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[31] For a more up-to-date information on the number of countries that have ratified the document visit the following website: http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165/signatures?p_auth=IQm14124

participation in internal and external quality assurance processes, and the primary role of institutions in managing and monitoring their quality) are rather broad and only prescribe the minimum expectations, they are still general expressions of rules that inspire similar quality assurance practices across a number of European countries. When applied in practice, these rules often impose particular standards of organisational structure, size, staff profiles and even curricular content, and their transposition into a European policy area represents another possible source for convergence (Vaira 2009; Reichert 2009). National policies also seem to converge with respect to institutional autonomy, as found by a report published by EUA on university autonomy in Europe. The report looked at several key areas, including organisational, academic, financial and staffing autonomy in higher education across 34 countries. It concluded that the rules and conditions under which European universities operate are still characterized by a high degree of diversity, but stressed that this diversity is slowly decreasing across countries (Estermann, Nokkala, and Steinel 2011).

The outlined findings demonstrate that the scope of organisational life regulated by hard rules across Europe is still very small. The existing rules are vaguely defined and loosely enforced, which implies low levels of coercive isomorphism across the EHEA and ERA at the moment. On the other hand, soft standardization, based mainly on transnational guidelines and policy recommendations, is much more apparent than hard standardization. Several studies confirmed that the way national governments regulate higher education institutions is aligning, which gradually trickles down to a set of common rules for European higher education. Based on this, we can predict that organisations will likely face similar coercive pressures in the long run, even if European organisations refrain from hard standardization.

2.5.2. Resources

Regarding the second dimension, DiMaggio and Powell state that the more consolidated the resources are on which organisations depend, the greater the structuration of the organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In turn, this will lead to more interaction between organisations, because they will compete for the same resources under the same conditions (Scott 2001). In such circumstances organisations are encouraged to model themselves after similar organisations that they perceive to be more successful in obtaining resources and mimetic isomorphism is likely to prevail (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Haveman 1993). Hence, in this part I look into how the construction of the EHEA and the ERA transformed the traditional sources of organisational income, or the way in which these resources were available to individual organisations.

Higher education institutions rely mostly on public funding that they obtain from national or regional sources. Beside public funds, organisations also try to generate their own income, which usually come from tuition fees, commercial activities, or project related activities. Considering tuition fees, they do not exist across all European countries and only a handful of organisations have the possibility to sustain high levels of tuition income from international or non-traditional students. Rents and commercial services are also contingent on the economic opportunities of the region where the organisation is located. Research and project funding is probably the only area to which most higher education institutions in Europe would have access to, especially if we think of the targeted and highly competitive funds from the EU.

Funds from the EU constitute only a small portion of many university budgets, but they are becoming increasingly attractive, especially considering the stagnating, or in some cases even decreasing level of funding from national sources. The European Commission dedicates EU funds primarily to aid the Bologna reform activities. These may be Europe wide projects

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in the field of quality assurance (ENQA), curricular reforms (Tuning programme), or national efforts supported through the Tempus programme for modernizing higher education in the EU and its neighbouring countries (Hijden 2012). Financial incentives for the implementation of the ERA action lines is provided through Horizon 2020 and ERC grants. Many of these programmes have become an important source of income for higher education institutions. Moreover, receiving European funding increases the legitimacy of successful higher education organisations and ensures their dominance and centrality within the organisational field (Scott 2001). Thus, higher education organisations that are successful in attracting European level funding will likely act as models upon which other organisations are going to try to model themselves. This provides some space for mimetic isomorphism in the EHEA, especially considering that the European Commission indicated the possibility of a significant increase of future funding from new European sources (Matei 2012).

The Bologna Process as such has had little direct influence, if any, on how resources are made available to organisations (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). The allocation of public funds continues to differ across countries, with no attempts on a European level to synchronize them (Matei 2012). But the absence of common European standards or guidelines in this area, does not mean that there are no converging trends. As a EUA report found out, public funding is increasingly subject to conditions tied to its allocation or accompanied by growing accountability requirements (Estermann, Nokkala, and Steinel 2011). This not only highlights a common trend across most parts of Europe to introduce restrictions on how public funding is provided, but also to design funding mechanisms according to similar principles. Consolidation of the methodology under which funding is made available is visible in ERA as well, where the European Commission expressed its interest to ensure "cross-border operation of research performing organisations, funding agencies and foundations, including by ensuring simplicity and mutual coherence of funding rules and procedures." (Commission 2010b, 11). The

alignment of funding methodologies across Europe, especially in times when many national governments seek opportunities to cut public spending on higher education, encourages organisations to become more competitive. Hence, it is not surprising that many of them seek to follow in the footsteps of successful research universities, particularly considering that research is the only area where funding continuous to be generous.

2.5.3. Relationships

The last important aspect of the structuration process are the relationships that organisations establish with each other. In contrast with the common approach that sees such ties as dependency relationships through which dominant actors control the weaker ones, I adopted a perception of relationships as being the primary source of professionalization where actors construct meaning, control belief systems and provide legitimacy to the actions of organisations (Machado-da-Silva, Guarido Filho, and Rossoni 2006). Consequently, the more connected the individual organisations and their members are in the EHEA and the ERA, the more likely it is that common professional norms will emerge that govern organisational processes. This aspect is essential to the working of organisational fields, and as Scott argues, the diffusion of professional standards is even more important in the structuration of the field than regulative power or resources (Scott 2001). Therefore, I briefly explore how academics and their organisations are becoming more connected in Europe and how this might enable them to impose a common professional identity for European higher education.

There was always a relatively stable cooperation of higher education institutions in Europe. The *Magna Charta Universitatum* is one of the most outstanding example of such a strong cultural bond between universities. The declaration was less a policy document and more a statement or reinforcement of the main cultural norms that guide the organisational field (Tomusk 2006). Today, when mobility and inter-organisational cooperation significantly increased in Europe, partially due to targeted policy initiatives, and partially as the outcome of

technological development, the occupation is much more exposed, or even forced to define uniformly the conditions and methods of its work. This process is based on the norms of faculty members who identify primarily with their academic communities rather than with their own organisation (Clark 1983). Because of that, they are eager to create programmes, structures, and policies that correspond to their image of the ideal university, which might not necessarily be related to the actual mission of the organisation (Reichert 2012). The fact that the values and norms that academics hold can affect the orientation of specific activities (for example though peer review), the organisation (through self-government), and even that of higher education policies (through consultative bodies) makes them a key source of normative isomorphism (Reichert 2012).

According to the 2010 Trends report, cooperation between academics and higher education institutions was perceived to be the second most important aspect of the Bologna Process (Sursock and Smidt 2010). Without doubt, increased cooperation helped the Bologna Process to reinforce the European identity of organisations and its members (Sursock 2012). It also provided the space in which the common parameters of European higher education could be discussed, negotiated and coordinated among the members of the profession. As Scott states: "Implicit if not explicit in the Bologna process are rules of behaviour and shared values" (Scott 2012, 11). International professional organisations often play a crucial role in transmitting these values and norms to other members of the organisational field. For example, the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) has been carried out in nearly 300 institutions in 46 countries and provided professional guidance on how organisations should be structured and how activities conducted. However, the number of professional organisation that operate internationally remained rather limited, portraying the traditional binary divide, with academic institutions being represented by EUA and professional ones by EURASHE. This has expanded

with the establishment of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) in 2002, adding a possible new layer to professional representation.

Beside professional organisations, individuals also can contribute to a new phase of academic "Europeaness" (Huisman and van Vught 2009). Mobility of students, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff is a requirement for normative convergence since it promotes synergy between different organisational practices. This connection was also recognized in the policy document which established the ERA. The Council of the European Union invited Member States and the European Commission to cooperate in order to "identify and take action with a view to removing present obstacles to the mobility of researchers to facilitate the creation of a genuine European scientific community" ("Council Conclusion on Establishing a European Area of Research and Innovation" 2000, 2). Similarly did the Bologna Declaration refer to the necessity of mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff, as did the 2009 communiqué recall that "mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area." ("The Bologna Declaration. Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education" 1999; "Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Comminiqué" 2009, 4). All these European policy documents emphasize a broad commitment to the free flow of members of the higher education system, which extends not just across member states but also across institutions of different types, profiles and statuses and opens the door for stronger normative isomorphism among higher education organisations.

2.6. Summary

One can observe isomorphic trends in all three aspects of the organisational field outlined above. First, there is an obvious convergence of rules that further a common degree structure based on three cycles, and establish a system of credits and comparable degrees. The tendency to support soft standardization, as another way to influence organisational behaviour, has also strengthened, first and foremost in the area of quality assurance. Secondly, in terms of

resources, European grants have expanded the available funding sources for organisations, but they have also reinforced competition for attaining them. In addition to this, the criteria and mechanisms under which public funding is accessible at national or regional level seem to converge in many European countries. Thirdly, mobility among academics and cooperation between organisations is rapidly growing, all of which support the spread of shared occupational norms across the European higher education landscape. The outlined findings support the conclusion that isomorphism is present in EHEA and ERA and underscores the assumption that organisations will likely pursue a pathway of adherence, imitation and devotion to a single organisational model as the most beneficiary and appropriate way forward.

While these developments point towards a more homogeneous higher education system in the future, at the present, the loosely defined nature of the EHEA and ERA allows for external diversity to endure. Although convergence was the leitmotiv of the Bologna Process, it did not try to impose a single organisational form as the best model. However, it did create a supranational arena where the rules, resources and organisational ties are being reconfigured. In such an environment organisations will have a natural tendency towards isomorphic behaviour, which in the long term can undermine the existing level of institutional diversity in the field (Klemencic 2013). Therefore, it might be less surprising that parallel to the objective to establish a European higher education and research area, the policy idea to diversify Europe's higher education emerged. The next chapter will explore this policy idea and how it seeks to maintain or increase the level of organisational diversity.

CHAPTER III: Exploring the idea of diversification in European policy discussions

3.1. Introduction

Like many early career researchers, I started out by demarcating first the topic of my interest and later experimented with several analytical lenses. In the beginning, I approached the diversification of higher education from a positivist perspective and tried to identify the indicators that could account for various degrees of institutional diversity in national higher education systems in Europe, and consequently produce policy suggestions for future action. While looking for plausible explanatory variables, I was constantly confronted with the questions of what kind of diversity is actually needed and why specifically institutional diversity should matter more in higher education than other types of diversity. This made me realize that policies furthering institutional differentiation principally follow normative beliefs and thus their relevance and appropriateness needs to be questioned first and foremost. Reichert (2009) in her study on diversity in European higher education came to a similar conclusion. She states that a sound analyses of the issue of diversity in higher education has to make "the values of diversity themselves an object of inquiry" (Reichert 2009, 12). Such an approach is warranted by the observation that discussions on diversity tend to favour a certain type of diversity, which means that they also encompass value judgements that are less explicit. Consequently, I decided to change my analytical lens and focus on the topic of diversification in higher education more critically, by using discourse analysis.

Since my study follows a critical perspective, I do not start out from the assumption that there is a recognizable lack of diversity in European higher education. Instead, I assume that the idea of diversification is an argumentative construct that supports the restructuring of higher education by promoting certain values over others. This represents the policy solution promoted by the discourse. Besides, the discourse also comprises a set of policy problems,

which the type of diversity promoted by various policy actors is supposed to solve, and a set of related policy measures, which are depicted by the same policy actors as the most beneficial way forward for achieving a given diversity in European higher education. Exploring these three elements of the discourse (the solution, the problem, and the policy measures) is the main purpose of this chapter, since it can help us better understand what diversification policies are about. I take a closer look at the meaning conveyed by several European organisations and other actors participating in the Bologna Process concerning the diversification of higher education, by analysing qualitatively their official documents from the past 15 years.

The chapter is made up of eight parts. In the next part I introduce the reader to discourses, which constitute the focus of my inquiry. In the third part I elaborate on how some discursive ideas can become Europeanized policy issues. The fourth and fifth parts relate to the analytical framework and the methodology of the data analysis respectively. They are followed up by two extensive parts. Part six describes the analysed texts in more detail, and by relying on my analytical framework explores the discourse around the diversification of higher education. Part seven integrates the themes and interpretations to provide a full understanding of the driving issues and potential outcomes of the European Commission's diversification agenda. The findings for each aspect of the discourse, namely the problem they identify, the solutions they advocate, and the kind of instruments they seem fit for the goal are presented. In the conclusion of the chapter, I underline once more the main findings of the discourse analysis and also draw parallels to the policy recommendations developed in Chapter 2.

3.2.   *Diversification as a discursive idea*

Following a constructivist perspective I presuppose that policy making is essentially about persuasion and ideas can influence the trajectory of policy development (Goodin and Tilly 2006; Hall 1993). Actors persuade each other using language, which is the main medium for communicating ideas. Ideas eventually congregate into systematically organized constructs

that are referred to as discourses. More specifically, Hajer (1996) defines a discourse as: "An ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena" (Hajer 1996, 44). In the case of this study, the phenomenon around which the discourse was constructed is the diversification of higher education, and it appears mainly in policy narratives focusing on the development of European higher education.

There are different levels on which we can observe the function of discourses (i.e. what it is and what it ought to be). In this regard, Schmidt (2010) differentiates between the policy level, the programmatic level, and a deeper philosophical level. On the most concrete level, ideas appear as specific policy solutions for a given context. On the next level we find the programmatic ideas, which underpin policy paradigms and hence define the way policies should be formulated. The third level relates to the most abstract ideas that construct our vision of the world and allow us to situate ourselves in it (Schmidt 2008). Change on this level comes seldom, and usually only when peoples' dominant worldview changes. In contrast, programmatic ideas and policy ideas change more frequently following a justification using cognitive arguments (Schmidt 2010a). While a discourse can convey meaning on all three levels, I consider the diversification of higher education primarily as a programmatic idea. This means, that I think the idea did not alter the underlying principle of how we look at higher education, but it surely represents more than just a change in policy, as it promotes new approach to other aspects of higher education as well. Ideational changes at the programmatic level occur mostly in moments of uncertainty, when previous solutions seem to have failed to provide the desired outcome (Schmidt 2010a). In this regard, change at this level is very similar to what Hall (1993) describes as second order changes to public policies. While the basic hierarchy of higher education goals remain the same, the way policy makers try to achieve them shifts, representing a paradigm change (Hall 1993). Consequently, the present study is built on the assumption that the discourse has modified the ideas on the paradigm level, which

allows policy makers to develop specific policies for the diversification of higher education, often leading to more than just structural changes.

Discourses can be the products of policy experts, academics, the press, interest group leaders, and even social movements (Scharpf and Schmidt 2000). They are not neutral constructs, but conviction is a central part of them, which informs the identities of the actors who generate them (Gill 2000, Paul 2012). Similarly, Hajer (1993) outlines that discourses represent more than just a constructed form of meaning of a phenomenon, but encompass also arguments for the phenomenon's existence, necessity and persistence. They are argumentative structures, which are used in reference to alternative and competing discourses. Therefore, the study of a discourse has to include also the study of the position which the discourse argumentatively criticizes. Likewise, Michael Billig (1987) noted:

„To understand the meaning of a sentence or whole discourse in an argumentative context, one should not examine merely the words within that discourse or the images in the speaker's mind at the moment of utterance. One should also consider the positions which are being criticized, or against which a justification is being mounted. Without knowing these counter-positions, the argumentative meaning will be lost." (Billig 1987, as quoted in Hajer 1993, 45).

Looking at discourses as argumentative constructs also stresses the fact that several discourses are in use at the same time and compete over the conception of the world. For policy-making this implies that meanings of concepts are not uniform and given, but rather policy issues are continuously contested in a struggle about their meaning, interpretation and implementation (Paul 2012). However, discourses not just challenge each other, but can also supplement and complement each other. Problems are very complex, therefore arguments typically rest on more than one discourse (Hajer 1993). In our case, we can assume that the idea to diversify higher builds on several other discourses, such as an economic discourse (what are the economic benefits of organisational diversity?), a social discourse (what are the social consequences of organisational diversity?), and even a political discourse (what are the political implications of organisational diversity?). The answers to these questions do not just provide

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the arguments on which the discursive idea rests, but they also emphasize the fact that prior economic, social, or political convictions influence it.

From a discourse theory perspective the deliberation of public policies takes place within a realm of ideas. This analytical perception of policy making highlights that policy problems, objectives and the related instruments are identified in a socially constructed world through the interaction of policy makers. In this regard, Hajer (1993) notes: "Whether or not a situation is perceived as a problem depends on the narrative in which it is discussed."(Hajer 1993, 44). This statement does not deny the fact that there might be lack of institutional diversity in European higher education systems, but whether it is perceived as a problem depends on how actors frame it. Similarly are policy goals ideational, reflecting a normative orientation towards the context in which they will have to be realized (Hay 2008). These arguments underline that policy makers work within a framework of ideas that specifies the goals of a policy, the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, and also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing. I call this interpretative framework a policy paradigm and assume that paradigms are social constructs that are open to redefinition through ideological contestation (Blyth 2002).

Although the identification of the most appropriate policy is carried out in a constructed socio-political context called policy paradigm, it does not lead to the conclusion that policy makers are not rational interest-following actors. Rather it means that actors conceptualize and assess their conduct in a world full with ideas and arguments about possible cause-effect relationships of complex problems. Their conduct is not a (direct) reflection of their interests, but a reflection of particular perceptions of their interests (Hay 2008). Consequently, actors can retreat from their initial strategic motivation if a discursive idea persuades them to do so (Heritier 2007). Therefore, paradigm shifts might serve as a possible explanation for changes in national policies, as is the case in several countries with rising intentions to diversify higher

education. The movement from one paradigm to another poses an opportunity for policy innovation and experimentation, but it also bears the risk for policy failure (Hall 1993). This is why, current national efforts to embrace diversification policies should not be considered as definite, but rather as temporal expressions of a dominant discourse, whose sustainability is still uncertain.

According to Blyth (2002), policy change only makes sense by reference to ideas that inform agents' responses to moments of uncertainty and crises (Blyth 2002). Such moments often account for a paradigm shift, because in these circumstances actors' perceptions of their own self-interest becomes problematized and blurred (Hay 2008; Schmidt 2010a). When the old policy paradigm does not provide any more satisfying and convincing mediation of interests its authority (and of its advocates) is gradually undermined. That is to say, policy makers become ambiguous regarding their interests, and are much more likely to give in to the cognitive arguments of competing discourses. This is the window of opportunity for a new discourse to replace the existing policy paradigm, and when it becomes localized, it also becomes internalized by national politicians, policy experts, and the like. In this process, when one policy paradigm comes to be replaced by another, the realm of what is politically possible, feasible, and desirable is reconfigured (Hay 2008). According to this study, such a change made it possible for the diversification of higher education to be perceived as a legitimate policy, because the "new" policy paradigm rests on the conviction that diversity is useful and should be fostered in higher education.

As mentioned before, there are many discourses and they can simultaneously define many different realities of higher education. Some of these realities might regard homogeneity of higher education systems as a necessity for ensuring uniform quality standards across the sector, while others might perceive it as a lack of flexibility to respond and serve efficiently the diverse needs of modern societies. Following the latter conviction, a discourse could bear

arguments in favour of diversifying higher education instead of homogenizing it. In a policy paradigm, where such conviction dominates, policy makers will likely perceive to be in their interest to enact policies that will increase institutional diversity in higher education. This example highlights that changing paradigms are important determinants of whether an issue is perceived as a policy problem and acted upon or not. However, I do not want to state that discourses are the main determinants of policies. Just as any other factor, they sometimes matter and sometimes do not in the explanation of policy change (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004).

3.3. *The role of European organisations in shaping higher education policies*

There is a general concern about the lack of institutional diversity in European higher education. This is thoroughly visible in contemporary policy discussions that take place in the framework of the EHEA and ERA. The diversification of higher education is not a brand new item on the European policy agenda. However, it has gained importance since 2003, when the European Commission first identified the need for greater institutional differentiation in its Communication on the role of universities in the knowledge society and economy of Europe (Commission 2003). Since then, the idea has maintained a steady presence in all major communications of the European Commission, but was also raised during ministerial meetings in the framework of the Bologna Process. This signifies, that the idea of higher education diversification is not necessarily a national policy preference, which was uploaded to a supranational level, but one, which emerged as the result of international policy deliberation with the involvement of European organisations.

We know that the European Union is a very active policy entrepreneur (Radaelli 2000). It is constantly expanding the range of its activities, and gradually acquires political and policy influence in fields, which were previously outside of its competence. Although, it has no legislative competence to directly propose higher education policies, it has competences to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States in this area ("Consolidated

Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union" 2008). For example, the European Commission has created some space for European level initiatives in the field of higher education through the Bologna Process and the Lisbon agenda. Likewise, the European Commission is a full member (with voting rights) of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and the Bologna Board, and the European Council Presidency co-chairs the Bologna Process. In the ERA there is an even more direct partnership between the European Commission and the Member States. This trend has been referred to as the creeping competence of the EU and points to the fact that European organisations are and continue to be active participants in shaping higher education policies both internationally and nationally (Pollack 2000).

The Treaty of Maastricht (1992) confirmed through the subsidiarity principle that the main responsibility for higher education policies lies at the national level (Reichert 2009). Therefore, international organisations, like the European Commission "Europeanize" domestic policies through policy coordination (Armstrong 2010). This does not mean that there are no common policy ideas that could be diffused to Member States, rather, that they emerge out of a policy deliberation process by the key stakeholders. The communications of the European Commission are the outcome of such deliberations and identify key policy issues that Member States are expected to address. They also outline ways in which funding from the EU will support national higher education reforms in line with the identified European policy directions. Although, the European Commission has no explicit coercive mechanisms to steer national efforts towards its own policy objectives, it still expects Member States to act according to its policy lines. This standpoint of the European Commission is apparent in the following quotes from its communications:

"The Commission is not a direct actor in the modernisation of universities, but it can play a catalytic role, providing political impetus and targeted funding in support of reform and modernisation." (Commission 2006, 11)

"The key policy issues (...) must be addressed in the first place by national authorities and institutions. But the EU can significantly support their efforts to reform higher education systems through the different EU policy and budgetary instruments." (Commission 2011b, 9; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

It is obvious that in the case of higher education policies the EU can hardly rely on its most common tool for policy coordination, namely the external incentives model (Schimmelfennig 2012). The model, which alters the cost-benefit calculations of the Member States by introducing sanctions and rewards for compliance, is only partially present in the field of higher education. The EU offers some financial incentives directly to higher education institutions through a number of programs (e.g. Erasmus+[32], Horizon 2020[33], Lifelong Learning Programme[34], or through structural funds), but these do not require the transposition of specific EU rules. Instead, such programs support mutually agreed policy objectives in line with the modernization agenda for higher education[35]. Therefore, policies that seek to diversify higher education on a national level can hardly be explained by interest politics. This does not mean that the adoption of such policies could not follow a rational choice perspective, but that it is probably driven more by endogenous factors than exogenous ones. Because the EU has no leverage to impose policies on its Member States in the area of higher education and because there are no specific programs that would offer financial incentives for the diversification of higher education, the adoption of such policies at the national level is more likely the outcome of domestic policy makers' engagement in an active search for new ideas.

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[32] For more information on the Erasmus+ programme, visit the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm

[33] For more information on the Horizon 2020 programme, visit the following website: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/

[34] From 2014 onwards, the activities of the Lifelong Learning Programme continue under the Erasmus+ programme.

[35] For a comprehensive list of EU policy objectives supported by various European programs see (Vukasović 2012).

When transnational meanings are allocated to social and physical phenomena than these phenomena come to be European(ized) policy issues (Paul 2012, 551). Accordingly, the basic propositions of this study states that the diversification of higher education is a European policy idea, which is promoted by a number of European organisations. This transnational meaning does not indicate any connection to the particularities of a specific country, rather relates to commonly shared ideas about how higher education in Europe should look like. Although these ideas are loosely coupled, they contain elements of a policy that enable domestic actors to cherry-pick on a voluntary basis and according to their own pragmatic interests. Diversification policies are one of the many Europeanized policy ideas.

3.4. The analytical framework

As outlined so far, diversification of higher education is a socially constructed collection and systematic arrangement of ideas about the phenomenon of institutional diversity and how it should be dealt with in the context of European higher education. I consider European organisations and different transnational policy actors as the source of this discursive idea. They might have generated the discourse about diversification, or just legitimize it, but that does not deny their centrality in the emergence of the idea. After the set of ideas is developed into a coherent argument on a European level, national policy actors can choose to experiment with such policies in domestic contexts. This implies a somewhat top-down perspective, whereby I presuppose that the European discourse about the diversification of higher education precedes national level adaptation, and also justifies studying transnational policy narratives first.

To analyse the European discourse about the diversification of higher education I rely on the work of Milliken (1999). According to Milliken, there are three aspects of every discourse, which are important to explore (Milliken 1999). These are the **signification**, the **play of practice**, and the **productivity** of the discourse. These analytical categories were fused with

a more traditional heuristic approach to policy making in order to present a detailed analysis of how the discourse relates to higher education policies. Consequently, I explored the idea of diversification as an argumentative construct that highlights a policy problem, promotes a policy solution and results in the adoption of certain policy measures. The framework is presented in table 6 and discussed in more detail below.

Table 6: The analytical framework for the study of the discourse

Content of discourse		
Semantic aspect	Policy problem	Signification
Semantic/ pragmatic aspects	Policy solution	Play of practice
Pragmatic aspect	Policy measures	Productivity

The first aspect combines the policy problem with what Milliken calls studying discourses as system of signification (Milliken 1999). It suggests that discourses construct social realities, and because of that they help policy makers to make sense of complex phenomenon. Sense-making appears as concepts are placed into an existing system of signs and meanings where their relationships to other concepts become clarified (Milliken 1999). The idea of diversification relates to other policy issues, like student mobility, lifelong learning, quality assurance, and so on. Elaborating on these relationships can provide an informed understanding of the meaning of the discourse, especially the shared perception of the problem. To unfold the constructed social reality, I looked at the semantics of various references to diversification and its relationships to other concepts, such as the cause of the problem and its consequences. Moreover, the textual context in which these policy documents refer to diversification of higher education has been explored as well.

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The second aspect relates to policy solutions as expressions of a hegemonic discourse. This aspect refers to the study of a discourse as a sort of dominant institutional practice where alternative meanings and activities are consciously excluded. The main question is why this particular idea made a career and became dominant over some others. To understand which solutions are promoted over others one needs to explore the broader frame in which the idea of diversification is embedded, and how it excludes other interpretations of diversity. To achieve this I combined two methodological approaches. I looked at the construction of outdated practices which the new solution is supposed to solve (deconstruction), and for alternative solutions that the dominant discourse fails to acknowledge (juxtaposition) (Milliken, 1999).

The final aspect entails the analysis of outlined policy measures as representing the productivity of the discourse. Every discourse is expected to produce a truth regime, which helps policy makers to operationalize policies, but also specifies who is authorized to act on behalf of the discourse, what are the appropriate practices to achieve institutional diversity, where and under what conditions should these activities take place, and finally how should the given actions be legitimized (Milliken, 1999). Therefore, it is important to explore how the construction of higher education diversification enables certain policy actions. I achieved this by critically examining the way in which the policy objective has been operationalized and looked for the common sense it produces.

The outlined analytical framework offers an integrated approach to discourse analysis. First, it takes into account the **formal perspective**, where discourse is defined as a unit of language beyond the sentence (semantic aspect). This function refers to the linguistic analysis of texts to discover a deeper layer of meaning. However, discourse analysis should not be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes these forms are designed to serve in political affairs (Brown and Yule 1983). Therefore, I also pay attention to the **functional perspective**, where discourse is defined as language in use (pragmatic aspect)

(Candlin and Maley 1997). This approach puts the emphasis on highlighting the objectives advanced by the message. In sum, through the analysis of various policy documents I intend to cover both the meaning of the discursive idea (based on the analysis of sentences) and what it seeks to achieve, by relating it to the social context in which it is uttered.

3.5. *Methodology of the analysis*

The analysis is based on a multi-methods approach. In the initial phase, I performed a computer assisted content analysis on a large number of documents. Afterwards, I dconducted a discourse analysis by looking at a few selected texts in-depth. Interpretivists have always given texts a central role in research, so the methodologies of content analysis and discourse analysis are not that radically different from each other (Bennett 2015). Moreover, combining the two has numerous benefits. Computer assisted text searches can quickly identify general patterns in a large number of documents and offer hints for the researcher which particular texts deserve a more detailed analysis (Bennett 2015). Thus, the quantitative side of the research was used to identify the policy documents that make extensive references to the idea of diversification, while the qualitative part was used to study the meaning of those references.

Notwithstanding, there are several epistemological differences between the two methods that need to be mentioned. Probably the most obvious one is that content analysis operates with fixed meanings, which discourse analysis does not (Bennett 2015). In this respect, the first part of the analysis follows the assumption that the idea of higher education diversification remained rather stable and uniform across a longer time period. While this assumption enables me to relatively quickly obtain information by searching for specific keywords across a large number of documents, it falls short on identifying the context in which the specific words or phrases are articulated. This shortcoming can be offset partially by coding each reference. During this process I manually assign an attribute to parts of the text in order to capture the essence of the message. Subsequently, the codes can be used to display the

frequency of references or their extensiveness (coverage), that is to say, to compute meaning (Dey 1999). In contrast, discourse analysis looks into how the meaning is constructed, thus allows for variations in the intersubjective perception of higher education diversification. It is not my intention to neglect these differences, but to highlight their respective advantages when it comes to the study of public policies.

Data was obtained from several policy documents published during the period of 1998 and 2015. Based on their origin, the documents could be classified into two main groups. First, I used official documents released by European organisations. Among them, most notably the communications of the European Commission, which are formal manifestations of the ideas and concepts endorsed by this institution and represent organized texts that advance European level policies concerning the development of the EHEA and ERA. Besides studying the documents released by the European Commission, I also examined official texts published by other important European organisations, such as the Council of the European Union, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency and Eurydice. The second group of documents originate from various transnational policy actors participating in the Bologna Process. In contrast to documents issued by European organisations, many of these texts emerged as a result of a much broader consultation (involving ministers of education, policy experts, professional organisations representing universities, universities of applied sciences, quality assurance agencies, students, and so forth) and thus embody the policy views of several EU actors, not only the one issuing them. Therefore, the documents of the Bologna Process are not just more numerous, but also represent the views of different policy actors, serve a variety of purposes, and address different target audiences.

The initial pool of documents contained 179 items. Most of them (124) related to the Bologna Process, and included ministerial communiqué's published during biannual ministerial meetings, reports and conclusions of the Bologna Follow-Up Group meetings or

other working groups, and position papers submitted to the conference by various stakeholders. The second group of documents constituted communications, working documents and reports published by the European Commission (39), followed by conclusions of the Council of the European Union (16). All of these documents are considered to reflect the public opinions of those organisations, groups, or institutions that published them (except if noted differently in the document). They have been obtained in an electronic format through the database of the European Commission[36] and the websites of the EHEA[37] and ERA[38]. For the detailed list of documents see appendices 1, 2, and 3.

In order not to miss any relevant data, I identified texts as inclusively as possible in the initial phase. However, not all materials count as relevant data and because of that I conducted a computer assisted content analysis to filter out those documents which refer to the diversification of higher education. This was done with the help of the computer software NVivo 11 in several steps. First, I needed to develop an efficient way to search and identify references to the topic of higher education diversification across my database. I began the analysis mechanically, by conducting separate searches for the keywords: diversify, diversified, diversification, differentiate, differentiated, differentiation. The roots of these words, namely 'diversity' and 'different' were deliberately excluded, because their use is so widespread in the documents that it would have superfluously inflated the number of references. While this approach helped me to identify those documents that matter at least on an initial level, it was not a perfect exercise. Text searches always bear the possibility to miss something that is important, or include something which is not important. To make my search results more rigorous, I decided to use a formula including a number of keywords.

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[36] To obtain the documents from the European Commission, visit the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/
[37] To obtain the documents from the European Higher Education Area, visit one of the following websites: http://www.ehea.info/ or http://eur-lex.europa.eu
[38] To obtain the documents from the European Research Area, visit the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/key-documents_en.htm

I continued pre-processing by simplifying the keywords used in my formula. This process is known as stemming and means that I have cut off the ends of words to reduce them to a common root (Bennett 2015). In the second stage the following formula was used: **divers* AND (diversif* OR differentiat*)**. It is made up of two parts, each representing a condition that the search result had to satisfy. First, the query had to flag all documents containing either one or both words starting with diversif* or differentiat*, where the star marks any other possible ending for these root words. This was my primarily criteria for identifying relevant documents since they are emphasizing an intention (to diversify or to differentiate), but also may refer to the process of increasing diversity in higher education (diversification or differentiation), and the possible outcome of such a process (diversified or differentiated). Secondly, without exception, the search query had to include also at least one reference to the word divers*. This addition to the formula extends the findings to include all possible references to the stem word of diversity or diverse. Applying this formula allowed me to narrow down the focus of my analysis to a smaller set of documents, satisfying both of the before mentioned criteria.

As I have stated already in the first chapter, diversity, diversification, and differentiation can relate to many aspects of higher education. Institutional diversity is only one aspect in this regard. After narrowing down my data, I conducted a close reading and coded the highlighted references. This enabled me to assess different aspects of the text a simple keyword search did not. Most of all, it allowed me to identify which aspect of diversity the document is referring to and in what way (is it praising diversity or criticizing it?). But coding is not just labelling. It means linking data to an idea, and vice-versa, seeing all the data that relate to an idea (Saldana 2015). It forms an essential part of the process of analysis and usually takes several rounds of coding and recoding. Rourke et al. (2001) distinguish five types of units of analysis that could be coded. The largest one is the **message** of a text, followed by a **paragraph** or section of a

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text, a **unit of meaning** representing an idea or argument, a **sentence**, and the smallest one is **illocution**, which stands for a set of words forming a single communicative act (Rourke et al. 2001). In my case, I coded units of meaning, which could be a single sentence or several sentences closely related to each other to express a complex idea or argument.

It was not my intention to cover all aspects of diversity mentioned in the documents. Nevertheless, as my analysis progressed several categories emerged under which I coded the most frequently repeated aspects of diversity. This helped me to recognize larger patterns in the analysed texts, and also put institutional diversity into a broader perspective. The list of used codes and their categorization is presented below:

a) Diversity in general
b) Diversity of national systems
c) Diversity of quality assurance procedures
d) Diversification of institutional funding
e) **Internal diversity**
   Types of:
   - Diversity of study programmes and qualifications
   - Diversity of student population and their needs
   - Diversity of teaching and learning practices
f) Diversity of mobility programmes and participants in mobility programmes
g) Diversity of research areas
h) **Institutional diversity**
   Arguments for:
   - Concentration of resources
   - Increased institutional autonomy
   - Better institutional management
   - New funding model
   - More transparency

Based on the results of the coding process I selected a couple of documents that seamed significant with regard to the development of the diversification narrative. I ended up choosing four communications issued by the European Commission between 2003 and 2011. Beside the fact they promote the diversification of European higher education, they also represent the public opinion of the same policy actor, are intended for the same audience, and although they are not binding for the Member States, they still serve the same aim, that is to offer

recommendations for the development of national higher education policies. Because of these characteristics, I consider the selected four communications as comparable documents and worth an in-depth analysis. During the discourse analysis, I employed a sceptical reading of the texts and maintained a stance of scholarly objectivity (Gill 2000). This helped me to contextualize the idea of higher education diversification based on the analytical framework presented before.

3.6. Analysis of the policy texts

The simple text searches within my dataset have revealed that policy documents use the term diversification and its alternative forms in a variety of ways. To demonstrate the range of contexts in which the word appears I have visualized part of my data using a word tree (see Figure 2). The figure below shows which words most often precede or follow the term 'diversification'. Due to size considerations, the visualized data encompasses only documents from the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial meeting, held in 2010, and which also marked the lunch of the EHEA. The data reveals that the selected documents devote similar level of attention to the diversification of courses and programmes, funding methods, partnerships, the student body, and the mission and profiles of institutions, out of which only the latter is in the focus of this study. This example proves that the word diversification, and its related forms, are not used exclusively to refer to institutional diversity, rather are applied broadly without a dominant form of expression.

Figure 2: Word tree for the term diversification from the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial meeting in 2010
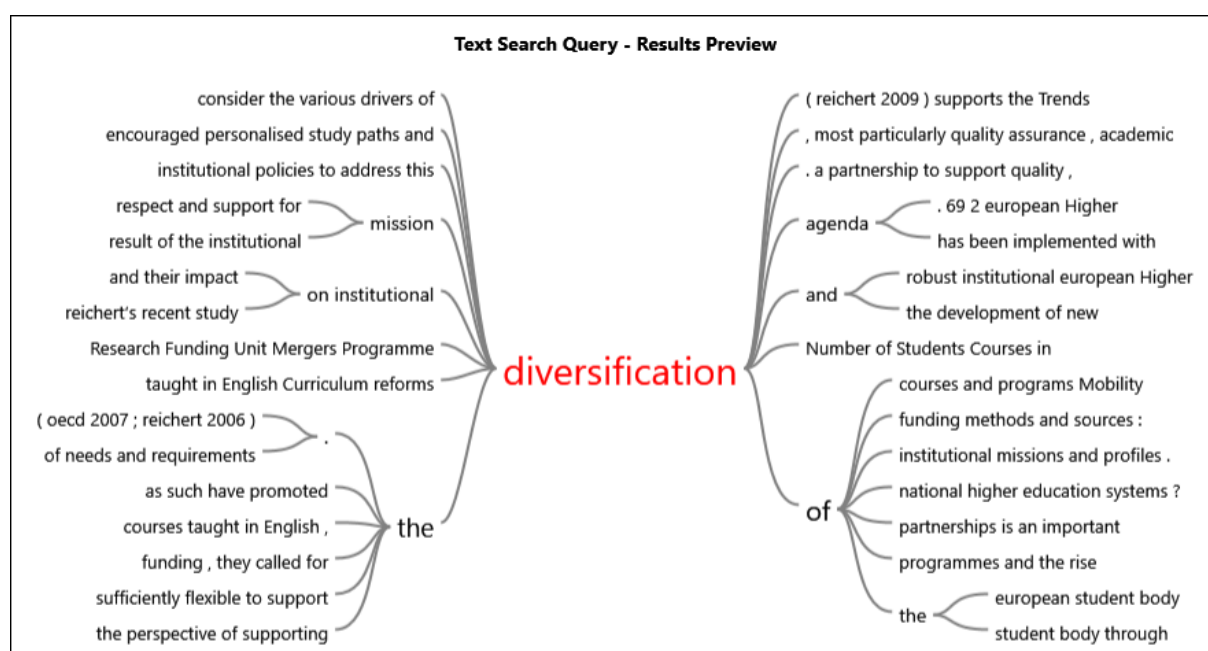
To identify those documents that devote considerable attention to the topic of institutional diversity I used a specific formula containing several keywords (see page 104). After running the computer assisted inquiry, out of the initial body of data (179) only 97 documents seemed to make a reference to the diversification of higher education. The documents containing the most number of references to the searched keywords are presented in the next table.

Table 7: Results of the text inquiry sorted according to the number of references

PUBLISHER_Name of the document (year of publishing)	Number of references	Coverage
ESU_Bologna with student eyes (2012)	72	0.09%
EUA_Trends III (2003)	68	0.09%
EUA_Trends VI (2010)	64	0.08%
House of Commons_The Bologna process (2007)	60	0.03%
BFUG WG Report_The Bologna Process in a global setting (2006)	57	0.06%
BFUG WG Report_International Openess (2012)	54	0.08%
BFUG_From Prague to Berlin (2003)	48	0.07%
EUA_Trends V (2007)	45	0.09%
EUA_Trends I (1999)	44	0.13%
BFUG_Bologna Beyond 2010 (2010)	43	0.22%

Since the context in which these references are made remains unknown at this stage, it is difficult to draw solid conclusions out of the result. Besides, both the number of references and the percentage representing the coverage of the searched words can bare a number of methodological errors. For example, the Sorbonne declaration, which is a two page long document and makes only one references to the term 'diversification' and three to 'diversity', appears with a considerably high coverage (0.34%), although none of these references relates to institutional diversity. Similarly, the position paper published by EURASHE in 2012 reports 17 references to the keywords in our formula, however, this number is highly influenced by the fact that the word 'diversified' is part of the document's title and hence appears more frequently. These examples of methodological errors necessitated to individually look at each reference and label them according to their meaning.

The highlighted references were coded into 8 main categories, out of which two, namely internal diversity and institutional diversity contained a number of sub-categories (see page 105). Similarly to simple keyword searches we can display the result of the coding process, either by the frequency counts of the codes (in numbers, charts, diagrams, word clouds, etc.) or their coverage, which shows the percentage the coded words represent of the entire document. While these measurements allow us to analyse and compare two or more codes within a document or across different documents, they are also not without any methodological error. For example, the following phrase repeats itself quite often across all documents:

"We share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations" ("London Communiqué" 2007, 5)

This statement was formulated as the key aim of the social dimension of the Bologna Process, and as such gets quoted repeatedly across all documents, but also several times within a single document. It was coded under the sub-category **diversity of student population and their needs**, which is part of the larger category **internal diversity**. This example demonstrates

that when the mission statement of a broader reform process contains the word 'diversity', then it can influence our measurements in a way that we might overemphasize its importance. In contrast, there is no one dominant expression to emphasize the importance of institutional diversity.

Table 8: Summary of the coding results

Name of the code	Number of sources	Number of references
Diversity in general	24	71
Diversity of national systems	20	42
Diversity of QA procedures	20	31
Diversification of funding	28	42
Diversity of mobility options	16	36
Diversity of research areas	4	8
Internal diversity	67	325
Diversity of student population	52	163
Diversity of study programmes and qualifications	39	130
Diversity of teaching and learning	12	21
Institutional diversity	43	180
Concentration of resources	7	8
Increased institutional autonomy	8	13
Better institutional management	2	2
New funding model	9	11
More transparency	18	61

After the coding process was finished, the number of relevant documents further decreased from 97 to 75[39]. While it was not my intention to compare how different aspects of diversity appear in European policy documents, it is still worth noting that the majority of the texts (67) made a reference to internal diversity or any of its sub-categories, while only 43 to institutional diversity (see Figure 3). Other aspects of diversity, such as the diversification of institutional funding or the diversification of mobility options, were also frequently mentioned. A similar pattern emerges when we look at the number of references (see Figure 4).

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[39] 22 documents contained references that could not be coded into any of the 8 categories.

Figure 3: Number of sources making a reference to each coded category
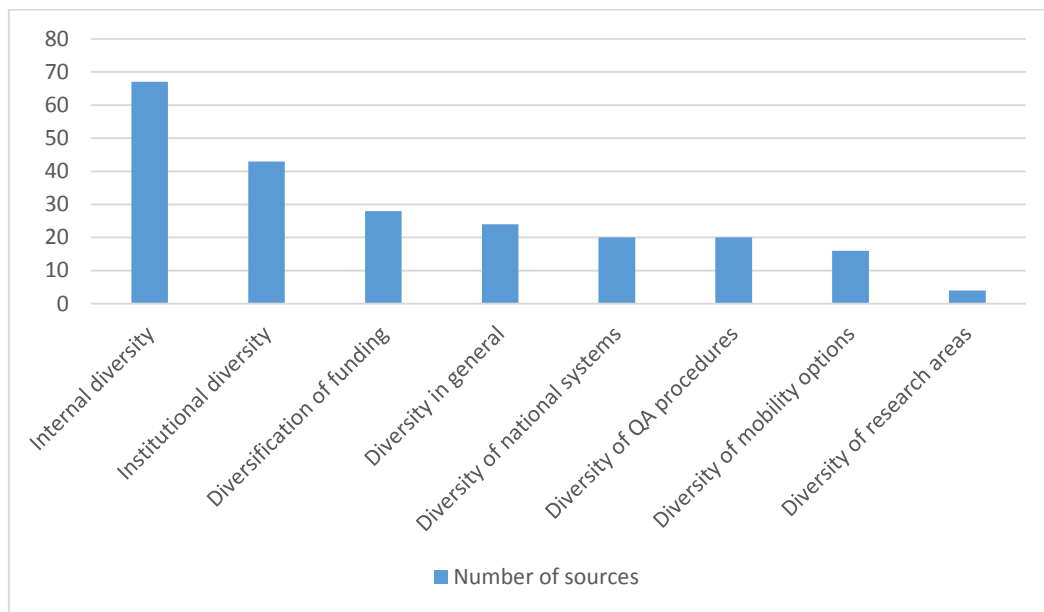
Figure 4: Number of references for each coded category
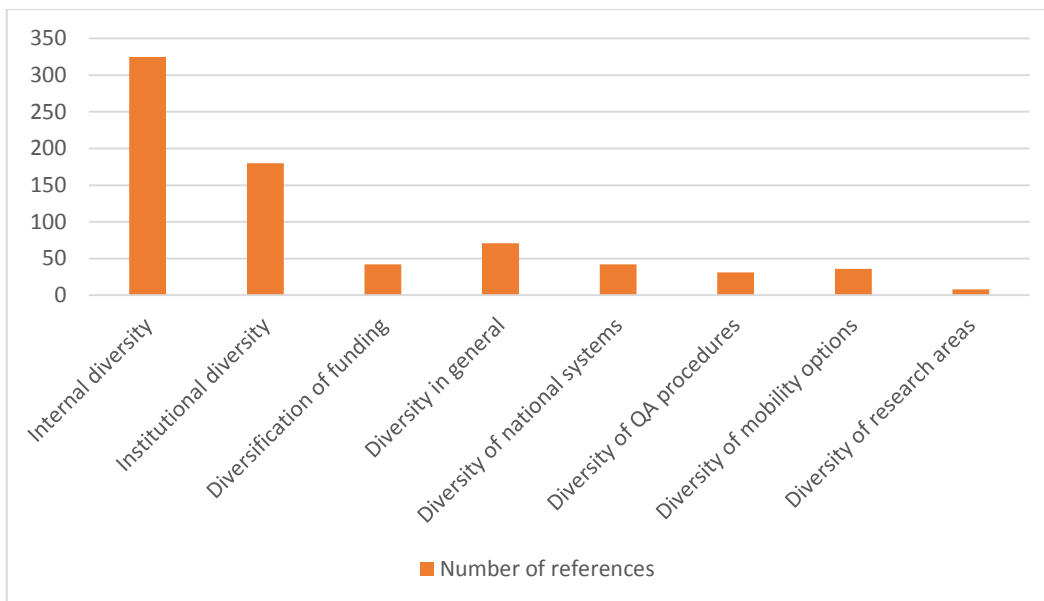
The parent category of internal diversity was made up of three different sub-categories. When we look at their distribution, we can note that most documents tend to refer to the diversity of the student population, followed by the diversity of study programmes and qualifications, and the least number of references are made to the diversity of teaching and learning practices (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Number of sources and references for each sub-category under internal diversity
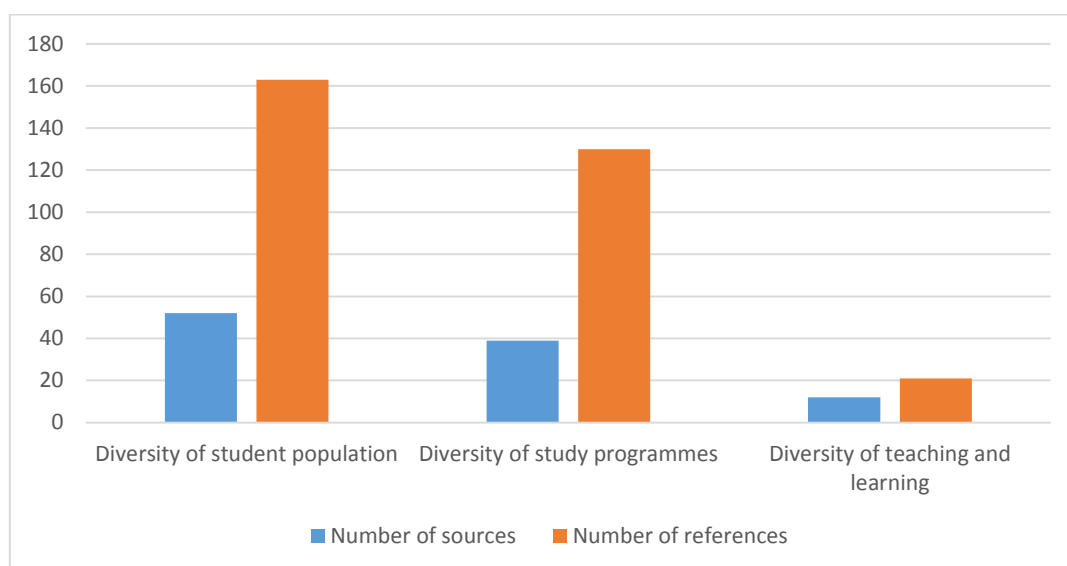
The parent category of institutional diversity also contained a number of sub-categories. These were coded only in the case the thematic unit included arguments also for the concentration of resources, increased institutional autonomy, better institutional management, new funding model, or more transparency. As it is visible in the chart below, the need for more transparency is the most commonly used argument in tandem with the need for institutional diversity (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Number of sources and references for each sub-category under institutional diversity
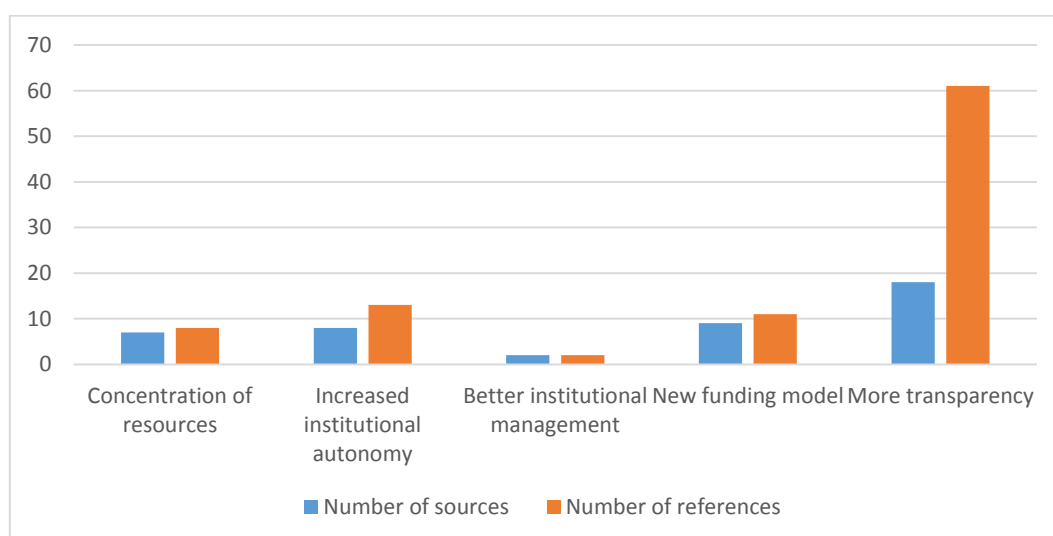
The previous comparisons confirm that institutional diversity was not the most commonly mentioned aspect of diversity in the analysed policy documents. Nevertheless, it was certainly part of the broader European policy discussions that concern the future development of EHEA and ERA. A number of European organisations and transnational policy actors expressed clearly their support for a more diverse higher education system. To identify the most relevant documents in this regard, first I listed out those that have a section devoted to institutional diversity (see Table 9). Secondly, I looked at the coverage of institutional diversity as coded in the texts (see Table 10). I decided to use the percentage of coverage for ordering documents instead of the number of references, mainly because longer documents (such as various reports produced by experts) seem to get an unfair advantage over shorter, but maybe more important policy documents when using the number of references as the main criteria. Since coverage takes into account the overall length of a document, it signifies better the importance institutional diversity occupies in a text.

Table 9: Documents devoting a section to the topic of institutional diversity

	Name of document	Publishing organisation	Type of document	Year of publishing
1.	Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education (Trends I Report)	EUA	Expert report	1999
2.	Towards a European Higher Education Area: survey of main reforms from Bologna to Prague (Trends II Report)	EUA	Expert report	2001
3.	Trends 2003: Progress towards the European Higher Education Area (Trends III Report)	EUA	Expert report	2003
4.	Bologna Process Between Prague and Berlin	BFUG	Expert report	2003
5.	Mobilising the brainpower of Europe. COM (2005) 152	European Commission	Policy document	2005
6.	Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna	EUA	Expert report	2005
7.	The Coimbra Group and European Higher Education after Bologna 2010	Coimbra Group	Position paper	2009

8.	Moving Professional Higher Education into 'Bologna post 2010'	EURASHE	Position paper	2009
9.	Bologna beyond 2010: Report on the development of the European Higher Education Area	Benelux Bologna Secretariat	Expert report	2009
10.	Recent developments in European higher education systems. Working document accompanying COM (2011) 567	European Commission	Expert report	2011
11.	Supporting growth and jobs. COM (2011) 567	European Commission	Policy document	2011
12.	Future of Higher Education: Bologna Process Researchers' Conference	BFUG	Expert report	2014

Table 10: Coverage of institutional diversity (Bold added to documents selected for discourse analysis)[40]

Name of document	Publishing organisation	Year of publishing	No. of references	Coverage
Keynote speech	Ministry of Education (Czech Republic)	2009	1	6.63%
Keynote speech	EUA	2009	2	4.54%
The Coimbra Group and European Higher Education after Bologna 2010 (Position Paper)	Coimbra Group	2009	7	4.45%
Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué (policy document)	European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education	2009	3	3.10%
Bologna beyond 2010: Report on the development of the European Higher Education Area	Benelux Bologna Secretariat (BFUG)	2009	8	2.81%
Moving Professional Higher Education into 'Bologna post 2010'	EURASHE	2009	2	2.77%
Mobilising the brainpower of Europe COM (2005) 152	**European Commission**	**2005**	**6**	**2.64%**
Supporting growth and jobs COM (2011) 567	**European Commission**	**2011**	**4**	**2.43%**
Delivering on the modernisation agenda COM (2006) 208	**European Commission**	**2006**	**5**	**2.20%**

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[40] The table includes only the top 20 documents ordered according to the size of the coverage percentage.

Council conclusions on the modernisation of higher education	Council of the European Union	2011	3	1.98%
Transparency Tools across the European Higher Education Area (Expert report)	BFUG	2012	10	1.75%
Prague Declaration (Position paper)	EUA	2009	1	1.66%
Trends 2003: Progress towards the European Higher Education Area (Trends III Report)	EUA	2003	26	1.36%
The EU contribution to the European Higher Education Area	European Commission	2010	3	1.24%
Towards a European Higher Education Area: survey of main reforms from Bologna to Prague (Trends II Report)	EUA	2001	7	0.99%
Recent developments in European higher education systems. Working document accompanying COM (2011) 567	European Commission	2011	10	0.99%
The role of universities in the Europe of knowledge COM (2003) 58	**European Commission**	**2003**	**2**	**0.79%**
From London to Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve: The contribution of The Council of Europe to the European Higher Education Area	Council of Europe	2009	2	0.68%
Keynote speech	EUA	2010	1	0.66%
Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems COM (2006) 481	European Commission	2006	1	0.57%

The summaries provided by the two tables helped me to identify those documents that might have played an important role in bringing the idea of higher education diversification to the foreground of European policy discussions. As it appears, the idea of institutional diversity had a steady presence in four major communications of the European Commission concerning the development of higher education published during the last ten years (see Table 11). The

European Commission supported the diversification of European higher education since 2003, when the communication on the role of universities in the knowledge society and economy of Europe was issued. From then on, the policy objective has been retained and carried on also to the subsequent communications published in 2005, 2006, and 2011. Moreover, the Council conclusion on the modernisation of higher education from 2011, represents a formal recognition of the European Commission's efforts in this regard by the ministers of Member States. Therefore, the organisation's intention to support the diversification of higher education can be considered as a legitimized policy for the development of the EHEA and ERA. Since the European Commission is among the first organisations to raise the issue of a lack of diversity in higher education, and also one which has continuously advocated for the idea of diversification, I chose to analyse their policy documents in more detail by the time of their adoption.

Table 11: Selected texts for the analysis of the discourse

Title of the text	Year of publication
The role of universities in the knowledge society and economy of Europe	2003
Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy	2005
Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation	2006
Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems	2011

I acknowledge that the selection of these documents followed from the way the concept of higher education diversification has been theorized. There are not just other aspects of diversity, which have been knowingly omitted from the examination of the discourse, but also some other actors, who might have contributed to its development. Consequently, before reviewing each of the four selected documents in-depth, I offer a short overview of those texts that do make a reference to the diversification of higher education, but were excluded from the

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discourse analysis. Besides offering a possibility to contextualize the idea more broadly, looking at these documents will also solidify my choice to focus on specific policy documents published by the European Commission. This is not to say, that I wish to neglect the role of other policy actors, but to underscore my observation, that they were somewhat less successful in advancing the policy objective of higher education diversification in a European context.

3.6.1. Early references to the diversification of higher education

The earliest document from my dataset to ever mention the diversification of higher education institutions was the first Trends report published in 1999. Institutional diversity is brought up in the section dealing with national frameworks for higher education institutions and qualifications. This part of the report comments on the structure of higher education systems across European countries and describes the advantages and shortcomings of the binary and the unitary models. It also stresses, that while many countries have a binary higher education system in place, they are encouraging closer cooperation (and in some aspects also integration) between the academic and the professional sectors (Haug and Kirsten 1999). The main concern stressed by the authors is, how to enable cross institutional recognition of qualifications between the two sectors. Hence, diversification of higher education does not appear as a policy goal that should be pursued, rather as a reality that needs to be tackled in light of increased mobility of staff and students.

The next document to devote extensive attention to institutional diversity is the second Trends report published by EUA in 2001. The document contains a heading called "Diversification of institutions", which appears under the same section as it did in the previous report (Haug and Tauch 2001). Not surprisingly, institutional diversity continues to concern only the distinction between unitary and binary higher education systems and how the tasks of higher education are divided within them. The report expands the discussion by demonstrating country level trends in setting up one or the other organisational model. This confirms that until

2001, the term diversification of higher education was mostly used in a descriptive manner to refer to the divide between academic and professional programmes and qualifications, and eventually institutions offering them.

The first affirmative reference made by a European policy document that specifically concerns institutional differences is to be found in the Prague Communiqué from 2001:

„Ministers agreed that more attention should be paid to the benefit of a European Higher Education Area with institutions and programmes with different profiles." (Prague Communiqué, 2001: 3).

It was also the first time institutional diversity appeared outside the context of organisational models and qualifications and was mentioned under the heading "Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area". From this moment on, the diversification of higher education was mostly discussed within the context of the competitiveness of European higher education. In the following years, the sentence from the Prague communiqué was quoted by various reports whenever referring to institutional differences. One of such documents was the third Trends report published by EUA in 2003. In contrast to the previous two Trends reports, this one devotes much more attention, and even actively promotes the idea of higher education diversification. This is demonstrated by the following two quotes from the report, which imply that institutions will have to make some difficult choices in the future.

*"Most HEIs still **have to** define their own institutional profiles more clearly in order to be able to target the markets which correspond to their priorities"* (Reichert and Tauch 2003, 9)

*"Indeed, the need to develop clearer profiles and to set priorities regarding the respective weight of the individual functions and areas to which these are to be applied **becomes a matter of survival**."*(Reichert and Tauch 2003, 104)

Probably the biggest contribution of the Trends III report to the advancement of the diversification agenda was that it provided quantitative proof for the lack of institutional diversity. Based on the results of its survey, which gathered feedback from 760 higher education institutions, the report concludes that *"a large majority of European higher*

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education institutions are similar" and that *"only 13% of all HEIs (16% of universities) in Europe see themselves as serving a world-wide community"* (Reichert and Tauch 2003, 104). This data, together with some other results demonstrating the lack of diversity, was also repeated in the report "Between Prague to Berlin", prepared for the 2003 Berlin ministerial conference by the Follow-up Group of the Bologna Process. The BFUG report emphasized too, that higher education institutions are facing an increasing need to develop more differentiated profiles (Zgaga 2003). Thus, both of the mentioned reports successfully sensitized the problem of homogeneous higher education systems in European policy discussions. However, a couple of months before these two documents were published, the European Commission already highlighted that countries and institutions will have to devote more attention to institutional diversity in light of increasing global competitiveness in higher education (Commission 2003). This fact underscores the pioneering role of the European Commission in stimulating policy discussions about the diversification of higher education in the context of a broader concern for the competitiveness of EHEA.

The next document in our timeline to devote a section to institutional diversity is the Trends IV Report published in 2005. The report discusses institutional diversity under the heading "Success factors and systemic challenges for implementing the Bologna Process" and calls our attention to the decreasing differences between universities and other types of higher education institutions. It relates this trend to the introduction of identical titles for qualifications from universities and other higher education institutions, but also acknowledges the role that increased emphasis on employability played in it (Reichert and Tauch 2005). In this regard, institutional diversity returns to be discussed in the context of the binary divide and differences between qualifications. The following Trends reports do not devote as much attention to institutional diversity as did the previous ones.

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The topic of higher education diversification gained a new momentum in 2009. Tables 9 and 10 confirm that institutional diversity once again became part of the broader policy discussions, notably during the Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Ministerial meeting. Many texts from the conference devote a substantial part to the topic of institutional diversity and the possible use of transparency tools (classifications and ranking exercises) as instruments for the diversification of higher education. Policy actors took a stance to express their opinion in this regard, which tended to be moderately supportive to the idea of higher education diversification, and especially the application of transparency tools. The Leuven Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009) contains also a section about multidimensional transparency tools. According to the communiqué, these instruments aim to make the diversity of institutions across the EHEA more transparent ("Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Comminiqué" 2009). Although the document offers a couple of recommendations for their implementation it remains rather neutral towards the idea and does not express an overwhelming support for such initiatives. In contrast, the documents issued by the European Commission before and after the ministerial meeting in Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve remain largely supportive to the idea of using transparency tools for the advancement of institutional diversity in the EHEA. This difference is going to be made more obvious next by analysing the four selected communication of the European Commission.

3.6.2. Document 1: The role of universities in the knowledge society and economy of Europe (2003)

This is the first communication of the European Commission that explicitly refers to the diversification of higher education. The concept of institutional diversity is mentioned in two different contexts. First, it is acknowledged that there is a high degree of diversity across national higher education systems. This type of diversity concerns mostly the variety of national higher education regulations and is perceived as a possible obstacle that can limit

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interoperability of the separate systems. Secondly, diversity is mentioned as an essential

requirement to achieve excellence. Hence, two distinct interpretations become apparent from

the initial reading of the document. This duality of perceptions is shown in the following quotes

that come from the section of the communication that described the current European higher

education sector.

*"The European university landscape is primarily organised at national and regional levels and is characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity which is reflected in organisation, governance and operating conditions, including the status and conditions of employment and recruitment of teaching staff and researchers. (...) The structural reforms inspired by the Bologna process constitute an effort **to organise that diversity within a more coherent and compatible European framework**, which is a condition for the readability, and hence the competitiveness, of European universities both within Europe itself and in the whole world."* (Commission 2003, 5; some parts of the text were left out intentionally; emphases added)

Seemingly, the underlying policy intention of the European Commission is to support

the harmonization of the different national higher education systems. This is obvious from the

argument that the high degree of diversity that exists in Europe needs to become more coherent

and compatible. However, there is also another layer of meaning attached to the same section

of the document. The European Commission gives a hint in the footnote on how much diversity

is necessary, and starts to depict a different policy intention in the continuation of the text.

"By way of comparison, there are over 4 000 higher education establishments in the USA, 550 of them issuing doctorates, and 125 identified as "research universities". Of these, some 50 account for the lion's share of American academic research capacity, public funding in support of university research and the country's Nobel prizes for science." (Commission 2003, 5)

"Today the trend is away from these models [referring to the Humboldtian model], and towards greater differentiation. This results in the emergence of more specialised institutions concentrating on a core of specific competences when it comes to research and teaching and/or on certain dimensions of their activities, e.g. their integration within a strategy of regional development through adult education/training." (Commission 2003, 6)

Here, we have to refer back to our initial theoretical insights to give a useful

interpretation of this seemingly distinct perception (i.e. diversity as a problem versus diversity

as a necessity). We can easily account for the outlined inconsistency if we make a distinction

between internal and external diversity. In the first instance, the commission is referring mainly

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to internal diversity (i.e. the organisation, the governance and operating conditions, the status and conditions of employment and recruitment of teaching staff and researchers, as well as the "readability" of degrees across national systems), whereas in the second part it makes a reference to external diversity (i.e. the emergence of more specialized institutions). Thus, while internal diversity is depicted as an obstacle for interoperability (which will be addressed by the ongoing Bologna Process), external diversity is seen as much more favourable, and even necessary.

While the text identifies an obvious need for more institutional diversity in Europe, it fails to define any specific policy objectives in this regard. Section 5 of the communication, which deals with the question of how to make European universities a world reference, states that radical changes have to be made, but not even the outlined three objectives under this heading make any reference to differences in institutional types, profiles, or statuses (Commission 2003, 11–12). Instead, they highlight in general terms that European universities have to have sufficient funding and use it efficiently, consolidate their excellence in research and in teaching through networking, open up to the outside, and increase their international attractiveness (Commission 2003). There is no mentioning of any objective that could fragment or stratify higher education, or that governments should adopt such measures. The objectives are generic and reinforce somewhat the rhetoric of egalitarianism, since in the European Commission's view all higher education institutions can be excellent.

"The aim must be to bring all universities to the peak of their potential, not to leave some behind" (Commission 2003, 16)

Soon after stating the importance of treating universities equally, the European Commission suggest a move towards the creation of networks of excellence. The identification of these networks is said to be a requirement for European higher education to achieve global excellence.

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*"A combination of the absolute need for excellence, the effects of the precariousness of resources and the pressure of competition, forces universities and Member States to make choices. They need to identify the areas in which different universities have attained, or can reasonably be expected to attain, **the excellence judged to be essential at European or at international level** – and to focus on them funds to support academic research."* (Commission 2003, 18; emphases added)

Besides stressing that institutional differentiation is unavoidable, by stating that universities and Member States are forced to make choices, the text also places the responsibility for making this decision into the hands of Member States.

"As to which areas should be given preference, this should be based on an evaluation within each university system." (Commission 2003, 18)

Allowing Member States to make strategic choices and concentrate research funding primarily in these networks of excellence is expected to change the way core activates of higher education are divided between institutions. In this regard, the European Commission argues that the tasks of teaching and research should not necessarily be shared equally among institutions. This position is documented by the following quote that appears under the policy objective to establish centres of excellence.

"The concentration of research funding on a smaller number of areas and institutions should lead to increased specialisation of the universities, in line with the move currently observed towards a European university area which is more differentiated and in which the universities tend to focus on the aspects situated at the core of their research and/or teaching skills. While the link between research and teaching naturally continues to define the ethos of the university as an institution and while training through research must remain an essential aspect of its activity, this link is nevertheless not the same in all institutions, for all programmes or for all levels." (Commission 2003, 18)

The outlined policy statement seeks to focus research funding on a smaller number (i.e. specialized) of institutions that could be competitive on an international level. In other words, excellence is seen as the outcome of good quality research, which again is dependent on the existence of specialized institutions or centres of excellence. These institutions or centres should conduct the lion's share of research activities and accordingly receive additional funding for their activities. The depicted causal chain points to the possible emergence of a two-tier structure of higher education with excellent research universities and possibly "less"

excellent teaching universities. This perception is also evident in the concluding remark of the European Commission:

*"Europe simply must have a first-class university system - **with universities recognised internationally as the best** in the various fields of activities and areas in which they are involved."* (Commission 2003, 22; emphases added)

The question emerges, how this kind of institutional differentiation would be different from the already existing binary models in many countries. It remains unclear, whether the supported structural setup points to a three-level arrangement of institutions, with top research universities, followed by teaching universities, and vocational higher education institutions at the bottom, or can it be reconciled within the binary system. While the arguments in favour of concentrating research activity and funding in a handful of institutions is well developed and reasoned, it is much less clear how other types of activities would be treated within such a division.

3.6.3. Document 2: Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy (2005)

The communication discussed before led to a series of consultations with key stakeholders. The present document is the outcome of these consultations and hence can be considered as the continuation of the policy directions outlined in the previous text. However, the new communication assumes a much more instrumentalist view of European universities, referring to them as "motors" of the new European knowledge-based economy. In relation to this objective, which has clear links to the Lisbon agenda, the communication also expresses a stronger criticism of European universities.

"Yet European universities, motors of the new, knowledge-based paradigm, are not in a position to deliver their full potential contribution to the re-launched Lisbon Strategy." (Commission 2005, 2)

Another apparent difference compared to the previous communication is that the lack of institutional diversity has been more concretely articulated as a problem of EHEA.

*"A tendency to uniformity and egalitarianism in many national systems has ensured that the average quality of universities, while generally homogeneous, is comparatively good – at least academically. But there are also **deficiencies stemming from insufficient differentiation**. Most universities tend to offer the same monodisciplinary programmes and traditional methods geared towards the same group of academically best-qualified learners – which leads to the exclusion of those who do not conform to the standard model. Other consequences are that Europe has too few centres of world-class excellence, and universities are not encouraged to explain at home and abroad the specific value of what they produce for learners and society."* (Commission 2005, 3; emphases added)

The above quote makes it clear that the European Commission sees the lack of institutional diversity as a problem, which needs to be overcome. It links low quality of higher education to the existing institutional homogeneity in national systems, which is at least partially related to the egalitarian treatment of institutions by national government. Nevertheless, the European Commission continues arguing that excellence can be achieved only through continuous differentiation of universities (and even its sub units). The following collection of quotes highlights this rhetoric.

"It [excellence] can exist in a few entire universities, but much more widely in individual faculties or teams within institutions or networks." (Commission 2005, 5; clarification added in brackets)

"The nature and intensity of research (as of other activities) varies considerably between countries, types of institution and individual universities. Each university must achieve its full potential in the light of its own strengths and priorities, and it must therefore be capable of identifying and focusing on these." (Commission 2005, 5)

"Universities should be responsible for setting specific medium-term priorities (including by defining types/areas of research, teaching and services in which they will achieve outstanding quality) and targeting the collective effort of their staff towards achieving these;" (Commission 2005, 7)

The outlined quotes emphasize that excellence can be the attribute of several institutions or their organisational units, but this potential needs to be identified first of all by each university. This perception deviates slightly from the policy statement identified in the previous communication, which declared that national authorities also have a responsibility in making these strategic choices. Because this responsibility of Member States is missing from the policy recommendations found in this communication, the text can signify a shift from a top-down to

a bottom-up approach to the diversification of higher education. This shift is also sustained by a policy recommendation that urges Member States instead to deregulate their higher education system to the extent that individual institutions can make such strategic decision.

"The Commission urges all Member States to take action ensuring that their regulatory frameworks enable and encourage university leadership to undertake genuine change and pursue strategic priorities." (Commission 2005, 9)

After each institution identifies its key areas of excellence (assuming that each have one), public funding is expected to follow similar adjustments.

*"This requires some concentration of funding, not just on centres and networks that are already excellent (in a particular type/area of research, teaching/training or community service) – but also on **those who have the potential** to become excellent and to challenge established leaders."* (Commission 2005, 5; emphases added)

*"Additional funding should primarily provide incentives and means **to those universities** (they exist in every system) and **to those groups/individuals** (they exist in each university) that are willing and able to innovate, reform and deliver high quality in teaching, research and services."* (Commission 2005, 8; emphases added)

The two examples underscore that the diversification of higher education and the concentration of funding go hand in hand. It also means that public funding should be selective favouring those institutions whose performance is considered as excellent. The European Commission has also identified its own role to support such measures. As stated: "The Commission aims to respond to the call to invest more efforts and money in outstanding quality, while at the same time ensuring that the terrain from which excellence emerges remains open and fertile throughout the Union." (Commission 2005, 11). Even if the European Commission does not propose specific benchmarks in higher education, this proposal still enables it to set an example for funding excellent institutions.

While the differentiation of institutions continues to be regarded as a highly desirable outcome, the importance of internal diversity did not vanquish entirely from the communication either. For example, the text continues to argue that Europe will require much more diversity with respect to target groups, teaching modes, entry and exit points, the mix of

disciplines and competencies in curricula (Commission 2005, 5). This raises the question whether internal diversity can or should be reconciled within an organisationally diverse higher education system. That is to say, to what extent would such claims be valid for highly specialized institutions? If they are not, then it would probably make sense to consider them as another form of argument for sorting out specific societal expectations among differentiated institutions. However, if one anticipates each institution to open up for different target groups, offer various teaching modes, entry and exit points, or simply strengthen interdisciplinarity in its curricula, then such claims can easily undermine our desire for specialized institutions.

3.6.4. Document 3: Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation (2006)

The next communication in the row builds on the fact that the European Council acknowledged at an informal meeting in Hampton Court in 2005 that R&D and universities are the foundation of European competitiveness[41]. Compared to the previous two communications, this document takes a very critical stand towards individual Member States and describes them as barriers that hinder universities to differentiate themselves. Member States are seen much less as being part of the solution, as was the case back in 2003. The following two quotes demonstrate this position and emphasize again that quality is dependent on the diversification of the system.

"Member States value their universities highly and many have tried to "preserve" them at national level through detailed regulations organising them, controlling them, micro-managing them and, in the end, imposing an undesirable degree of uniformity on them." (Commission 2006, 3)

"This pressure for uniformity has led to generally good average performance, but has increased fragmentation of the sector into mostly small national systems and sub-systems. These render cooperation difficult at national, let alone European or international, level and impose conditions which prevent universities from diversifying and from focusing on quality." (Commission 2006, 3)

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[41] For more information about the informal European Council meeting in Hampton Court, visit the following website : https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/photo/photoByReportage.cfm?ref=011636&sitelang=en

The necessity of supporting institutional differentiation is reaffirmed, and the fact that institutions should differentiate primarily according to their research and teaching activates gets also repeated.

__Europe needs universities able to build on their own strengths and differentiate their activities on the basis of these strengths__. While all institutions share certain common values and tasks, not all need the same balance between education and research, the same approach to research and research training, or the same mix of services and academic disciplines. __Research should remain a key task of the systems as a whole, but not necessarily for all institutions__. This would allow the emergence of an articulated system comprising world-renowned research institutions, plus networks of excellent national and regional universities and colleges which also provide shorter technical education. Such a system would mobilise the substantial pool of knowledge, talent and energy within universities and would merit – and be in a position to generate - the increased investment needed to make it comparable with the best in the world." (Commission 2006, 4; emphases added)

The above quote also demonstrates the already established strong link between institutional differentiation and the emergence of world-class institutions. The communication also seems to rely much more on the typical market jargon, like promotion, investment, strategic choice, and competition, which underlines that the European Commission argues for the diversification of higher education primarily based on an economic rational. The following collection of quotes demonstrates this point.

"However, this crucial sector [higher education] of the economy and of society needs in-depth restructuring and modernization if Europe is not to lose out in the global __competition__ in education, research and innovation" (Commission 2006, 3; clarification added in brackets; emphases added)

"It [differentiation] will help universities to __promote__ their different activities and to convince society, governments and the private sector that they are worth __investing__ in." (Commission 2006, 9; clarification added in brackets; emphases added)

"Excellence emerges from __competition__ and is developed mainly at faculty/department level – few universities achieve excellence across a wide spectrum of areas." (Commission 2006, 9; emphases added)

"Universities, for their part, need to make __strategic choices__ and conduct internal reforms to extend their funding base, enhance their areas of excellence and develop their competitive position; structured partnerships with the business community and other potential partners will be indispensable for these transformations." (Commission 2006, 12; emphases added)

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While it is noticeable that the diversification of higher education is justified by economic arguments, there are still no concrete policy recommendations offered for Member States, except the ones that we loosely referred to before, namely the deregulation of higher education systems. As was the case in the previous communications, the most concrete suggestion, relates to differentiated funding on the basis of institutional excellence. This policy recommendation is clearly highlighted in the next two examples.

*"Universities should be **funded more for what they do than for what they are**, by focusing funding on relevant outputs rather than on inputs, and by adapting funding to the diversity of institutional profiles."* (Commission 2006, 7; emphases added)

*"**Research-active universities should not be assessed and funded on the same basis as others weaker in research** but stronger in integrating students from disadvantaged groups or in acting as driving forces for local industry and services. Apart from completion rates, average study time and graduate employment rates, other criteria should be taken into account for research-active universities: research achievements, successful competitive funding applications, publications, citations, patents and licences, academic awards, industrial and/or international partnerships, etc."* (Commission 2006, 8; emphases added)

The communication also underlines the role of the European Commission in this regard, and states that it will provide political impetus and targeted funding to enhance differentiation in the European higher education system (Commission 2006). With regards to the former initiative, the European Commission seeks to employ the open method of coordination to identify and spread best practices across various national systems. Concerning the latter initiative, the European Commission will use its financial instruments, namely the Erasmus +, the Horizon 2020, the Lifelong Learning programme, the structural funds and the loans of the European Investment Bank to support efforts towards institutional differentiation. The communication has also foreseen the establishment of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) which is described as an innovative institutional model to drive change in existing universities (Commission 2006).

3.6.5. Document 4: Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems (2011)

This communication makes a remark in its introduction once again to the necessity of diversifying EHEA, and also devotes a full section to the articulation of policy recommendations in this regard. This not just shows that diversification of higher education remained on the policy agenda, but also continued to be seen by the European Commission as one of the core objectives for making European higher education achieve global excellence. Therefore the lack of institutional diversity was further problematized in the communication.

"At the same time, higher education institutions too often seek to compete in too many areas, while comparatively few have the capacity to excel across the board." (Commission 2011, 2)

Except the couple of introductory sentences that express concerns for the lack of institutional diversity in European higher education, the topic of higher education diversification is mentioned only in the context of policy instruments. As was the case with all three communications beforehand, this testifies that the discussion on this topic has advanced and changed slightly. The current communication elaborates much more extensively on European policy instrument that could foster the differentiation of higher education institutions. The main instruments identified in this regard are the so called transparency tools.

"There is no single excellence model: Europe needs a wide diversity of higher education institutions, and each must pursue excellence in line with its mission and strategic priorities. With more transparent information about the specific profile and performance of individual institutions, policy-makers will be in a better position to develop effective higher education strategies and institutions will find it easier to build on their strengths." (Commission 2011, 2)

This is the first time that the European Commission explicitly mentions that there should be some sort of transparency tools that could be used for enhancing institutional diversity in the EHEA[42]. In addition to these instruments, the European Commission continues

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[42] The objective to support the transparency of organisational missions and performance was first stated by the European Commission in 2008 in its report to the Council of the European Union (COM (2008) 680) and repeated in 2010 in the flagship initiative Youth on the Move (COM (2010) 477). The term 'transparency tools' was mentioned in relation to institutional diversity in the Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué in 2009.

to argue for increased institutional autonomy and assumes that by reducing legal restrictions institutions are likely to become more responsive to external demands. Hence, Member States that overregulate the system and the lack of market mechanism that support competition are reoccurring elements of the discussion on the diversification of higher education.

*"**Autonomous institutions can specialise more easily**, promoting educational and research performance and fostering diversification within higher education systems. But legal, financial and administrative restrictions continue to limit institutional freedom to define strategies and structures and to differentiate themselves from their competitors."* (Commission 2011, 9; emphases added)

This communication is the first one that dedicates an entire section to the idea of higher education diversification. The section is titled: "*The EU contribution: Incentives for transparency, diversification, mobility and cooperation*" and summarizes the initiatives that the EU is going to undertake to achieve the outlined policy objectives, such as the diversification of EHEA. It might be important to notice, that in this section there is no mention of the different aspects of internal diversity, like the diversity of study programmes, student needs, or teaching methods, but relates only to the diversity of institutional types, profiles and statuses. The document outlines that the European Commission is going to support the diversification of higher education through evidence-based policy analysis and transparency which is first and foremost going to be realized in the form of a European ranking system (Commission 2011a, 10).

*"(…) it is essential to develop a wider range of analysis and information, covering all aspects of performance - to help students make informed study choices, to enable institutions to identify and develop their strengths, and to support policy-makers in their strategic choices on the reform of higher education systems. Evidence shows that a **multi-dimensional ranking and information tool is feasible** and widely supported by education stakeholders."* (Commission 2011, 10; some parts of the text were left out intentionally; emphases added)

In particular, the European Commission will undertake the following measures:

*"**Launch U-Multirank: a new performance-based ranking and information tool** for profiling higher education institutions, aiming to radically improve the transparency of the higher*

Before that, transparency tools were mainly cited concerning qualifications and the quality of education (such as the implementation of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement).

education sector, with first results in 2013. By moving beyond the research focus of current rankings and performance indicators, and by allowing users to create individualised multidimensional rankings, this independently run tool will inform choice and decision-making by all higher education stakeholders." (Commission 2011, 11; emphases added)

*"In cooperation with Member States and stakeholders, **analyse the impact of different funding approaches** on the diversification, efficiency and equity of higher education systems, as well as on student mobility."* (Commission 2011, 11; emphases added)

Similarly to the arguments found in the previous communication, the policy reasoning in this text assumes that when provided with sufficient level of autonomy, higher education institutions will pursue a specialization course in a competitive higher education setting. Thus, reducing restrictions, especially in the fields of funding and spending, and providing adequate information on each institutions performance becomes the precondition for diversification. Indeed, it appears that the European Commission considers the differentiation of organisations as driven mainly by increased competition and institutional freedom, while neglects the possible role of governmental regulations in this regard. Accordingly, bottom up policies are preferred over top down solutions.

3.7. Summary of the findings

So far I have presented the observations that emerged from the first level reading of the documents. In the following discussion I intend to go beyond the thick description previously provided and engage in a deeper analysis of the data by looking for reoccurring patterns. I elaborate more deeply on the content of these texts and how they might be interpreted given the study's analytical framework. I present only the summary of my data with some illustrative examples that will serve to justify my arguments. This enables me to base my claims on a much larger quantity of data, while its disadvantage is that the process of analysis becomes less transparent (Taylor and Wetherell 2001). Despite this limitation, the summary will focus on the three main questions raised in the introduction of this chapter, namely: a) what problem(s) is the diversification of higher education supposed to solve? b) What kind of diversity does Europe need? c) How can that particular type of diversity be achieved?

3.7.1. The problem definition

There have been visible changes considering the length, detail, and the position of the texts that describe the idea of higher education diversification. The 2003 communication did not explicitly emphasize its importance, rather acknowledged that the future of European higher education lies within a more coherent and compatible organisation of the different national systems in the course of the Bologna Process. Despite failing to problematize the lacking diversity of institutional types, profiles and statuses, the document already pointed out that the ongoing harmonization process should not result in the dominance of one particular institutional model, but in a diverse higher education system (Commission 2003, 5). The document does list out a number of challenges that European higher education faces, but does not include the absence of institutional diversity among them. Instead, the subject is mentioned in a sub-heading that focuses on developing centres and networks of excellence. There, diversification of EHEA is presented as a solution for creating centres of excellence, which could enable European higher education to attain global appeal.

In contrast, the 2005 communication is much more concerned with the topic and outlines uniformity and egalitarianism as major challenges for European higher education. The lack of diversity was the first problem to be mentioned among several system level challenges, like insularity, over-regulation, and under-funding. The text clearly affirms that: "there are also deficiencies stemming from insufficient differentiation." (Commission 2005, 3). Hence, it is the first document to outline the negative consequences of insufficient differentiation, which reinforces the problematization of the prevailing organisational homogeneity in the EHEA. Afterward, a full paragraph is devoted to the topic of differentiation (discussing both internal and external diversity) under the sub-heading called "Attractiveness: the imperative of quality and excellence". This confirms, that the idea of higher education diversification persisted to be

debated first and foremost as a problem that concerns mainly the competitiveness of European higher education.

The idea to diversify the EHEA stems largely from the perception that European higher education is underperforming compared to other higher education system in the world. More precisely, institutional diversity is understood as being low, because policy makers are juxtaposing EHEA against the characteristics of the US higher education system. In the 2003 communication on the role of universities in the knowledge society and economy of Europe alone, the European Commission makes eleven separate references to the superiority of the US higher education system. But, similar expressions can be found in other policy documents as well, not mentioned above. For example the communication on the European Institute of Technology from 2006 makes the following statement:

"There are nearly 2,000 universities in the EU aspiring to be research-active. While not wholly comparable, less than 10% of higher education institutions in the US award postgraduate degrees and even fewer claim to be research-intensive universities." (Commission 2006, 5)

The narrative couples the US's excellent performance, which is measured predominantly on the basis of research productivity (see also page 120) with the level of diversity that exists in their higher education system, regardless of the fact, that it is unknown whether the US system's stratification can account for its competitiveness (Hotson 2011). The underlying argument, which seems to drive the rationale, is the belief that if Europe does not structure its higher education system as the US then it will lag behind in the global competition. Performance is mainly seen in terms of research activity, but the European Commission also frequently refers to the lack of attractiveness of EHEA compared to the US system. While not part of the official Bologna Declaration, this same concern started to play a crucial role in the Bologna Process as well (Enders and Boer 2009). Therefore, the discourse surrounding the diversification of higher education seems to have little to do with the actual level of

heterogeneity found in the system, and more with the assumption how excellence and attractiveness can be achieved in a global higher education market.

It goes without saying, the European Commission relates to higher education institutions predominantly as enterprises embedded within competitive markets. References to other problems, such as access to higher education by marginalized groups or the decreasing relevance of higher education to labour market demands, are not apparent in the texts. Instead, the idea of higher education diversification is framed as a genuine solution to EHEA's lack of competitiveness in a global setting. The language, and its underlying norms, contests the idea of multiversities[43] (institutions that assume primacy in all areas of higher education) and links success to institutional specialization. At the same time this argument subtly implies that institutions that do not specialize might fail. Concerning the causes of insufficient institutional differentiation, the texts highlight that "these failures are compounded by a combination of excessive public control coupled with insufficient funding." (Commission 2006, 4). In other words, the European Commission emphasizes the rigid regulatory frameworks of Member States, which directly limit institutional freedom to act as strategic players and differentiate their activities on the basis of their teaching and research capacities. Secondly, the lack of public funding and its misalignment, in the sense that it fails to reward institutions based on their profile and performance, is another obstacle to the diversification of the EHEA. These two issues are going to be addressed by the policy measures advocated for by the European Commission.

3.7.2. The policy objective

Through the analysis of the four communications it became evident that the policy objective to diversify the EHEA, as a solution for Europe's lack of competitiveness in a global higher education market, has become more and more elaborated over time. The arguments

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[43] The term has been popularized with the publication of Clark Kerr's The Uses of the University in 1963.

found in the texts also suggests that a modern higher education system is likely to encompass institutions that are both functionally and qualitatively different, for which the prime example is the US higher education system. However, there are only vague references to what kind of diversity is needed in Europe.

The documents relate differently to internal and external diversity. In the first case, increased harmonization is claimed to be necessary, while in the latter, more institutional differentiation is desired. This points to the already observed tension between the two aspects of diversity. Claims for institutional differentiation tend to be justified on the grounds of competitiveness, while claims for more internal diversity on the grounds of equality of access, as part of the social dimension of the Bologna Process (Hackl 2012). Although both aspects are depicted as crucial for the overall quality of European higher education, by 2011 institutional differentiation comes much more into the centre of attention and is seen as more favourable, and even necessary by the European Commission. On the other hand, there is no substantial concern in the latest communication for the diversity of study programmes (except one policy line), target groups, curricular content, or teaching methods, which suggests that internal diversity has been excluded from the list of solutions for rising EHEA's competitiveness.

The European Commission also describes in which possible areas higher education institutions should differentiate their activities. It argues that the tasks of teaching and research should not necessarily be shared equally among institutions.

"Research should remain a key task of the systems as a whole, but not necessarily for all institutions" (Commission 2006, 5)

The depicted model resembles the US higher education system, with first-class research universities on the one side and possibly second-class teaching universities on the other. Thus, the proposed path of differentiation prefers vertical differentiation, which is based on qualitative differences between institutions. In contrast, horizontal differentiation, which could

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include the emergence of less attractive teaching focused institutions, is often portrayed as the consequence and not as the goal of higher education diversification.

Based on the number of references, it becomes obvious that the primary emphasis rests on creating a critical mass of institutions, which are capable to compete on the global level. The hegemony of the discourse is maintained by undermining alternative approaches to building excellence. Since the US higher education system is the only reference point, it is hard to argue that homogeneous systems could achieve global excellence as well. Therefore, the discourse excludes alternative solutions that rest on an egalitarian approach, although, it could be claimed that the equal treatment of institutions offers better overall quality for a large number of the population. Instead, the narrative criticizes such policy approaches stating that they produce only "average quality" (Commission 2005, 3). There is no explicit categorization of good versus bad policy solutions, but it is evident that the voice of some higher education institutions is silent. The policy objective advocated for favours the flagship institutions, which tend to be located in capitals and have large student and faculty numbers, over those that are at the periphery. This can produce some negative spill-over effects on specific regions, which as a consequence might lose out and be trapped with underperforming institutions and with lower quality education (Huisman and van Vught 2009). Small, regional universities, with insufficient capacity to conduct world class research, are likely to become pushed aside with little vision for their future role in EHEA.

3.7.3. Policy measures

While the policy objective and the problem it supposed to solve were elaborated quite early on, the related policy instruments to achieve them have emerged rather late. Acknowledging that the European Commission has limited influence on national higher education, and that the discourse is deeply embedded within an economic reasoning, it is not surprising that the outlined policy measures relate to higher education institutions

predominantly as market players. Accordingly, the proposed policy direction assumes that the combination of institutional autonomy, financial incentives, good leadership, and information about performance will steer institutions towards differentiating their "products and services". Hence, to achieve more institutional diversity, the European Commission advocates first and foremost for greater institutional autonomy. The argument assumes that by reducing legal restrictions, institutions are likely to become more responsive to external demands. The argument is highlighted in the following quotes:

*"**Autonomous institutions can specialise** more easily, promoting educational and research performance and fostering diversification within higher education systems. But **legal, financial and administrative restrictions continue to limit institutional freedom** to define strategies and structures and to differentiate themselves from their competitors."* (Commission 2011, 9; emphases added)

"The Commission urges all Member States to take action ensuring that their regulatory frameworks enable and encourage university leadership to undertake genuine change and pursue strategic priorities." (Commission 2005, 9)

The second policy measure relates more broadly to issues of funding. The European Commission stresses that research efforts and resources should be concentrated in a few institutions who seek global excellence in research, rather than dividing funds uniformly or providing supplementary aid to those institutions that underperform. The European Commission seeks to provide targeted funding through programs like the Horizon 2020, the Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus +, or the structural funds. These resources are granted on a competitive basis and can be easily aligned to the mission of the institution (Horta, Huisman, and Heitor 2008). After each institution identifies its key areas of excellence (assuming that each have one), funding is expected to follow similar adjustments. Such an approach will likely strengthen further the competitive environment in higher education. This argumentation can be seen in the two quotes below.

*"Universities should be funded more for what they do than for what they are, by focusing funding on relevant outputs rather than on inputs, and by **adapting funding to the diversity of institutional profiles**."* (Commission 2006, 7; emphases added)

"Research-active universities should not be assessed and funded on the same basis as others weaker in research but stronger in integrating students from disadvantaged groups or in acting as driving forces for local industry and services." (Commission 2006, 8)

Beside the fact that the European Commission explicitly discourages excessive ex ante checks of higher education institutions and funding that is not linked to excellence, there is also a third and more latent policy objective present in the analysed documents. Higher education institutions are frequently encouraged to assess their strengths and shape their activities accordingly. The measure advanced by this narrative is increased managerialism. Managerialism, which in this context refers to the identification and concentration of institutional resources on strategic priorities, undermines some of the more basic assumptions of academic freedom, namely the freedom of inquiry by faculty members. Instead, managerialism assumes that inquiry should follow the strategic priorities of institutions and the broader society. The following quotes highlight this argument.

*"Universities should be **responsible for setting specific medium-term priorities** (including by defining types/areas of research, teaching and services in which they will achieve outstanding quality) and targeting the collective effort of their staff towards achieving these."* (Commission 2005, 7; emphases added)

*"Universities, for their part, **need to make strategic choices** and conduct internal reforms to extend their funding base, enhance their areas of excellence and develop their competitive position (…)"* (Commission 2006, 12; some parts of the text were left out intentionally; emphasis added)

*"Support the development of strategic and professional higher education leaders, and ensure that higher education institutions have the autonomy **to set strategic direction** (…)"* (Commission 2011, 9; some parts of the text were left out intentionally; emphases added)

Besides the outlined measures, probably the strongest productive outcome of the discourse relates to the creation of transparency tools. As such, the discourse made it obvious, that there can be no diversity without applying some sort of instruments that measure and generate comparable information about the performance of each higher education institution.

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Moreover, it authorizes governments to use the obtained information to align funding to institutional performance. While this relationship is not explicitly mentioned in any of the texts, the link appears to be somewhat obvious. As stated by the 2011 communication, the purpose of such instruments is: "to help students make informed study choices, to enable institutions to identify and develop their strengths, and to **support policy-makers in their strategic choices** on the reform of higher education systems." (Commission 2011, 10; emphases added). Consequently, the European Commission has been enthusiastic to support the development and application of several transparency tools, such as the U-Map, U-Multirank and the various scoreboard projects (e.g. Innovation Union scoreboard[44]) that offer comparable information on institutional performance on a European scale.

The four outlined measures (i.e. institutional autonomy, financial incentives, adequate leadership and management, and transparency about performance) feature a bottom up policy approach, where the diversification of higher education is regarded primarily as the outcome of institutional choices in a competitive environment rather than of top-down governmental decisions. The establishment of new and specialized organisations is not mentioned as a possible alternative to the diversification of higher education system, neither is the possibility to merge existing institutions in order to achieve critical mass in areas of excellence. The role of quality assurance in promoting or supporting institutional differentiation remains unknown as well.

3.8. *Summary*

The topic of institutional differentiation appeared in European policy discussions shortly after the Bologna Process was launched in 1999. Since then, the idea and its supporting arguments have constantly evolved to advocate more convincingly for the diversification of

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[44] For more information about this project visit the following website:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/policy/innovation-scoreboard/index_en.htm

higher education. The analysis has demonstrated that institutional diversity is no longer perceived simply as a matter of different historical developments of national higher education systems, but has become an important European policy concern which needs coordinated efforts of both European and national authorities. The idea of diversification stems from a broader concern for the competitiveness of the EHEA, whereby a causal link is drawn within the discourse that associates the lack of competitiveness with the lack of institutional differentiation. This is the main problem the diversification of higher education is supposed to solve. The concepts relationship to other challenges faced by European higher education are rarely, if at all, mentioned. While it is reasonable to expect that increased institutional differentiation might affect access to higher education, the quality of teaching and learning, or the financial difficulties that many governments face in financing higher education, these aspects play only a marginal role in the discourses justification.

The discourse rests on the notion that once given the necessary freedom, right information, required managerial skills, and appropriate financial incentives, higher education institutions are likely to differentiate their activities to satisfy political demands for excellence. The European Commission has been especially active in promoting the discourse. This firm support for the idea of higher education diversification has been observed in a number of communications released between 2003 and 2011, which legitimize it as a relevant policy direction for the future development of the EHEA and ERA. Considering the range of policy measures promoted, it is plausible to assume that diversification of higher education will remain an important policy objective for the EU in the future, with the condition that it does not "go against the need for convergence of the fragmented European higher education system" (Huisman and van Vught 2009, 22). The idea to diversify higher education has already taken root in several national cases where policies are being developed that seek to identify and stress out the differences that exist among higher education institutions. When these differences

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become obvious the institutions are going to be rewarded accordingly. Whether such diversification policies will actually create quality improvements at system level remains to be tested.

CHAPTER IV: The rise and fall of the Romanian diversification policy

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has confirmed that there is a general concern among European policy actors for institutional diversity in the EHEA. This concept has moved on from being a descriptive construct to an elaborated discursive idea that advocates for the further diversification of higher education. However, it is less well known to what extent this European idea has been successful in promoting policy change at the national level. In the past decade most European countries' higher education systems have evolved in the absence of a particular policy on diversification (Codling and Meek 2006, 37). One of the few exceptions is Romania, which besides England, Germany, Slovakia, and to some extent the Netherlands, has enacted a policy for supporting the differentiation of its higher education institutions (Reichert 2009; Maassen 2011).

The government of Romania started the ambitious higher education reform in 2007. The reform was largely inspired by European policy narratives that emphasized the importance of higher education in a future knowledge economy, and more precisely, the significance of higher education diversification as means to achieve better overall quality in the system (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). Hence, Romania became one of the few European countries to introduce a diversification policy based primarily on the classification of universities and ranking of study programmes. Besides providing comparable information about the performance of each individual institution and study programme the policy also sought to link the gathered information to the allocation of publicly funded study places and other financial incentives. Consequently, the Romanian higher education reform represents a unique case, because it was one of the first "attempts" in Europe to actually use a classification and ranking exercise for such broad purposes. I deliberately emphasized the word attempt, since the reform has eased following a change in the national government in 2012. While the Law on National Education,

which provided the basis for the reform is still in place, some of its provisions have been modified and others, such as repeating the classification and ranking exercise periodically, no longer followed. Despite this fact, the distinctive endeavour by Romanian policy makers to use transparency tools for the diversification of higher education proves to be a noteworthy case to study.

The final part of my study looks at how the Romanian higher education reforms are related to the broader European discourse on the diversification of higher education. The absence of clear motive, the remarkably swift adoption, and the fact that the Romanian government assigned part of the policy's implementation to an external body, namely the European University Association (EUA), presents not just a particularly interesting case of policy making to investigate, but also suggests that the most plausible explanation for the policy's adoption might be related to the power of transnational ideas to reconstruct domestic policy paradigms. This observation has been also noted by Andreescu and colleagues (2012), who stated that the pan-European concern with classifications and rankings is one of the main triggers of the government's sudden interest in diversification (Andreescu et al. 2012). In line with this statement, my study assumes that the European discourse about the diversification of higher education is more likely to account for the recent policy innovation in Romania than other factors. Moreover, by offering an explanation for why Romania pioneered in introducing a policy on higher education diversification we can also unveil in what way it intended to reshape the countries' higher education system.

The chapter is made up of several parts. I continue by elaborating in more detail on the analytical framework and the methodology, which were used for exploring the main research question of this chapter. This part is followed up by a general account of the recent history of Romanian higher education. The next part identifies the key actors involved in the policy formulation and implementation process. The fifth part concerns explicitly the policy

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formulation process and covers all of its stages step by step. The sixth part is devoted to the implementation of the policy and the challenges it faced. The final two parts offer a critical analysis of the policy and how the empirical evidence supports the previously established assumption concerning its adoption process.

4.2. *The analytical framework of the study*

The fact that Romania endorsed a policy to diversify its higher education system can hardly be reduced to processes of policy transfer from a European to national level. There was no obvious model to be copied, only a loosely coupled collection of discursive arguments in favour of diversification. Instead, I argue that ideational change, driven by a broader European narrative and the engagement of epistemic communities in transferring these ideas could offer a more plausible account for the actions of the Romanian government. The analytical approach is based on Hall's (1993) argument according to which policymakers work within a framework of ideas that specifies not only the goals of the policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing (Hall 1993). Consequently, I suppose that domestic policymakers followed similar justifications as the ones expressed on a European level for the introduction of a diversification policy in Romania.

Since I approach my topic from a constructivist perspective I relate to political realities much more critically. This means that the need to diversify Romania's higher education system should not be taken for granted as a true reflection of domestic societal problems. Policies that stimulate institutional differentiation might depend less on the actual level of diversity, and more on domestic policymakers desire to follow European policy trends. Considering that social legitimacy is much more important than efficiency for the spread of a policy in the context of the EU, the appropriateness of the ideas is the key element for their domestic adaptation (Radaelli 2005). This enables for Europeanized policy ideas, such as the one on the

diversification of higher education, to be perceived as a legitimate policy direction and eventually become endorsed by domestic policy makers. Following this reasoning, I assume a certain causal-relationship between events that took place in Romania. This process is depicted in the following figure.

Figure 7: The proposed process of policy change in the case of Romania
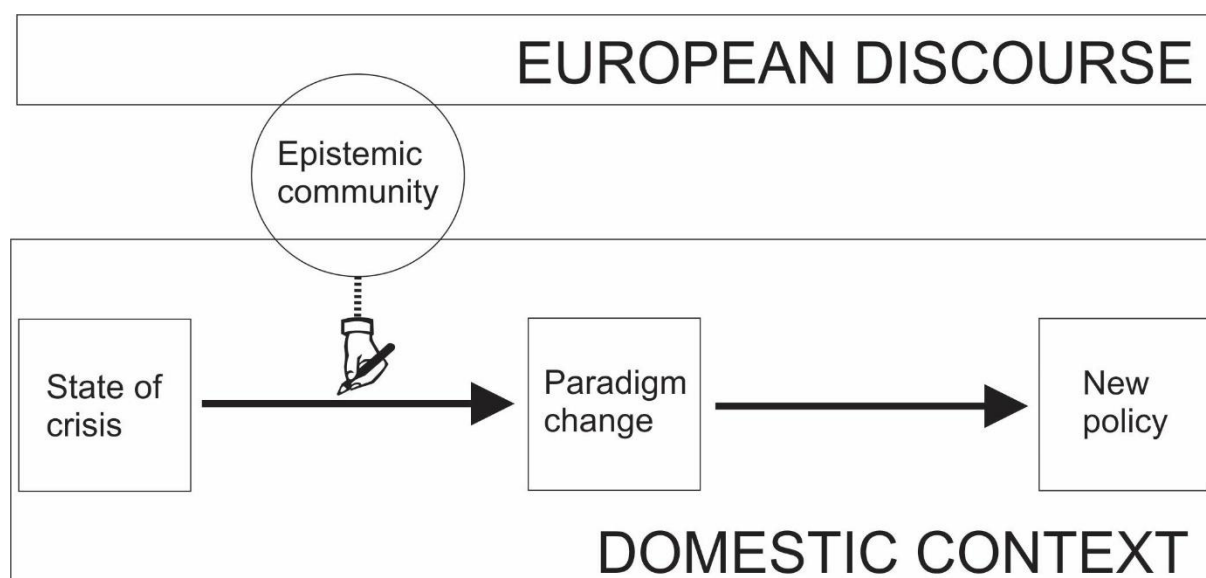
The outlined process contains all the factors that I suppose played an important role in the specific policy outcome witnessed in Romania. During the policy's course of development I assume a conjunctional causation between the influence of a specific European discursive idea and the intention of some expert communities to promote such an idea in the domestic policy context. I also theorize the occurrence of a "crisis" in the domestic policy context (necessary but insufficient condition) which was utilized by the same group of people to create an ideational turn and led to the adoption of a new higher education policy that focused on institutional differentiation. These factors are linked together by a casual processes that follows an ideational explanation, meaning that actors' behaviour is not reduced to their individual preferences or the institutions in place, but how ideas can alter the perceptions of policy makers. This does not imply that actors are not rational or their actions constrained by existing

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institutions, rather that ideas have the potential to become the building blocks of individual preferences and institutions.

The power of ideas to generate policy change occupies an important role in the proposed analytical framework. In order to understand why some countries would adopt a policy for the diversification of their higher education system, first we need to understand how transnational discourses can change domestic policy paradigms. Considering this, I propose that networks of experts played a crucial role in the case of Romania. They acted as links between the European ideational context and the domestic policy paradigm, actively promoted European policy ideas, and were themselves subscribed to the European discourse on the diversification of higher education. These networks are referred to as epistemic communities (Haas 1992a). They can reside in national, transnational and international organisations and hold authoritative claims to policy relevant knowledge (Evans 2009; True and Mintrom 2001). Because epistemic communities are considered as knowledgeable in a specific policy area, they are able to have a significant impact on domestic politics and policy. Their influence comes mainly from being seen as more credible or more convincing than competing groups, either because the reputation of its members or due to their persuasive ability (Haas 1992b).

Epistemic community theory assumes that experts are not disinterested actors in policy making, in contrast, they actively engage in consensus building to advocate their own policy preferences (Haas 1992a). When they gain an important advisory or decision making position within their national policy making arena, their transnational links allow them to coordinate their work with experts in different countries (Haas 1992a). Popkewitz (1996) calls this the "inter-national circulation of ideas", in which some countries act as laboratories for political reform (Popkewitz 1996). This medical metaphor considers international experts, policy entrepreneurs, and representatives of organisations offering tailor-made miraculous solutions for national problems as the analogues of infectious agents moving from country to country

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looking for suitable hosts to be infected (Amaral and Magalhães 2004). In a similar way I suppose that epistemic communities successfully seized an opportunity to introduce their own "medicine" in Romania.

As was outlined before[45], domestic policy paradigms are the most likely to change in moments of crisis or uncertainty (Haas 1989). When national governments become unclear about their preferences or dissatisfied with previous policies, the ideas promoted by epistemic communities, such as the diversification of higher education, can be seen as a way to give meaning to ambiguous social circumstances and re-establishing political decisiveness (Hajer 1993). In such circumstances epistemic communities can easily alter the strategic interests of policy makers. The process takes place by framing societal problems in a way, that policy makers define state interest and adopt solutions in line with the ideas promoted by epistemic communities (Haas 1989). This is exactly what the outlined analytical framework assumes happened in the case of Romania and which is going to be tested.

4.2.1. Who are the epistemic communities in Romania?

An important part of the study is to understand the role of epistemic communities in the process of idea diffusion, namely those organisations and individuals that influenced the formulation of the recent higher education policy in Romania. Epistemic communities can be centred into single organisations, like think-thanks, knowledge institutions, global financial institutions, or international organisations, but they do not have to be. They can be also networks between individuals (politicians, bureaucrats, experts, etc.) that spam across large territories maintaining transnational links between its members through joint activities such as conferences, workshops, journal, research collaborations, etc. (Haas 1992a). Identifying these agents of transfer is the first step in my analysis. The second step involves exploring their interpretation of the European discourse on diversification. Epistemic communities are

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[45] For more information about how discourses relate to policy making see chapter 3.2.

expected to share the same normative beliefs and rhetorical strategies as the ones found in the European ideational context. The final, and probably most important step is studying their role in the previously depicted casual process (see Figure 7).

We can consider various expert organisations, like the European University Association, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, the UNESCO European Center for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES), Education International, OECD, the World Bank, or even the European Commission, as epistemic communities. Throughout the years most of these transnational organisations provided advice to the Romanian government and also published reports and carried out audits regarding the state of the countries higher education affairs. For example, the former Romanian minister of education noted the following in his account of higher education reforms in Romania: "It is with satisfaction that I can refer to the enlightening documentation and expert advice that the Ministry received from the UNESCO European Center for Higher Education" (Marga 2002, 125). This underscores the important role such expert organisations as UNESCO-CEPES played in the domestic policy arena. Besides the mentioned organisations, Romania had also a number of representatives in different European bodies, like the European University Association, the European Student's Union, Education International, and the European Registry for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. These representatives supported the diffusion of European ideas in the Romanian policy context (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). They did so mainly through their engagement in national communities of experts, like the National Council for Education Reform, the National Council of Rectors, the National Council for Financing Higher Education, the National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education, the National Council for Continuing Education and Training, and others.

Probably two organisations and their activities are worth pointing out right away. Among the local organisations, the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research,

Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) was a key player in enabling Romanian academic communities to participate in policy making. It has implemented several strategic projects concerning the reform of the Romanian higher education system with the support of European structural funds (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). These projects[46] created the premise for evidence based policy development and also shaped the debates between different stakeholders, international experts and domestic decision makers (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015; Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Zulean, et al. 2012). Diversification of higher education also appeared as a topic in their work. One specific project, called "Quality and Leadership for Romanian Higher Education: Charting the Future of our Society"[47] was particularly important in this regard, because it sought to analyse the landscape of Romanian higher education. It generated several policy documents, out of which two related directly to the diversification of higher education. The first one was a vision document, which was a result of a so called foresight project, and elaborated several scenarios for the development of the Romanian higher education system. A diverse higher education system was used as a meta-scenario providing the core principles for future policy action (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Zulean, et al. 2012). This meta-scenario was called "Blue Ocean" and defined the future of Romanian higher education as populated by a multiplicity of "institutional animals" competing not for the "whole ocean" but for a variety of smaller or larger niches (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Zulean, et al. 2012, 1011). The foresight project also identified three institutional examples, tentatively relating to them as *Scientia*, *Inovatio*, and *Regio*, that would populate the "Blue Ocean" by 2025 (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Zulean, et al. 2012). These examples served as future reference points for a broader policy discussion on the topic of diversification. The second document, closely related to the ideas embedded in the first one, elaborated a methodology for the possible differentiation of

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[46] For a more detailed review of the UEFISCDI projects please look at chapter 4.6.4 National projects.
[47] The project was carried out between 2009 and 2011.

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Romanian universities[48]. Both of these documents (i.e. the vision document and the document detailing a possible methodology) were the products of a joint venture between international and domestic experts that extensively stressed the importance of institutional diversity in Romanian higher education.

The second organisation worth mentioning underscores Romania's active participation from very early on in transnational policy debates. In 1972 the UNESCO-CEPES (European Center for Higher Education) was set up in Bucharest which became a focal point for promoting cooperation in higher education between European Member States, North America and Israel (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). However, the centre's activities were focused primarily on higher education in Central and Eastern Europe. It engaged actively in policy development and was also a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-up Group until 2010 (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). Interestingly, it also promoted the idea of university rankings and stimulated discussions on this topic among domestic stakeholders (Sadlak and Liu 2007). In 2004 UNESCO-CEPES helped to organize the first International Ranking Expert Group (IREG) conference in Washington, which resulted in the establishment of the IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence non-profit association of ranking organisations, universities and other bodies interested in university rankings and academic excellence[49]. Therefore, one can rightfully assume that some of the policy instruments promoted in tandem with the need to diversify higher education, like transparency tools, were well understood by domestic experts already before the introduction of the new higher education policy.

Due to the high concentration of specialized experts around UNESCO-CEPES and its large knowledge base, Romania was always connected to international developments (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). In 2009, the country hosted the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education

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[48] For more information about the projects of UEFISCDI visit the follwoing website:
http://www.edu2025.ro/about-the-project/objectives.aspx
[49] More information on the IREG Observatory is avaiable at the following website: http://ireg-observatory.org/en/index.php/about-us

in the Europe Region: Access, Values, Quality, and Competitiveness. In 2012 Romania hosted the Bologna Ministerial Conference and welcomed about 500 participants representing 47 European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries, the European Commission, BUSSINESS EUROPE, Council of Europe, Education International, ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE and UNESCO as well as approximately 40 delegations of non-EHEA countries[50]. These examples showcase that Romania was never isolated from international developments in the field of higher education, and as some would argue, it was even a forerunner in many aspects. Because of this, epistemic communities could easily mediate between the European ideational context and the domestic policy paradigm, enabling Romania to become one of the first countries to develop and implement an extensive policy on higher education diversification in 2011.

4.3. Methodology

The study follows the methodology of process-tracing. As argued by George and Bennett (2007), it is an ideal tool for "theory testing and theory development, not because it generates numerous observations within a case, but because these observations must be linked in particular ways to constitute an explanation of the case" (George and Bennett 2005, 207). Hence, I do not seek to find mechanical-style explanations which could be generalizable as universal laws that govern policy making in Europe. Instead my approach is case centric and focuses on a particular policy adoption process in Romania. It is possible that identical policies will be enacted in other parts of Europe, and their introduction might not be explained by the proposed framework, but that would not diminish the value of my findings.

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[50] The information has been obtained on 4th of March, 2015 from the following website: http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=61

Table 12: Causal mechanism depicting the development of a diversification policy in Romania

	X1 Independent variable	*X2 Independent variable*	*Necessary but insufficient condition (contextual condition)*	*M1*	*M2*	*M3*	*Y - Dependent variable*
A C T I O N	The European discourse about the diversification of higher education gets constructed	Domestic experts internalize elements of the European discourse	Dissatisfaction with previous approaches to higher education policy (i.e. crisis)	Position themselves as relevant policy actors in the domestic policy context	Promote the European discourse as a necessary policy direction	Perceive the policy direction as the most beneficial one.	Integrate elements of the European discursive idea into the law
A C T O R	European organisations	Epistemic communities	Domestic policy actors	Epistemic communities	Epistemic communities	Domestic policy actors	Domestic policy actors

The depicted process refers to a case of policy development during a specific time and space. Therefore, two important scope conditions have to be mentioned. First, the policy was developed during the last decade, when the Lisbon strategy and the Bologna Process greatly influenced higher education policies across Europe. Secondly, the process has to be observed in the context of a post-communist country's struggle to harmonize it policies and institutions with that of the EU. Therefore, the applicability of the causal mechanism is only relevant in a short-term perspective and is limited to a very few number (population) of cases, or even might be case-specific.

The methodology of process tracing describes how events or situations have unfolded over time (Collier 2011). Because, inferences about the casual relationship are made based on a careful description of each stage of the process explaining what happened at one point of time becomes much more important than assessing change or sequence (Collier 2011). Therefore, I will systematically describe that (a) there is in fact a European discourse on diversification, (b) there are epistemic communities that are subscribed to that discourse, (c) that there was a crisis in the Romanian policy context, (d) that epistemic communities used this momentum to promote the discourse on diversification, (e) that the policy paradigm of higher education adopted element of this discourse, (f) that the new

policy was developed based on these discursive elements. The analysis follows the type of process-tracing that George and Bennett (2005) termed analytical explanation (George and Bennett 2005). It means that I converted the historical narrative of policy development in Romania, based on qualitative data, into the above outlined causal explanation. As a consequence, the explanation might be deliberately selective, since I focus only on those aspects of the process that I perceive as particularly important (George and Bennett 2005, 211). One of such things is the role of epistemic communities, which appears as a key independent variable in the causal mechanism, and which can be evaluated against rival explanations for policy adoption and change.

Qualitative data has been gathered between October 2013 and September 2014. During this period I conducted elite interviews with policy makers and various experts in Romania and reviewed a number of policy documents concerning the reform of higher education. The term 'elite' does not indicate that the chosen persons belonged to a specific social class, but that they were selected purposefully because of who they are or what position they occupy or occupied in the past. That is to say, the selection of interviewees was not random, but specifically targeted key individuals involved in the drafting and implementation of the new higher education policy in Romania. The selected individuals are the only ones who could provide me with information on this particular process or event. Among the interviewees were several members of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Elaboration of Education and Research Policies (Presidential Commission)[51], heads of various national agencies dealing with higher education matters, and experts who took part in designing the methodology for institutional and programme assessment. The interviews lasted for about 50 minutes during

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[51] The Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Elaboration of Education and Research Policies was established in 2007 by the President of Romania at that time.

which I explored important aspects and stages of the policy formulation and implementation process. The list of interviewees is presented here:

- Mircea MICLEA (former Minister of Education, chair of the Presidential Commission)

- Lazar VLASCEANU (member of the Presidential Commission)

- Adrian CURAJ (director of UEFISCID)

- Gabriel HANCEAN (expert involved in the design of the classification and ranking methodology)

- Radu DAMIAN (former head of ARACIS)

- Adrian MIROIU (president of the National Council for Higher Education Funding)

- Bogdan MURGESCU (vice-president of the National Council for Higher Education Funding)

- Mihai PAUNESCU (expert involved in the design of the classification and ranking methodology)

In addition to the listed interviewees, 5 relevant policy documents have been analysed as well. They are listed in the table below.

Table 13: List of analysed policy documents

Name of policy document	Type of document	Issuer	Year
Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania	Report	Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Elaboration of Education and Research Policies	2007
National Pact for Education	Agreement	President of Romania	2008
Education and Research for a Knowledge Society	Strategy	Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Elaboration of Education and Research Policies	2008
Law of National Education	Law	Government of Romania	2011
OMECTS no. 4174/13.05.2011	Ministerial order	Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport	2011

The analysis was conducted by contrasting the evidence with the analytical framework, which theorises that epistemic communities played a crucial role in altering national policy paradigms, and hence made it possible for domestic decision makers to institutional differentiation as a necessary step in improving the quality of the Romanian higher education system. In the continuation I am summarizing the findings of my interviews with key policy makers and also offer a detailed review of the policy formulation and implementation process. I start off by providing some general accounts of the history of Romanian higher education.

4.4. The recent history of the Romanian higher education

During the communist period there were only three comprehensive universities operating in Romania, namely in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and one in Iasi. All the other higher education institutions were divided into a series of independent and specialized institutions according to fields of economic activity that supported manpower planning (Sadlak 1994; Mihailescu and Vlasceanu 1994). This fragmented organisational structure was inspired by the political motivation to avoid the concentration of large numbers of students in one institution and prevent potential political disturbances (Mihailescu and Vlasceanu 1994). They taught based on a uniform curricula, offered the same type of qualifications, had the same admission procedures and accepted students in line with pre-established party decisions (Nicolescu 2002). Since universality and the critical spirit were in a strong contradiction with the Ceauşescu dogma the communist regime tried to limit the role of universities to mere centres for teaching a restricted number of highly qualified workers (Sadlak 1994; Mihailescu and Vlasceanu 1994). At the same time, the prestige of the university diploma was very high and the barriers to enter university were thick and strong (Mihailescu and Vlasceanu 1994).

Because of the imposed restrictions on access to higher education, after the political changes at the end of 1989 Romania experienced a sudden growth in enrolment rates, especially in fields like medicine, social sciences and humanities, were the available study places were

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much more limited before (Mihailescu and Vlasceanu 1994). More precisely, the number of student has multiplied over four times between 1990 and 2011 (considering both ISCED 5 and 6 programmes) (see Figure 8). The sudden increase created a considerable challenge for the public higher education sector, which could only be sustained by allowing institutions to charge tuition fees that did not exist before (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). However, since the number of students who wanted to enter higher education exceeded the available places at public institutions, several private universities have been established as well. Many of these were for-profit universities that operated for several years in the absence of any legal regulation about private higher education (Mihailescu and Vlasceanu 1994; Nicolescu 2002; Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). By 2010 the total number of higher education institutions in Romania increased from 56 to 107 and nearly 45% of all enrolled students were studying at private universities (Dragoescu 2013, 32). This demonstrates that during the last two decades the key axis of institutional differentiation in the country was the public-private one (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). Today, there are 56 public universities and approximately 40 accredited private universities in Romania.

Figure 8: Evolution of total student numbers in Romania between 1990-2011
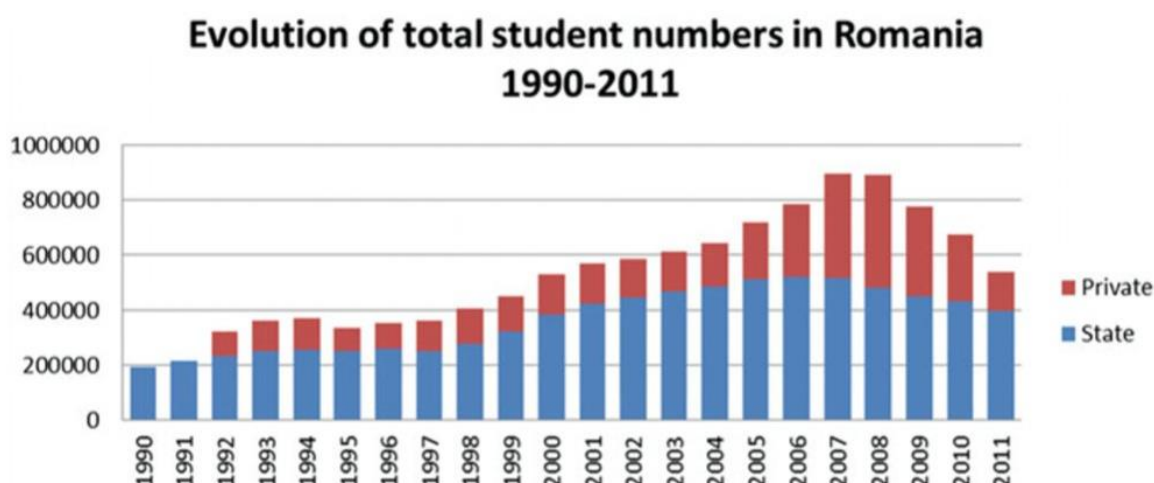
Source: Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015

The process of unrestrained growth (both in terms of the number of institutions and students) was coupled with the lowering of the quality in higher education, which became the mantra of almost all policy reforms that were enacted after the regime change (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). The Romanian government attempted to reform its higher education system three times during this period. As early as 1990, the government already amended the communist legislation to liberalize and democratize the higher education system (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). But only in 1993 had the government adopted a new legal framework for higher education. The most important element of the Act no 88/1993 was the introduction of the accreditation procedure for higher education institutions and the recognition of university diplomas. These measures sought to establish firm rule regarding what type of entities are officially sanctioned to provide higher education services (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). Hence, its main aim was to bring order into the anarchic development of higher education especially concerning the mushrooming of private higher education (Nicolescu 2002). To tackle this problem the act established the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA), which set minimum standards concerning teaching staff and other input criteria to ensure that private higher education institutions provide the same quality as do public ones. However, the latter institutions were exempt from accreditation requirements (Nicolescu 2002).

Two years after the adoption of the first post-communist law a new legal framework (Act no. 84/1995) was enacted to regulate the organisation and functioning of the Romanian education system. The new law meant to strengthen the autonomy of universities and institutions were granted the right to create and implement their own development policies according to the provisions of the legislation and under the coordination of the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth, and Sports[52]. However, institutional autonomy was still limited in

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[52] Referred to as the Ministry of Education in the continuation of the text.

certain matters, especially concerning personnel and financial management (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015).

The second wave of reforms took place from 1997 to 2002. One of the former ministers of education described this reform phase as a "vast action to cleanse the education system", which once again sought to address the mushrooming of private universities that were considered as degree-mills (Marga 2002, 128). Besides, the reform also envisaged to reinforce academic autonomy, increase access to higher education, strengthen the relationship between universities and the business community, and also introduced a new financing mechanism for higher education (Act 151/1999). The model was based on bilateral contracts between the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions and included a component calculated on a cost-differentiated per student capita formula (Nicolescu 2002; Marga 2002). In 2002 the financing criteria were further adjusted and a qualitative component (based on process and input indicators) of the financing algorithm was introduced. Since then, the percentage of the overall university financing allotted according to some qualitative criteria increased every year, reaching up to 30% in 2010 (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). However, none of the here outlined reform ideas related directly or indirectly to the diversity of institutional types, profiles, and statuses, which demonstrates that during the 90's there was not much concern for the diversification of the Romanian higher education sector, or if raised, then the emphasis was placed on internal diversity (i.e. the start-up of new programmes, new departments, etc.) (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012).

In 1999 Romania signed the Bologna Declaration, but systematic measures to implement the principles behind the declaration were taken only in 2004 (Act 288/2004). This marks the beginning of the third wave of reforms in Romanian higher education. The reforms

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started following a change in the government[53]. The modernisation of higher education became one of the key priorities of the new government, especially the implementation of the Bologna requirements. A new law on education, adopted in 2004, introduced the Bologna structure into the Romanian higher education system. However, in practice many universities delayed its implementation, or implemented the core principles incompletely or pro forma (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Zulean, et al. 2012). This made it necessary for the minister of education at that time to issue a series of ministerial orders[54] and force universities to restructure their educational programmes. Therefore, the core elements of the Bologna agreement (three degree cycles, ECTS, and diploma supplement) have been truly introduced only from October 2005.

The Bologna Process offered an opportunity for national governments to address some of the problems and challenges in their respective systems, which was difficult to do before, due to internal resistance (Charlier 2008). Therefore, many governments implemented the Bologna principles with their own distinctive flavour (Vögtle 2014). This was also the case in Romania, where the third wave of reforms contained locally relevant measures as well, like restructuring quality assurance and modernizing the institutional governance model.

The restructuring of quality assurance started with the Government Decision no. 1257/2005 that approved the organisation and functioning of a new quality assurance organisation, replacing the previous National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation. The decision could be described as another attempt to stop the expansion of private universities. The CNEAA was highly politicized (it was subordinated to the parliament and included several members of it as well), and because of this, the council often approved the establishment of private universities if there was a political interests for it.

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[53] The new government was set up by the Democratic Liber Party, which formed a coalition with the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania.
[54] Minister Order No. 3235/2005, Minister Order No. 3861/2005, Minister Order No. 3617/2005, Minister Order No. 4868/2006

"It [CNEAA] was the tool for people involved in politics to create private and state universities everywhere where they wanted. Because, as I said, they were members of this national council for accreditation, they sent themselves to check whether the conditions are satisfied by the candidate, they said yes and wrote a report, and the report was approved by the same people which enabled them to make a law granting the establishment of a new university." (Interviewee: M01; explanation added in brackets)

The quality assurance body that sought to replace CNEAA was the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) whose operation was defined in the Law on quality assurance in education (Act 87/2006). ARACIS was completely independent from the parliamentarians, had a separate budget, and worked with a different set of criteria to evaluate and accredit universities. Since its establishment only one private higher education institution was opened in Romania (Interviewee: M01). In this sense ARACIS was much more effective, but according to some, it was still concerned too much with the accreditation procedure.

"(…) it focused more on premises, on inputs, on institutional capacity, but not really on measuring, not really differentiating genuine quality." (Interviewee: M08; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

The new law (Act 87/2006) made a firmer distinction between quality assurance and accreditation (whereby the latter was defined as part of the former) and also differentiated between internal and external quality assurance, following closely the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). The methodology for external evaluation included three broad domains (i.e. institutional capacity, educational efficacy and quality management) and within each domain there was a number of distinct standards and performance indicators outlined (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). The methodology also made a distinction between minimum (obligatory) standards and reference (optimal) standards, and institutions that failed to satisfy the minimum standards in any of the three domains were denied accreditation (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). Eventually, the much improved methodology assisted ARACIS in becoming a candidate member in the European

Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in 2007, and two years later a full member[55].

Another policy measure to be implemented alongside the Bologna principals was the modernization of governance structures and practices at Romanian universities. In 2005 the Ministry of Education proposed to change the existing regulations concerning the election of the university rectors. Instead of having the rectors picked by the institutions' senate the policy aimed to make the selection internationally competitive, and thus, reduce the role of the senates in universities. This move by the Ministry of Education was provoked by a general concern for misuse of power in higher education institutions.

"(…) and old boys, knew from the very beginning who are the persons from the faculties that will become members of the senate and they worked very hard to have their members in the senate. So if you looked at the representatives of the faculties in the senate you could completely predict who will be the rector." (Interviewee: M01; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

The existing model enabled certain individuals to take complete control over an institution. One example noted by an interviewee highlights a specific case in which "the dean of the faculty was the husband, the head of department was his wife, and in the same department were her daughter and son in law" (Interviewee: M01). Such practices had severe impact on the quality of institutional governance and also more generally on the quality of higher education. In order to introduce fair and more competitive election procedures, the ministry proposed to make the selection of rectors internationally competitive.

"Anybody from any university around the world could send a candidate. The senate of the university would have a selection committee which would select two candidates and propose them to the senate to choose which one they prefer. This is a much more corporate, a much more efficient way to organize the governance of the university." (Interviewee: M01)

While the proposal was not accepted in 2005, certain elements of it were incorporated into the 2011 Law on National Education. The selection of rectors remained on a national level,

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[55] The information has been obtained on the 16th of March, 2015, from the website of ARACIS: http://www.aracis.ro/en/info/info/news/single/browse/4/view/aracis-membru-enqa/165/

but they were elected by all the faculty members and representatives of the students, which reduced the influence of the senate. The success of this regulation is marked by the next quote:

"It was the first time after 1999 that we got new rectors. Because, in the majority of universities, the same rector was in position for the last 15 years." (Interviewee: M01).

Considering the outlined trends and the number of reforms, it is easy to conclude that Romanian higher education changed very much since 1998, especially along its legal framework. The Romanian government addressed several policy concerns, among which were first the regulation of private higher education and the re-establishment of institutional autonomy, and later the introduction of the Bologna structure along with the modernization of public funding and institutional management. However, the principles which had been established during the past twenty years gradually started to be perceived by policy makers as outdated, as not being fit for the European reality of the Romanian higher education system.

"Things even became contradictory and there was no vision for higher education. Therefore, it was absolutely necessary to come up with a new view on ways in which higher education needs to change." (Interviewee: M06).

After 2007 this concern led to a new wave of reform, which aspired to differentiate higher education institutions according to the type and quality of their activities. Before describing the recent changes in Romania's higher education policy, I will elaborate in more detail on how previous reforms related to the topic of institutional differentiation.

4.4.1. Effects of previous policies on the diversity of higher education system in Romania

The transition from a highly centralized totalitarian regime to a democratic society has been accompanied by many problems, which was also apparent in the field of higher education (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). One of the biggest concerns of Romanian policy makers was the quality of the countries higher education (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). The rapid expansion of private universities was considered to have greatly contributed to the lowering of higher education quality in general, but many criticized also the way accreditation procedures were

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implemented, how the funding of public universities was calculated, or simply highlighted the inefficient functioning of the Romanian higher education market. Furthermore, many policy makers and domestic experts associated the decreasing quality of higher education with the diminishing differences between universities.

The rapid increase of student numbers and the expansion of private higher education after 1989 was followed by a strong phase of standardization and consolidation (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). During this process, the Romanian government has imposed a detailed regulation of financial activities, hiring and promotion criteria, and rigid quality assurance standards. These measures produced coercive isomorphism that contributed to the homogenization of higher education (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012; Păunescu, Florian, and Hâncean 2012). Especially concerning quality assurance, the robust enforcement of national standards of quality criteria, forced institutions to import and adopt the formal institutional arrangements prevailing in traditional universities (Păunescu, Florian, and Hâncean 2012). Hence, mainly private universities were coerced to closely mimic the structures, processes and goals of the traditional public universities, while pursuing alternative quality criteria, was not an option for many of them (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012; Păunescu, Florian, and Hâncean 2012; Miroiu and Andreescu 2010). The effect of this coercion has been observed by several scholars as well. In a study on institutional mission statements drafted by Romanian universities, scholars found a high level of similarity (Păunescu, Florian, and Hâncean 2012). Besides coercive forces, normative isomorphism was also eroding the differences between public and private universities. Private universities were compelled to hire senior professors from public universities, who afterwards commonly taught in at least a couple of institutions (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). This additionally strengthened institutional homogeneity, whereby the programmatic and curricular

standards of public universities were promoted across the system through normative isomorphism (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012).

Initially, the quality of higher education was defined strictly in terms of compliance with governmental regulations. It had no nuances because the accreditation agency only looked at whether institutions are complying with a minimum set of criteria. The ones that were accredited were also considered to offer a good quality education and research. This approach created to a downwards shift in quality where most institutions sought to satisfy just the minimum criteria (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). Since accreditation procedures failed to incentivize better performance differences in terms of quality have decreased between institutions. This process has been referred to by Miroiu and Vlasceanu (2012) as a "race for conformity" which was justified on the basis of claims for legitimacy and an intention to create a public perception of quality of the institutions activities (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012, 803). Likewise, the funding model in place failed to discriminate between institutions on the basis of quality or performance (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). It rewarded input criteria and did not differentiate between institutions according to their missions, which encouraged them to behave in like manner (Miroiu and Andreescu 2010).

When considering funding, there is another important development in the Romanian higher education system worth mentioning. It relates to the increased competition among universities for tuition fee paying students, which became an important income source for many. The introduction of uncapped tuition fees in public universities for students not supported from the state budget led to a sharp increase in their numbers (overtaking the number of state supported student in 2004 and being in majority until 2010) (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). Consequently, many institutions boosted enrolments often in the absence of the necessary material and academic infrastructure (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). Generating income from tuition fees has been a race to the bottom, where public

universities dominated the competition (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). Their strategy was to charge tuition fees below the amount of the state per-capita allocation, which severely limited the strategies of private universities. Because of this, many private universities could not compete on price, so they tried to compete on opportunity cost by offering formally the same degree to students as public universities, but with less academic effort (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). This created an inefficient market, where institutions perceived their competitiveness on the basis of lowering the quality of education. At the same time, market niches, such as "high tuition high prestige" or "older students and short term programmes" were not exploited (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012, 882). These findings of Andreescu, underline the inefficiencies of the Romanian higher education market, where quality was frequently sacrificed by institutions to attract more fee-paying students, without any efforts by them to exploit alternative opportunities on the market by differentiating their institutional profile. Therefore, Andreescu et al. conclude that the conditions for institutional diversification were simply not present in Romania (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). Similarly does Miroiu and Vlasceanu (2012) state that "One striking characteristic of the Romanian higher education system is its homogeneity" (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012, 802). This is not just based on the weakening of differences between public and private universities, but also between new and old ones, between large and small ones, between comprehensive and highly specialized universities, who adopted "quasi-identical" missions, organisational structures, types of study programmes, and content, procedures and practices related to teaching and research (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012, 802).

4.5. *Key actors in the policy formulation process*

The recent higher education reform in Romania was marked by frequent political turnovers. Between 2004 and 2012 five different governments were formed and a surprisingly high number of Ministers of Education appointed (12 in total). Despite the turbulent political

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environment the ideas that guided the reform proved to be reasonably consistent – a fact that can likely be attributed to a coherent policy formulation process and to the key individuals who directed its development and implementation throughout the changing political landscape. These individuals are considered to constitute the epistemic community identified in the analytical framework of this chapter.

Higher education, and education in general, became quite early on a priority area for the Democratic Liberal Party which was considered to be a "reformist party with European vision" (Interviewee: M04). Traian Basescu, who assumed the office of the president of Romania in 2004, was one of the key figures with an overarching vision about how the state of Romania should be reformed, including the modernization of its higher education system. While still not an EU member at that time[56], the government already sought to align its developmental policies with the strategic direction of the union. As mentioned by one of the interviewees, Basescu started to spend a lot of time in European Council meetings, where several discussions focused on education, research, and innovation that were seen as factors directly related to the economic prosperity and revival of the European economy (Interviewee: M02). In these meetings, the president of Romania familiarized himself with the shared objective of Member States to become the most competitive knowledge-based society, but was also confronted with European scale data that depicted the country as lagging behind in achieving this objective.

"He was the captain of a ship and first he didn't think much about education, research and universities. So that was a new continent for him, and he became very interested in developing it." (Interviewee: M02)

The task to modernize Romanian higher education was taken on by Mircea Miclea, a non-affiliated expert who was the former chancellor of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. He became the minister of education in December 2004 and remained at this position

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[56] Romania joined the European Union in 2007

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until November 2005, when he resigned. In this one year, Mircea Miclea initiated several reforms in education, including the before mentioned enforcement of the Bologna principles, the establishment of ARACIS, and the attempt to modernize institutional governance (i.e. 3rd wave of reforms). After one year in office Mircea Miclea decided to resign. As he explained:

"I asked for more money for education, because I was completely aware that if you don't have enough resources then you cannot have sustainable reforms. You start to do things, but they are like forms without substance. So, when I asked them for resources and when they didn't approve it, I said okay, then I resign." (Mircea MICLEA)

The quote highlights some of the initial difficulties of the reform. While the modernization of education was very important for several key individuals, including the president of Romania, the necessary resources for carrying them out could not be secured. Following his resignation, Mircea Miclea remained a central figure in the higher education reform and led much of the policy formulation process as the chair of the Presidential Commission. This commission was established in 2007 by the president of Romania without any specific budget and was run rather informally (Interviewee: M02). Its purpose was to help integrate Romania into the bloodstream of European higher education and research and secondly to enhance the competitiveness of the country's educational sector. To achieve this, the Presidential Commission was tasked to identify the weaknesses of the Romanian education and research system, their causes, and propose appropriate solutions to them.

In the beginning the Presidential Commission was composed of 12 members, who were dominantly nominated from the academic community. As mentioned before, it was chaired by Mircea Miclea, its vice-presidents were Daniel David and Daniel Funeriu, and its secretary was Razvan Valentin Florian. Other members included: Dragos Ciuparu, Mihai Ionac, Tudor Luchian, Dorel Banabic, Romita Iucu, Petre T. Frangopol, Lazar Vlasceanu, and Cezar Barzea. The commission's initial members were professors from various universities, among which were the University of Bucharest, Babes-Bolyai University, University of Iasi, and some others. Six months later the commission expanded to include also representatives of trade

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unions, student associations, parents, experts from the Romanian Academy of Science, and other stakeholders. The final number of its members reached 43, out of which many were not directly involved in politics, but they were still very influential in setting the direction of the new higher education policy. As a former member of the Presidential Commission stated:

"Okay, we coached the minister, but didn't want to be ministers ourselves." (Interviewee: M02)

Not all the members of the commission were equally active. A few members stood out, such as Mircea Miclea, Lazar Vlasceanu, Romita Iucu, Dragos Ciuparu, and Daniel Funeriu, who was at that time residing in Munich, Germany (Interviewee: M02). These few experts can be considered as the pioneers of the policy development process. In addition, several other organisations assisted with the development and implementation of the policy, most notably the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), the National Council for Higher Education Funding (CNFIS), and the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI). Their precise role in this process will be described in the following part.

4.6. Policy formulation

The new higher education policy in Romania was formulated through several years and in several steps. Following the government change in 2004 and the appointment of Mircea Miclea as the minister of education, a number of measures have been initiated to modernize the country's higher education system. However, in 2005 after the government rejected to provide the amount of budget required to implement these measures, Mircea Miclea resigned. His reform ideas were highly appreciated by the president of Romania, who encouraged him to carry on with the policy formulation process, but away from the political spotlight. Consequently, Mircea Miclea was appointed as the chairman of the Presidential Commission. The work of the commission was crucial for providing the basis for the up-and-coming higher

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education policy, managing all of its stages, and some of its members were also actively engaged in its implementation.

Figure 9: The policy formulation process
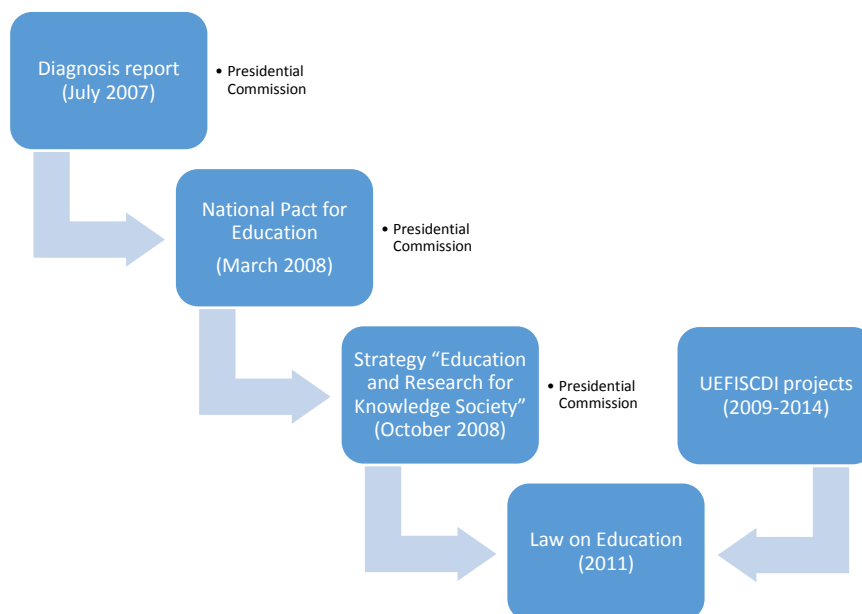
Despite the changing political context the Presidential Commission carried out the policy formulation process rather continuously in the following years. The president of Romania was very supportive to it, mainly because he saw the work of the commission as a coherent process, which relied on scientific evidence (Interviewee: M01). This rational approach to policy making convinced Traian Basescu that higher education, and education in general, should remain on the political agenda. The Presidential Commission started the policy formulation with a broader analysis that was highly supported by the former minister Mircea Miclea as well. As he put it:

"Why? Because it was one of the problems I faced when I came to the ministry. I had no analysis. No deep analysis of what is going on in the education system. It was only my guesses, my own personal analysis that I could rely on, but I had the feeling we need a better analysis. So okay, let's do this analysis and offer it to whoever will be the minister of education, to the parliament, and so on." (Micrea MICLEA)

As the first step in the policy formulation process in July 2007 the Presidential Commission issued a diagnosis report on the state of the Romanian education and research system (see Figure 9). The report collected a large amount of international comparative data on the performance of Romanian higher education and emphasized that the country is significantly lagging behind other (mainly western) European Member States. These concerns were embedded into the National Pact on Education, a policy document signed by each political party in 2008. The National Pact on Education served as a basis for elaborating the strategy "Education and Research for Knowledge Society". Parallel to the adoption of this document, UEFISCDI commissioned 5 large scale projects, out of which several were linked to the objectives mentioned in the strategy. In line with the objectives set forth by the strategy and the National Pact in 2011 the new Law on National Education was adopted. This stage concludes the policy formulation process and marks the beginning of the policy's implementation, which will be described later in the text.

4.6.1. Diagnosis report

The Presidential Commission published its diagnosis report entitled "Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania"[57] in July 2007. The report consists of a 3 page long analysis of the state of Romanian education system (part of which refers to higher education) and a 20 pages long second part that offers a set of solutions for the modernization of the education and research system. The document is very analytical drawing on several international sources for comparative data about the country's performance.

The report stresses four major problems concerning the Romanian education system, namely that it is (a) inefficient, (b) irrelevant, (c) inequitable, and that it has (d) low quality in terms of infrastructure and resources. The first problem, that is inefficiency, refers mainly to general education and students attainments in international tests (e.g. PISA, TIMSS, or PIRLS),

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[57] Original title in Romanian: 'România educaţiei, România cercetării'

which justifies the argument why Romania is not competitive in an international comparison. Irrelevant, which is the second problem, juxtaposes Romanian educational performance against the knowledge economy indicators set by the European Union[58]. The data demonstrates again that the country is lagging behind the average performance of EU countries, but even more when compared to the targets set out in the Lisbon strategy. The third problem emphasizes regional and ethnic differences in the Romanian society that lead to inequalities in educational attainments. The fourth and final problem outlines the low quality of educational services and relates them primarily to outdated educational infrastructure, weak human resources and the politicization of schools. Based on these four issues, the document concludes that the Romanian education system needs an urgent reorganisation if it wants to avoid technological and economic isolation ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania", 2007).

The diagnosis report makes a clear reference also to the lack of competitiveness of Romanian higher education institutions. In this regard, it states that: "In higher education and research, a few islands of excellence are dipped into a sea of mediocrity" ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 9). This statement is supported by the fact that no Romanian university is in the top 500 of the Academic Ranking of World Universities and by the argument that the level of published scientific articles and the country's innovation index are not just below EU average, but also lower than its neighbour's, such as Hungary and Bulgaria. Thus, the report draws several comparisons with EU countries in order to highlight the disadvantaged position of the Romanian higher education system. These comparisons served as the main justification for proposing structural reforms in the higher education system.

The second part of the diagnosis report offers 8 measures for the modernization of higher education with expected results by 2015. All of these measures are subordinated to the

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[58] The document presents data on five indicators, which are the following: Premature dropout from the educational system; Percentage of 22-year old population which graduated at least from high school; Percentage of 15 year-old students who do not manage to reach at least the lowest performance level (PISA 2001); Percentage of graduates in mathematics, science and technology; Adults' participation in lifelong learning.

aim to achieve a type of higher education that will make Romania a leading agent in the knowledge society and economy ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 21). Out of the 8 objectives, 2 directly relate to the diversification of the higher education system, while one objective is indirectly related to it. These measures are discussed in more detail next.

The first measure outlines extensively the importance of differentiating universities and is the first time differentiation as a policy goal is publicly stated in Romanian policy documents. The objective is justified based on the observation that the country's higher education system is characterized by excessive uniformity and dispersion of resources. It further outlines areas where homogeneity prevail, such as in the mission of universities, in public funding of universities, in human resource policies, and in quality standards. The components of the policy measure are broken down in the next table.

Table 14: Summary of the first modernization measures proposed by the diagnosis report

Problem area	Evidence
Mission homogeneity	No university focuses only on MA or PhD education No university linked its mission to the needs of the local community
Funding homogeneity	Universities receive the same amount of funding regardless of the quality of their graduates or research output
Homogeneity of human resource policies	Academic promotions fail to differentiate between poorly and well performing staff
Homogeneity of quality standards	No output indicators are used to assess the quality of higher education institution

Source: Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania 2007, 22-24

Based on excessive homogenization in the above mentioned areas the Presidential Commission comes to argue that the performance of the Romanian higher education system is very weak. The report states that Romania has "too many universities for a too limited number of students, too many teachers for a poor research level, too much dispersion of public money regardless of the education quality" ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 23). Bad quality is not just seen as a consequence of homogenization, but also as a barrier

which prohibits linking quality of institutional performance to public funding. Therefore, the Presidential Commission continues to argue for a paradigm shift, which can be summarized as a move "from homogenisation and dispersion to differentiation and concentration" ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 23).

The report outlines that institutional differentiation has appeared naturally in the US and Canadian systems, however, in countries where this is not the case, policy measures have been taken to enforce it. The German Excellence Initiative, the Chinese and Russian targeted institutional funding, the French institutional mergers, and the creation of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology are brought up as examples and used to justify policy action in Romania. The Presidential Commission also issues a warning that if Romania fails to act, its higher education system will not count in any international classification and cannot expect from its universities to become the forerunners of the country's cultural and economic development ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 23). To avoid such a scenario, institutional differentiation is offered as the main (and to some extent the only) solution to achieve global excellence and no alternative approaches are discussed and evaluated. Moreover, the Presidential Commission specifies that this differentiation movement "must be carried out from top to bottom", by a ministerial order ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 23). By doing so, it deliberately excludes other types of policy approaches, such as the German or Dutch models, which relied on a bottom-up approach, allowing their universities to demonstrate their determination to excel in a given area.

The proposed top-down approach materializes itself in the elaboration of four institutional categories that could be used in a national classification. These are the following ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 24):

- **Intensive research universities**. They could offer programmes on all levels, but their primary focus would be on graduate and post-graduate education.

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- **Education and research universities**. Such institutions would offer both undergraduate and graduate level programmes, but no PhD's or post-doc programmes.

- **Education centred universities**. Universities in this category would offer only undergraduate programmes.

- **Vocational universities**. These institutions would realize education programmes in specialized areas, such as military, art, physical education, and so forth.

The proposed institutional categories basically mirror the educational cycles, meaning that the higher the class to which an institution belongs, the more advanced study programmes it would be able to realize. To achieve such a classification of institutions the report suggests to hierarchically differentiate institutions and study programmes in consultation with the National Council of Rectors and a(n) (inter)national agency, which remains unspecified ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 24). While the texts avoids using the word 'ranking' it does imply the need to conduct such an exercise, and even suggests that ARACIS could define the benchmarks and excellence standards for the assessment. The report also makes a case for extending the differentiation and classification exercise to the level of departments within each university. Finally, besides the general proposal to classify higher education intuitions, the report also recommends the establishment of an Institute for research, innovation and advanced studies in the field of science and technology. This initiative resembles very much the idea to establish a European Institute of Innovation and Technology, which was put forward by the European Commission just two year earlier in 2005.

The second relevant measure described in the report relates to the differentiation of funding. It originates from the concern that public funding is not linked with the quality of work (e.g. graduates' quality, research quality), which could be assessed by looking at institutional outputs. Funding levels are instead adjusted to input criteria that stimulate

universities to sacrifice quality for the sake of larger student numbers and more study programmes. An interviewee described this problem in the following way:

"The Romanian higher education was, and still is, a distorted system, in the sense that there are very many programmes and very many universities, both public and private. We have about 90 universities in total. Some of them are quite near to each other and offer the same programmes, so resources are not well used. We don't have many resources, but even those we have are not well used." (Interviewee: M06)

The Presidential Commission proposed to change the present system of higher education financing, which is based on equivalent student numbers, to one which would (a) fund institutions according to the average cost of study programmes, (b) offer multi-annual financing based on study cycles, (c) help universities access research funds from private sources, (d) introduce rigorous evaluation of the management of public funds, and also (e) support the concentration of resources according to quality (Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania 2007, 26-27). The latter suggested action would be linked to the differentiation process outlined in the previous measure (i.e. classification of institutions), and would allow for universities and study programmes that provide high quality to obtain more public resources. This demonstrates that the classification of institutions and the concentration of public resources was already thought of as related measures from the policy's early developmental stage.

Besides the two described measures there is also a third one mentioned in the diagnosis report, which is partially related to the idea of diversification. According to the Presidential Commission, Romanian higher education lacks the means to assess differences in institutional performance. It is stated that without clear indicators "mediocrity may cohabit with excellence because differences are faded" ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 28). In order to correct this shortcoming, the commission proposed the development of a system of benchmark indicators for higher education and also highlighted some indicators in this regard. Moreover, it already hinted at the possibility that both public and private universities should

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do a "public presentation on a periodic basis" concerning their performance and based on the specified indicators ("Research in Romania, Innovation in Romania" 2007, 28).

The three measures presented so far necessitated the (a) assessment of institutional performance, (b) the hierarchization of institutions based on the results of the assessment, and (c) rewarding institutions correspondingly to their position in the hierarchy. All three measures were proposed with the justification that Romanian higher education institutions need to be incentivized to become more competitive within a European knowledge economy. This reasoning was also repeated by one of the persons involved in the activities of the Presidential Commission.

"The quality decreased in all universities, so one of the most important ideas was the following. Let's try to support a few number of universities to have very, very good programmes, so that they can be competitive in Europe. You know, this is important because we just entered the European Union and there is a strong competition. You are not only competing at home, you have to compete with universities in the entire Europe." (Interviewee: M06)

After Romania joined the European Union, differences in quality and performance between its higher education system and some of the more advanced systems in Europe became more of a pressing concern. This convinced domestic policy makers to take immediate action, among which the diversification of higher education has been identified as the main policy direction. In the following 4 years, the policy has been further fine-tuned. The diagnosis report was the first step in the process of policy formulation, but it already outlined the importance of developing a national pact for education that should ideally involve all stakeholders of the political and civil society. The pact was intended to generate a broader consensus and gather political support for the upcoming educational reform. Its development and content is described the next.

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4.6.2. National Pact for Education

Following the presentation of the diagnosis report a few members of the Presidential Commission started to elaborate the National Pact for Education[59]. The document sought to gather the support of all political parties and other associations for the modernization of the Romanian education system. Its elaboration started right after the commission finished the diagnosis report. In October 2007 the president of Romania publicly announced the importance of a joint agreement for the progress of the reform. One month after the announcement the president sent out the draft text of the National Pact to the leaders of political parties represented in the Romanian parliament. It was also the first time the policy solutions identified in the diagnosis report, including the differentiation of higher education institutions based on a ranking and classification exercise was brought to a larger audience and immediately fuelled numerous debates. Initially, four parties refused to join the consultation process, because they were highly critical of the proposed policy.

"They were opposing the entire idea based on technical or scientific arguments. I would say that they were against the idea of ranking departments using indicators such as the number of ISI papers. They were saying that these are irrelevant indicators and that Romania should have a specific national strategy. The idea of connecting to international communities was considered to be irrelevant." (Interviewee: M04)

Despite substantial opposition, the Presidential Commission insisted on the signature of a joint agreement concerning the policy. They negotiated with the political parties from the parliament and asked them whether they agree that the main solutions to the outlined problems are the ones presented in the National Pact (Interviewee: M01). But it was not just a technical debate about the appropriateness of the proposed solutions. Several parties considered the document as a "service to the democratic party, and not a service to education" (Interviewee: M01). After several attempts to convince the opposition parties to take into consideration the outlined objectives an agreement was reached and the National Pact signed in March 2008 by

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[59] In the continuation I will refer to the document as the 'National Pact'.

the leaders of all political parties represented in the Romanian Parliament. In the following months the delegates of the Romanian Academy of Science, the representatives of 22 trade unions, student organisations, parents' associations and other non-governmental bodies joined the initiative. Hence, the National Pact succeeded to generate a public consensus about the major problems of the Romanian education system and the appropriate solutions to these problems, which were to be reached by 2013, according to the text of the agreement.

The National Pact emphasized the same problems present in the diagnosis report, namely that there is a considerable gap between the education performance of Romania and other European countries. This problem was well highlighted in the first sentence of the document:

*"We are aware that Romania is confronted with major long term risks because of **the gap between the Romanian education and research system and the standards and results of the European Union countries** in which knowledge is the most important resource of economic, social and personal development. We are concerned that the gap between Romania and European Union countries could widen."* ("National Pact for Education" 2008, 1; emphases added).

Several policy objectives have been elaborated to address this concern[60]. Besides arguing for an increased investment in education and research (up to 6% of GDP for education and 1% for research) the National Pact also stressed the need to alter the existing financing mechanism for higher education by relying on the results of a classification and ranking exercise.

"The financing based on projects, programs and study cycles will determine Universities to differentiate. Starting from a transparent and coherent reference indicators system for the base of financing, we are sustaining the creation of a hierarchy of universities as soon as possible, by differentiating from universities centred on university degree, universities which will organize university degree and MBA, and universities centred on PhD and research studies." ("National Pact for Education" 2008, 2)

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[60] Only one objective specifically touched upon the modernization of higher education. The other objectives either focus on the core values of education, or on different levels of education (i.e. primary education, secondary education, life-long learning).

The outlined objective retained from the diagnosis report the notion that institutional differentiation should be based on cycles of education and stressed also that "performance indicators will be made clear for each level of education" ("National Pact for Education" 2008, 1). This meant that educational outputs were supposed to become more measurable, and hence, open up the possibility for comparing institutions. This is the only example where institutional differentiation is brought up in the document, but it reveals a lot about the underlying policy intention. In this regard, it is evident that the purpose of the National Pact was to get political support for linking performance assessments to institutional funding.

As mentioned briefly beforehand, the discussion about the National Pact had two aspects to it. There was a technical one considering the best policy approach to achieve the stated goals, and a political one, which played out between the governing and the opposition parties, and involved struggles about maintaining privileges and influence in higher education. Two months after the adoption of the National Pact a new election circle started in Romania, which renewed the debates on both fronts. This however, did not stop the Presidential Commission from continuing its work on the formulation of the policy, and developing an overarching strategy for the reform of the Romanian education system.

4.6.3. Strategy for education

Based on the diagnosis report, and following the adoption of the National Pact for Education the Presidential Commission started to elaborate a national strategy for education[61]. Between May and June 2008 stakeholders were invited to send their remarks on the draft text of the strategy. In October 2008, the final document was published with the title "Education and Research for a Knowledge Society"[62] and contained operational solutions for the

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[61] In the continuation of the text, I will refer to the document as the 'strategy'.

[62] The original title of the document in Romanian is "Educatie si Cercetare pentru o Societate bazata pe Cunoastere" 2009-2015. It was obtained on the 22nd of October 2013 from the following website: http://erawatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/erawatch/opencms/system/modules/com.everis.erawatch.template/pages/export TypesToHtml.jsp?contentid=c0fb2e06-d4c4-11e0-b174-3b1a37daf5b5&country=Romania&option=PDF

implementation of a new education policy for the period 2009-2015. However, the strategy was much more than just a collection of specific policy objectives. It sought to challenge some of the underlying values and perceptions considering Romanian higher education by relying on rational and consistent argumentation. This is made more explicit through the following extracts from the strategy:

*"Promoting the four pillars of a knowledge society (…) it involves, first of all, **a new range of values**."* ("Education and Research for a Knowledge Society" 2008, 4; some parts of the text were left out intentionally; emphases added)

*"All the measures and actions proposed within this strategy aim not only at a new institutional and legislative commitment, but especially at a new axiological commitment, **a new hierarchy of values** that should make us overcome the axiological disorientation which we have experienced after 1989."* ("Education and Research for a Knowledge Society" 2008, 4; emphases added)

*"The final objective of this strategy is the social, real acceptance of **a new scale of values**, necessary for the consequent achievement of options corresponding to a knowledge economy. We will succeed if these values will be part of our actions, not just part of occasional speeches of various personalities of the day."* ("Education and Research for a Knowledge Society" 2008, 4; emphases added)

These extracts showcase that the reform sought deeper cultural changes than simply altering the institutional framework of higher education. The objectives outlined in the strategy tried to change the core values of the system by defining what should count as appropriate institutional behaviour and what not. It stressed that past values are inconsistent with the idea of knowledge society and hence should be reordered.

Out of the nine identified objectives in the strategy three related directly to higher education. These are the following[63]:

Objective 2: To place at least three Romanian universities in the top 500 universities in the world;

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[63] Only those objectives are listed which have a direct reference to higher education and research.

Objective 3: To increase scientific production up to five times and triple the total innovation indicator of the country, reaching the current EU average for these indicators;

Objective 9: To assign at least 7% of GDP for education and research by 2015 and link the amount of resources granted to performance results.

These three objectives do not mention explicitly the diversification of higher education, instead refer mainly to the scientific performance of institutions. Hence, it is a bit surprising that the core objectives of institutional differentiation and resource concentration, which were identified in the diagnosis report and stressed in the National Pact for Education as well, are barely touched upon in the document's main objectives. Nevertheless, the idea of institutional differentiation is not completely disregarded, rather appears later in the text as part of the concrete measures to be implemented. The description of these measures is very similar to that of the diagnosis report and does not deviate from it by much, which can be seen below.

Measure 1: University differentiation and resource concentration

There are several arguments underlying this measure. Among them is the already mentioned mediocre quality of higher education for which the document blames the lack of institutional differentiation. As stated by the strategy:

"The Romanian higher education system is not differentiated according to quality criteria, a fact that did not allow a concentration of human, material and financial resources in top universities, an essential condition for attaining an excellence level." ("Education and Research for a Knowledge Society" 2008, 28)

According to the strategy, not just institutions should be differentiated, but also their departments or chairs, and the study programmes they offer. Moreover, the strategy emphasizes that public funding should be granted giving priority to institutions, departments, and programmes demonstrating high quality in performance while also stressing that "academic

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mediocrity can no longer be supported with public money" ("Education and Research for a Knowledge Society" 2008, 29). As we have seen already many times, the argumentation portrays the differentiation of universities as a pre-condition for the concentration of resources (financial, material, and human), which is again strongly connected to addressing the problem of low quality in Romanian higher education.

In the continuation, the strategy outlines some actions to be undertaken to achieve the differentiation of higher education institutions. These actions specify how, by whom, and when should activities be carried out and also give hints on some of the possible follow-up measures after their implementation. The three most important actions are the following ("Education and Research for a Knowledge Society" 2008, 20-30):

1. Evaluation of all public and private higher education institutions;

2. Evaluation and ranking of study programmes;

3. Evaluation and classification of departments/chairs based on five performance levels.

The first action argues that the purpose of the evaluation should be to differentiate institutions according to the quality of their outputs and processes. It also suggest that the results of the evaluations should be made public and inform the government for adequate future decisions. While the text does not specify what kind of decisions these would be it does mention some possible consequences for universities that do not satisfy the minimum criteria in this evaluation. Hence, public universities that fail to do so will no longer receive state funding and should either file for bankruptcy or merge with a more competitive institution. Private universities that do not perform at the minimum level will lose the state's recognition of their diplomas. On the other hand, the best performing universities (either public or private) will have access to a special institutional development fund to boost their performance. The strategy also highlights that the allocation of institutions into the established four categories (i.e.

intensive research, education and research, education, and vocational) is supposed to be carried out by ARACIS and NURC (National University Research Council) between 2009 and 2011.

The second action states that it is easier to compare and rank study programmes at national level than whole institutions. The result of such ranking shall be made public allowing the best placed programmes to receive priority in allocating publicly financed study places. In contrast, lower ranked programmes will receive less or no public support.

The third action relates to the ranking and classification of departments or chairs. As stated in the strategy, universities would be responsible to carry out the evaluation according to the methodology established by the Ministry of Education. In addition, rectors would be accountable to allocate institutional resources to the most competitive departments or chairs. Those, departments or chairs which are considered as low performers will be subject to a rigorous monitoring for 2 years, following which they will either improve their performance or be dismantled.

Based on the outlined actions we can conclude that the strategy foresaw the introduction of a classification and ranking exercise, which would assess performance at three levels: institutional level, at the level of study programmes, and at the level of departments/chairs. These actions were to be supplemented with initiatives to increase the institutions' freedom to set their internal structure according to their stated mission (perceived to be one from the four categories in the classification exercise), to modernize university management and leadership, especially by introducing flexible rules concerning human resource management that could enable differentiated workloads for professors in line with the institutions' mission, and to provide additional funding for excellent performance. The latter initiative has been elaborated in more detail in the strategy, which is presented next.

Measure 2: Differential and flexible financing of universities. Increasing public accountability of higher education institutions

The strategy describes 4 ways to distribute public funding for universities. These are the following:

- basic funding (to cover the standard cost/student);

- complementary funding (for investments and major repairs);

- universities' own resources (from tuition fees; research, development, and innovation activities; services, etc.);

- additional funding (to enhance excellence).

Many of the outlined funding streams would take into account the results of the institutional evaluations specified under the first measure. The objective of basic funding was to increase the financial autonomy of institutions by enabling them to establish real cost of studies, to offer multi-annual financing based on study programmes, and also to award grants primarily to the "best placed programmes" ("Education and Research for a Knowledge Society" 2008, 39). Complementary funding would be provided only to public universities with viable institutional development projects, while additional funding would be provided to excellent study programmes, regardless if it is carried out by a public or a private university. Furthermore, the strategy clearly states that the Ministry of Education "must set a clear system of sanctions ranging up to dismantling low performance universities", which inefficiently use public funds or encounter ethical issues ("Education and Research for a Knowledge Society" 2008, 38). This evidence underlines the fact, that institutional evaluations were envisioned not just as instruments to make institutional performance more transparent. It was expected from them to create a more just funding model, by enabling additional public support for high quality institutions and programmes, and furthermore, justify the penalization of weak performing institutions.

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4.6.4. National projects

Between 2008 and 2011, and parallel to the ongoing elaboration of the new Law on National Education, the Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) implemented 5 strategic projects concerning higher education that were funded from the EU Structural Funds. The projects run under the following titles: (i) Quality and Leadership for the Romanian Higher Education, (ii) PhD in Excellence Schools, (iii) Doctoral Studies in Romania: Organisation of the Doctoral Schools, (iv) Improving University Management, and (v) National Student Enrolment Registry. These projects offered a foresight on the future development of the Romanian higher education system. As a closely related interviewee explained:

"This is our job. We keep on looking for options, try setting up an agenda, to polish proposals for different policies. But it is the job of policy makers to assemble these proposals into a coherent political option. So for us, it is important to push the boundaries by looking at foresight on higher education." (Interviewee: M03)

Out of the five mentioned projects, the one called "Quality and Leadership for Romanian Higher Education" involved several objectives that related to the idea of institutional differentiation. As part of this project, a so called vision document has been produced together with a set of strategic recommendations for Romanian higher education. It encompassed a variety of good international practices, including recommendations from international experts, but also initiated debates that focused on the need to classify universities.

"Not all the work packages had the same weight. But anyhow, it [differentiation of universities] was a key point on our agenda. It was something I believed was important for the future of Romania." (Interviewee: M03; explanation added in brackets)

The project was a foresight exercise, "a vehicle for gathering information" that resulted in the elaboration of several documents (Interviewee: M03). One of which, called Vision for Romanian Higher Education 2025[64], described the future of Romanian higher education as very

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[64] In the continuation I will refer to the it as the 'vision document'.

diverse, both internally, by offering different types of programmes for different types of students, and externally, according to the structure and activities of institutions. It is stated: "Like people, each university has its own personality" ("Vision for Romanian Higher Education 2025" 2011, 18). The document outlines three major challenges that Romanian higher education institutions need to face in the future. These are (a) personalization, (b) diversity, (c) transparency. All three challenges are interlinked, meaning that personalization, which refers to the ability of institutions to meet the needs of their users, can be achieved only though diversification, and diversity is not attainable without transparent data, which will become much more important in the future for both the user and the state. Hence, it seems that the ideas and arguments embedded in this document are closely aligned with the views and opinions of the Presidential Commission. However, there was no clear link between the work of the Presidential Commission or the policy documents produced by it, and the UEFISCDI project. Instead, most of the time the two processes went on parallel, but without intersecting each other.

The fact that UEFISCDI operated separately from the Presidential Commission, allowed it to have a somewhat different perception on how the diversification of the Romanian higher education sector could be achieved. For instance, the vision document did not express strong argument for linking public funding to institutional types or profiles. Moreover, institutional differentiation has been operationalized more broadly in the vision document than in the diagnosis report, the National Pact, or the strategy. While describing diversity, the authors of the vision document acknowledge that there are several types of excellence, not just the often narrowly perceived teaching and research nexuses.

"Some universities choose to tend to local and regional needs, to 'grow' practical abilities for the local labour market and economy. Others aim at developing creative thinking and training open and mobile professionals. There are higher education institutes that already have an international research reputation and therefore select their students carefully. Alternative models are also available: there are institutions that decided to forge new development directions and to regularly provide technological and innovation public policy consulting and

assistance; others undertake educational experiments challenging the academic environment as a whole." ("Vision. Romanian Higher Education in 2025" 2011, 19)

Even though the UEFISCDI projects were detached from the policy formulation process, there were a couple of less obvious conjunctions, especially in terms of policy learning and knowledge sharing. Based on the results of these project the Ministry of Education asked UEFISCDI to organize several events where representatives of universities, the ministry, and some international bodies started to discuss publicly the subject of higher education diversification. These meetings laid the ground for the methodology of institutional differentiation and also have been carried forward to three new projects that were initiated in 2011[65]. The new projects concerned more directly to the implementation of a diversification policy in Romania and also covered financially some aspects of it, like data collection for the institutional evaluations.

4.6.5. Law on National Education

The Law on National Education was adopted in January 2011 and represented the final stage in the policy formulation process. It included most of the objectives outlined in the National Pact and the strategy. This is not surprising considering that the same key members of the Presidential Commission who drafted these documents also tabled the law. The first draft of the law was prepared already in 2005 when Mircea Miclea was still the minister of education, and there were many versions presented thereafter. However, most of these versions were received negatively by the public. As explained by one of the interviewees:

"So we presented the draft law and immediately there was a public outrage. And then I remember some of the politicians, particularly the president saying to us, well do you want to stop here or carry on?" (Interviewee: M02)

In 2008, following the adoption of the National Pact, a separate committee was set up to help move on the process. This committee was initiated by Cristian Adomnitei who was the

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[65] The three projects were the following: Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities; Quality Assurance in Higher Education through Habilitation and Auditing; and Quality, Diversity and Innovation in Romanian Universities.

minister of education at that time. It was made up of people who represented different views and political options and who continued to develop a new concept for Romanian higher education. This new concept embodied the same objective, that is to say, to make Romanian higher education more competitive by designing new incentives that would make people and institutions perform better (Interviewee: M06). These incentives became institutionalized into the classification and ranking exercise which was introduced in chapter IX of the law, with the title "Promoting quality in higher education and research". According to the articles in this chapter, Romanian universities are to be classified in three classes based on the results of the external quality evaluation as follows (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193, §4):

- Education oriented universities ('A' class);

- Education and research/art universities ('B' class);

- Universities with advanced research and educational programmes ('C' class).

The institutional categories defined by the law were considered as nominal cases, without any hierarchy between them. They essentially made a distinction between two types of institutions, the teaching ones and the research ones, with the second category being a mixture of both types. Yet, from the policy maker's perspective, this option was somewhat less important. As stated by an interviewee:

"We wanted to differentiate universities according to their profiles or missions which they sought appropriate for themselves. These were either teaching or research. The combination was not of interest to us. Not at all. So either teaching or research." (Interviewee: M02)

Alongside the institutional classes, the law also sought to establish a ranking of educational programmes within disciplinary fields. It was to be built in such a way as to provide information to potential beneficiaries concerning the level of academic quality of the study programme. Therefore, the methodology of this ranking exercise grouped study programmes according to five 5 levels of quality, ranging from 'A' (excellent) to 'E' (poor).

A classification of departments was also prescribed to be done internally by each university (Law on National Education 2011, Article 195). This classification would rank department on five levels based on their research performance. The results of it were expected to be used for potential organisational changes, especially by giving more leverage to the rector of a university to dismantle weak performing departments. This is testified by the following text extract from the law:

"The university senate, upon proposal of the rector, based on the internal assessment, may decide the reorganisation or dissolution of the poor performance departments or institutions, without impairing in any way the students." (Law on National Education 2011, Article 195, §2)

The mentioned classification and ranking exercise was perceived as a tool to incentivize institutions. Thus, the outcomes of it were not supposed to be fixed, rather institutions, programmes, and departments could constantly seek to improve their positions or change classes. In this regards, an interviewee stated the following:

"Within the disciplines you can move in the rank if you improve your outputs, but also in the classes, provided that several of your disciplines prove to be very good. So classes were considered as being an orientation. You may be part of one class, but that doesn't mean that all your disciplines are at the top level (…) We were particularly keen on saying these were not frozen categories." (Interviewee: M02; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

The measures detailed in the law sought to assess performance at three levels (i.e. institutional level, programme level, and departmental level), using different scales for expressing the results, but also allowing for flexibility in case institutions, programmes, or departments improve their performance in the future. This created (not surprisingly) some confusion among institutions, which made it hard for them to interpret the consequences of such a policy.

"So it was absolutely confusing for me. One scale is from 'C' to 'A', and the other from 'A' to 'E'. I don't know why they did it like this. You could have a university in this [referring to education oriented universities] category, and have a programme in the 'A' category as well. And in that category you couldn't run a master degree, or a PhD." (Interviewee: M05, explanation added in brackets)

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Similarly, an institution could be in the top class (i.e. university with advanced research and educational programmes), run programmes at all three study cycles, but still have some of them ranked at level 'E', which is the worst rank for study programmes. The fact that each class or rank would be linked to the distribution of publicly funded study places and institutional funding, just added to the confusion. Taking the former example mentioned by the interviewee, a teaching institution whose activities are, according to the criteria set by the law, reduced to carrying out undergraduate programmes only, could have a number of 'A' ranked programmes, but at the same time be prohibited to offer MA or PhD programmes in those fields. Moreover, it would not have access to the special developmental fund reserved for 'C' class universities, which in the long term might further undermine the quality of those 'A' ranked programmes. Despite such inconsistencies, the law made it mandatory to have all institutions and their study programmes assessed according to a unified methodology.

To identify which university belongs to which class, as well to rank educational programmes a nation-wide institutional evaluation was mandated (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193, §1). The classification of departments was to be carried out by the institutions themselves, hence, it was considered as a separate process, and elaborated to a lesser extent at this moment. On the other hand, the ranking and the classification exercise was to be carried out according to a unified methodology proposed by the Ministry of Education and approved by a ministerial order within maximum 6 months from the enactment of the law (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193). From a technical point of view, the assessment was to be made by a consortium including ARACIS, student representatives, CNCS, CNATDCU and an international body with competences in ranking and classification of educational institutions (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193, §5). The only exception from this rule was the first assessment, which according to the law, should be carried out independently by an international body or a foreign agency for quality assurance registered in

the European Quality Assurance Registry (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193, §6). Afterwards, the ministry was responsible to take full responsibility for performing this exercise periodically (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193, §3). The law also put a strong emphasis on the validity of data, and there were measures included in it to sanction those universities which fail to provide data or report false data during the assessment process. As one of the individuals who participated in the drafting of the law stated:

"W*e decided to collect data in such a way as to threaten directors to assume full responsibility for the data which they provide, and if they distort data, and this is afterwards proven, there will be a penalty."* (Interviewee: M02)

Consequently, the law stated that the refusal of providing data, or providing false data, is considered as a breach of the principle of public liability and leads to penalties (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193).

In line with the objective to increase institutional diversity in the Romanian higher education sector, the Law on National Education proposed that each institution should establish its own mission, institutional development strategy, curricula design and implementation, internal quality assurance mechanisms and financial and human resource management systems (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). Despite requiring from universities to develop their own distinctive approaches to their structures and processes, they were still expected to comply with more general regulations, such as the status of academic staff (which remained largely the same as that of a civil servant), quality assurance standards and procedures defined by ARACIS, and strict regulations concerning the use of public funds (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). This was an inherent contradiction between the expectations of the new higher education reform and the existing regulatory framework of the Romanian higher education system, which in many areas acted as a boundary to institutional differentiation. Nevertheless, the reform moved on to classify institutions and rank their study programmes, and probably even more importantly, to link those outcomes to institutional funding.

4.7. Changes in institutional funding

Until 1999, public universities in Romania were funded according to the principles inherited from the communist period. It meant that funds were largely distributed based on the number of faculty and staff positions and a small part was earmarked for running costs and institutional investments (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). In this funding model, universities tried to maximize their budgets by requesting more than necessary teaching positions from the Ministry of Education, who had discretionary power in these decisions (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). One way to get the Ministry of Education to approve the opening of additional faculty positions was to overload academic curriculums with various academic subjects and to create new study programmes, whose curriculum often overlapped with existing programmes (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). Nevertheless, these actions directly translated into more teaching positions, and hence more public funding for individual universities.

After 1999 a new funding model was implemented in Romania, which was followed by a gradually increasing public funding for higher education (see Figure 10). This increase reached its peak in 2007, when it accounted for 0,42% of the national GDP. In absolute value the funds were increasing until 2009. As an interviewee noted, since then the amount of money decreased very much.

"It decreased from 1.9 billion leu in 2009 to 1.6 billion leu in last year [2013]. You see. It decreased very much." (Interviewee: M06; clarification added in brackets)

Figure 10: Public funding of higher education in the period 1999-2010

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Basic funding (thousand LEI)	174,590	270,000	380,011	477,490	633,147	847,264	1,041,38	1,181,34	1,730,40	1,912,98	1,950,04	1,908,67
Share of GDP	0.32	0.34	0.33	0.32	0.32	0.34	0.36	0.34	0.42	0.38	0.37	0.37
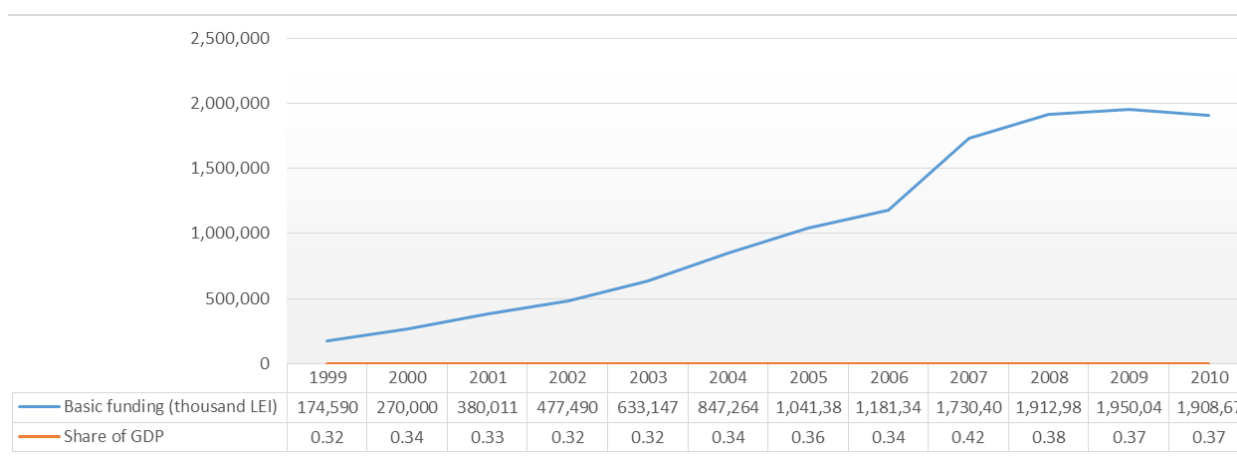
Source: National Council of Higher Education Financing (CNFIS)

Between 1999 and 2011 public funding was granted on a yearly basis following the signature of a contract between public universities and the Ministry of Education. Since the institutions had no formal bargaining power, this contract was rather a formality which was accepted almost every time without negotiations (Interviewee: M07). The funding model had two pillars. There was a base (or core) funding calculated on the basis of student numbers and multiplied with different coefficients for different fields of study, programme level (BA, MA, PhD), and teaching language. It was a formula-based funding model in which the number of enrolled students became a principle criteria for determining the amount of public funding (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). This model motivated universities to increase the staff/student ratio by enrolling more students in the same classes, overuse the teaching facilities, reduce the weekly number of courses in the curricula, offer the same courses for students enrolled in different study programmes, and generally reduce the number of programmes whose costs were very large (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). In sum, universities tried to accommodate as many students as possible, while at the same time they tried to reduce the operating costs (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012).

Aware of the outlined dangers, from 2003 part of the basic funding was calculated according to so called quality indicators that sought to reflect institutional performance and

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correct for opportunism in higher education (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). This means, that the methodology for basic funding included a **quantitative component** that relied on the number of students and a **qualitative component** that relied on quality indicators. Between 2003 and 2011 the number of quality indicators increased from 4 to 17, out of which some encompassed several smaller ones as well (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). The detailed list of quality indicators and their weights is shown in the next table.

Table 15: List of quality indicators and the percentage of basic funding they determined in 2011

Group	Indicators	%
1. Teaching staff	IC1 – Ratio between full-time teaching staff and students	3.00
	IC2 – Ratio between professors and students	1.00
	IC3 – Ratio between associate professors and students	1.00
	IC4 – Ratio between teaching staff having a PhD title and students	1.50
	IC5 – Ratio between teaching staff below 35 years of age and students	2.00
2. Impact of research on the teaching process	IC6 – Level of performance in scientific research (complex structure)	7.00
	IC7 – Percent of students in master and doctorate programmes within the total number of students	1.00
	IC8 – Percent ratio between the value of research contracts and the university's total income	1.00
3. Material resources	IC9 – Ratio between expenses with endowments and investment and the number of physical students	1.00
	IC10 – Ratio between material expenses and the number of physical students	1.00
	IC11 – Ratio between expenses with books, journals and manuals and the number of physical students	1.00
4. University management	IC12 – Percent of investment expenses within the total budgetary allocation received by universities for this purpose[66]	0.00
	IC13 – Overall quality of academic and administrative management (complex structure)	3.75
	IC14 – Percent of income gained from sources other than budgetary allocation within the total income of the university	2.00

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[66] This indicator was used until 2006 and referred to the number of computers owned by the university per 1000 full-time student (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015).

	IC15 – Percent of income gained from other sources than budgetary allocation utilized for institutional development in the total income of the university	1.50
	IC16 – Quality of social and administrative student services (complex structure)	2.00
5. Not specified	IC17 – Lifelong learning[67]	0.25
Total percent of basic funding determined		30.00

Source: adapted from the work of Vîiu and Miroiu 2015

As shown in the table, institutional performance in scientific research was the single most important indicator (more than twice as much as the ratio between full-time teaching staff and students or the overall quality of academic and administrative management). But, when looking at the group of indicators research performance and teaching quality were assigned very similar weights (9% and 8.5%). They were followed by university management (7.25%) and material resources (3%). These indicators were calculated for each institution and the results obtained were compared with the results of other institutions to determine the final amount of funding. Thus, the final amount was not based on the absolute value an institution obtained on the quality indicators, but on their relative value (i.e. how they compared to other institution's performance with a similar number of students) (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). The percentage of the basic funding allotted according to such criteria continuously increased, reaching up to 30% in 2011 (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). This means, that 1/3 of the public funding was already distributed on a differentiated basis when the Law on National Education came into force.

The outlined funding model can already be considered as a step towards institutional differentiated in which quality assessment and institutional comparisons started to play a crucial role (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). The funding scheme made it possible to see how each university is performing by looking at their results on the quality indicators and it was also

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[67] From 2011, 0.25% of the total 30% have been calculated based on a newly introduced indicator measuring lifelong learning (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015).

frequently used as an internal management tool by universities to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

"In fact, if you looked at each indicator, you could see where individual universities were positioned. One of the indicators was research and that accounted for 7%. So you could see a comparison between the research results of universities. It was used also as an internal management tool, because universities knew where they lost money, and they knew where they gained money." (Interviewee: M05)

However, the relevance of the previously established quality indicators has been called into question by the new higher education policy. This concern was strongly expressed by key individuals who drafted the policy.

*"They called these quality criteria. If you look at the criteria, all of them are input criteria. Things like ratio of professor per student, number of square meter per student, the existence of a library, the existence of a laboratory, an internet connection. **These are all input criteria, which are not related to the outcome**. How good is your student? How good is your scientific research? These are quality criteria which have no impact on quality. Zero output indicators, only input indicators. So for example, if you have many square meters, then you receive more money. It doesn't matter whether you do anything with these square meters. If you have a laboratory, you receive more money. It doesn't matter whether you use that laboratory, whether you publish research using that laboratory or not. It doesn't matter! But they call it indeed quality criteria."* (Interviewee: M01; emphases added)

Another critique of the former methodology was that it assessed certain indicators on the level of the entire university.

"So for example, one of the former criteria was this. How many articles did you publish in ISI journals? And when you have a university such as Bucharest, and you put together the articles in mathematics and theology, it doesn't work. You cannot compare." (Interviewee: M06)

In addition to these two concerns, the quality indicators also failed to create any substantial difference in institutional financing. According to Miroiu and Vlasceanu (2012) the use of quality indicators led to a less than 10% increase or decrease in the income of individual universities (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). This has been also confirmed by some of the interviewees:

"Indicators were so designed as to balance themselves. So basically the differentiation of financing per institution was not more than +/- 10%. In fact it influenced financing only in a narrow range." (Interviewee: M07)

Bearing in mind the outlined shortcomings of the previous methodology, it is not surprising that the relevance of quality criteria proved to be very low when considering the recent policy aspiration for more institutional diversity (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). Therefore, the Law on National Education, which was adopted in 2011, tried to alter institutional financing. It stated that degree programmes are financed on a differentiated basis from public funds and based on their position in the programme hierarchy (i.e. ranking) (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193, §7). PhD programmes were supposed to be financed separately, through a national competition between PhD schools or programmes (Law on National Education 2011, Article 160). In addition, the law stated that the state may finance programmes for outstanding performance in any category of university (Law on National Education 2011, Article 193, §8).

The Law on National Education identified three financing streams, all of which resemble the ones outlined in the strategy, and all of them were linked to the results of the classification and ranking exercise as well (Law on National Education 2011, Article 223):

- Basic financing determined according to the number of students and differentiated based on the field of study, level of study, and teaching language;

- Supplementary financing determined according to the ranking of study programmes within their own field;

- A funding stream for institutional development addressed to the best universities in each of the established classes.

Basic funding would continue to be determined according to the number of students, but taking into account the characteristics of the study programmes run by the institution. At the same time, the number of students an institution can have would be linked to the results of the classification exercise. Article 193, paragraph 10 states that programmes at universities are

financed according to their classes, namely BA, MA and PhD programmes at 'C' class universities, BA and MA programmes at 'B' class universities, and only BA programmes at 'A' class public universities[68]. Based on these criteria, some universities were expected to receive more students and more public funding.

"This meant that research universities got more money. That was the idea. Not much more, but more." (Interviewee: M06).

The second stream of funding, that is **supplementary funding**, was to be affected the most. The proposed changes made the previous quality indicators redundant and relied instead on the results of the programme ranking[69]. The new methodology also intended to change the way the final amount of public funding is determined. Instead of comparing results between universities, it tried to compare similar programmes at different institutions.

"So if you have a programme in political science that is ranked 'A', then you get more money than for a student that you have in a programme in political science, but which is ranked 'E'. In general, changes were very large sometimes. The formula worked differently in different areas, but it was still possible for example that you get 70 leu for a student if the programme is ranked 'E' and you get 120 leu for a student if the programme is ranked 'A'. So much more! Almost double." (Interviewee: M06)

Supplementary funding was further divided into three major components. The first one was a supplementary funding for excellence (accounted for 25% of funding) which was a successor to the previously used quality indicators for differentiated funding. Secondly, there was a preferential funding for master and doctoral programmes in the field of natural sciences and technology, for those taught in foreign languages, and for jointly supervised doctoral programmes. The third component comprised funds to support higher education institutions with an active local or regional role (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015).

An **institutional development fund** was supposed to be dedicated to higher education institution with the highest performance from each category and funding from it allocated based

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[68] In the first two categories it was not mentioned explicitly that these programmes have to be realized in public universities.

[69] Supplementary funding was equivalent to 30.5 % of the basic funding (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015).

on competitive criteria following international standards (Law on National Education 2011, Article 197). Even though the funding council proposed a methodology for implementing this stream of financing, it has not been accepted by the Ministry of Education (Interviewee: M07). The proposal foresaw multi-annual financing for institutional projects selected in consistency with institutional objectives and national priorities in education. Thus, it was envisioned to support the best public universities to excel in their particular areas.

"If you are an innovator in teaching, you can compete for these funds. Or if you want to become more innovative in research you have several sources. Either you go competitive, or you get a grant just to improve the infrastructure." (Interviewee: M02)

In sum, the new funding methodology tried to utilize the results of the classification and the ranking exercise in determining the amount of public funding across all three streams. In many cases it substituted the previous quality indicators with the concept of "excellence indices" corresponding to the rank of each study programme[70] (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). By doing so, it hoped to provide a new incentive model for institutions, replacing the old one, where the number of students was the most important determinant of public funding. Being classified as a 'C' class university would allow for the institution to receive public funding also for MA or PhD students; having highly ranked programmes would have increased public funding calculated based on per student capita; while scoring high on both evaluations would have secured public funding for larger institutional investments as well. Therefore, the results of the ranking and classification exercise became crucial for institution. As noted by one of the interviewees involved in drafting the new funding mechanism:

"I was supposed to use the results of ranking and classification. When I say to use, I mean that I had to decide how and if to use these results in the funding of universities. Because, in fact that was the main consequence of this." (Interviewee: M06)

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[70] The excellence indices reflected the results of the national ranking of study programmes. For example, at the bachelor level, a study programme belonging to class A (best performance) translated into an excellence index of 3, but 0 if the programme was ranked in class D or E (low performance). For master level studies, programmes ranked in class A received an excellence index of 4, those in B an index of 1 and those in C, D, and E received 0 (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015).

The outlined funding model was short-lived and never fully implemented. Just after the results of the ranking and classification were published another change of government took place in Romania. The new government, relying on a court decision that brought into question the results of the classification and ranking exercise, decided to ease the effect of the reform by giving a compensation to those institutions or study programmes that received less money as a consequence of the new funding methodology.

"We said in the financing methodology that we would pay universities according to their position in rankings, but at the end of the day, if a university had less money than necessary for paying salaries the ministry compensated from its buffer fund. So it was not a big deal to be the first in this ranking, because every university managed to get money to run their programmes." (Interviewee: M08)

After the new government was established, the Ministry of Education decided to use parts of the supplementary funding, as well as the funds intended for institutional development, and even its own reserve fund, to compensate discretionary some of the universities. Therefore, the intended effects of the funding model, which was created as part of the diversification policy, could not come to the surface. Instead of enforcing the principles of the funding model, the new government advocated to a much stronger degree the interests of smaller universities. As noted by one of the interviewees:

"We met the new minister of education and his secretary of state who thought of nothing but supporting, helping in all ways poor performers." (Interviewee: M06).

The new government wanted to avoid universities not being able to pay salaries or going bankrupt by any means. In this regard, the funding methodology was perceived as a political problem that could have negative effects on the new government's image (Interviewee: M08). These considerations led to swift changes in the Law on National Education and the funding methodology. In December 2013 the law has been amended and the requirement to link institutional funding to the outcome of the classification and ranking exercise removed. More precise, the amendment revoked paragraph 10 from article 193, which regulated how publicly funded study places are distributed among the different classes of universities. It also erased

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the texts "financed on a differentiated basis" and "based on their educational programs position into the hierarchy, according to the ranking" from article 193, paragraph 7. These changes caused the funding procedure to remain rather vague, saying that the exact financing methodology will be developed by the Ministry of Education in consultation with CNFIS and approved by the Minister of National Education.

While the amendment reversed some aspects of the funding methodology, it did not eliminate entirely the idea of classifying universities and ranking study programmes. The law remains to say that excellence programmes are assessed and ranked, and this ranking should provide a ground for additional support (relating mainly to supplementary funding). Following these changes and based on the request of the Ministry of Education, CNFIS produced a new funding methodology in 2014, which did not take into account the results of the 2011 classification and ranking exercise and returned to use quality indicators.

4.8. *Policy implementation*

In a move designed to diversify the country's higher education system the Romanian government started to classify higher education institutions (both public and private) and rank their study programmes in early 2011. The process unfolded as foreseen in the Law on National Education (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: The implementation process of the Romanian diversification policy
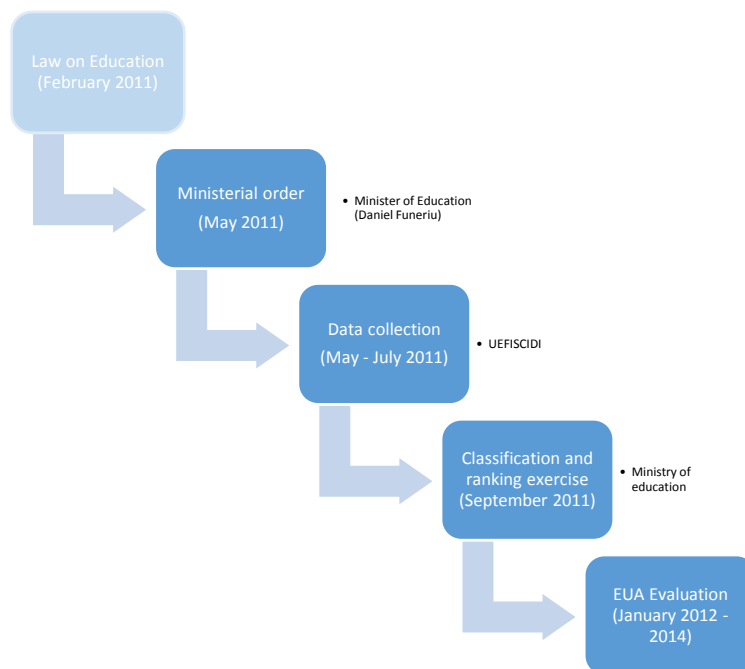
In May 2011 a ministerial order was issued that initiated the data collection phase. This represented the first step in the implementation of the new higher education policy. The gathered data was evaluated and based on it Romanian universities classified and their study programmes ranked. After publishing the results of the evaluation exercise a qualitative assessment of universities was carried out by the European University Association. These stages of the implementation process are described separately in the subsequent part of the study.

4.8.1. Data collection and its methodology

The methodology for the classification and ranking exercise was developed by a team of experts in close cooperation with some of the members of the Presidential Commission (Interviewee: M04). The expert team was responsible to identify the most relevant indicators and their weights by looking at similar exercises in other European countries. The draft methodology was presented several times at different workshops and round tables, and

stakeholders were invited to comment on it. Even the EUA offered some technical advice in drafting the methodology. A small expert team was assigned by them to provide guidance in identifying the main indicators (Interviewee: M08). The final version of the methodology, which got approved by the ministerial order no. 5.212/2011, relied on more than 60 distinct indicators and measured institutional quality based on the university's capacity to support **teaching**, **research** and **external relations**. In addition, it calculated **institutional capacity** as well, based on indicators such as infrastructure (dormitories, faculties, equipment), services (career counselling, lifelong learning centres, support services for disabled students) and staff (post-doc students, support personnel, etc.).

Table 16: Indicators grouped according to the three main categories of assessment[71]

CRITERIA I. Teaching and learning	CRITERIA II. Research	CRITERIA III. University relations with external environment
Standard 1.1. Human resources Standard 1.2. Curriculum and qualifications	Standard 2.1. Results of scientific research/ artistic creation Standard 2.2. Availability of adequate resources for scientific research/ artistic creation	Standard 3.1. Social-economic relations Standard 3.2. Internationalization Standard 3.3. Social and cultural involvement of the university
CRITERIA IV. Institutional capacity		
Standard 4.1. The universities' capacity to support teaching and learning	Standard 4.2. The universities' capacity to support research	Standard 4.3. The universities' capacity to support services to society
Standard 4.4. The management of the university		

The top three criteria (I-II-III) represented the major areas of the institutional evaluation and contained several standards, which contained even more indicators (see table above). Because of this, the methodology could be considered as a rather extensive one.

"The methodology was difficult to manage. If you want to rank programmes in a field like political science (...) you have to take into account more than 60 criteria. It's impossible." (Interviewee: M06; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

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[71] Own translation based on the criteria described in the ministerial order OMECTS nr. 4174/13.05.2011

Assessment methodologies are rarely neutral to the concept of quality, since they emphasize what counts as important and what not. In this regard, research performance was one of the most important criteria in determining the class of an institution, as well the place of a study programme in the ranking. Research had a cummulative weight ranging from 40% (in case of arts and humanities and certain social sciences) to 60% (for natural and engineering sciences) (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015). On the other hand, criteria concerning the universities relation to its external environment or institutional capacity had the smallest weight of all four major criteria (Vîiu and Miroiu 2015).

The methodology put a lot of emphasis on the number of publications, especially in international journals. To correct for the differences in size between departments or institutional units, the methodology calculated a ratio between the number of publications and department size (Interviewee: M08). In addition, it was designed so as to apply a penalty for departments with less than five people, which was considered as a minimum requirement for implementing a study programme. The penalty aimed to reduce bias in results, since smaller departments had larger publication ratio, but also intended to encourage the development of larger departments, which was seen as a requirement for excellence (Interviewee: M08).

After the methodology was finalized, the data collection process was initiated. It has been conducted by the agency UEFISCDI upon the request of the Ministry of Education. The agency's role was pure technical, since it did not participate in developing or applying the methodology, but rather provided the administrative support for data collection (Interviewee: M04). Data was collected through an online survey, which had to be filled out with empirical data for the previous 5 years, starting from 2006. This process lasted for one month. Considering the range of different indicators this might seem as a rather short time period. It was justified by the fear of some policy makers that institutions might try to manipulate data if given more time.

"We didn't want to give them lot of time to build up the data, to introduce a lot of distortion." (Interviewee: M02).

Data collection was also limited by the lack of infrastructure in place. Although, universities are required to present similar information for accreditation purposes, for funding purposes, the ranking and classification exercise meant to count everything from the beginning.

"We don't have the technical infrastructure within the universities in order to say: Now I want to measure this and that. You should just report me those data! We can't do that, because the folks [universities] would say, okay but I need some time to collect the data, we don't have it in an electronic system." (Interviewee: M04; clarification added in brackets)

Despite the legal sanctions foreseen by the law for the distortion of reported data, the process had to be repeated in several instances. The first amount of data collected from universities raised serious concerns about their validity. Several members of the expert team who designed the methodology, stressed that institutions over-inflated some data, or reported not valid information on some of the indicators. Due to this, universities were asked to clarify the provided information and in some cases even audits were carried out, which prolonged that data collection for a few more months.

"Later, they [expert team] discovered that the numbers are huge compared with reality. When put together, Romania should have been on the first position in terms of productivity in the world." (Interviewee: M03; clarification added in brackets)

Since universities were in an uncertain position and did not know how their future could be affected by this evaluation, many decided to inflate their work results where possible, that is, to report as many students as possible, as many publications as possible, in all areas of activity (Interviewee: M04). Universities were also required to make their raw data available publicly on their websites, which created additional concerns for the policy makers. Following the publication of raw data, several members of the academic community reported to have found false data in these reports. However, when asked to state their concerns officially, they refrained to do so, which an interviewee called "academic solidarity in lying" (Interviewee:

M02). Considering the range of problems faced in the data collection the initial results of the classification and ranking exercise seemed rather dubious.

4.8.2. Data processing and publication of the results

Initially, data processing was done by the same expert team that was responsible for developing the methodology. Weights were continuously adjusted within the methodology to create several scenarios. This resembled a trial-and-error approach to data processing to find the best possible outcome (Interviewee: M08). However, the final results of the ranking and classification exercise were calculated by the Ministry of Education with little involvement of the academic community. Hence, very little is known about the process and the challenges involved in formulating the final results. As one member of the expert team involved in developing the methodology noted:

"That was the first scenario. Then it went to the ministry and in the ministry several scenarios were elaborated. From this point on I don't know what happened actually, because we did not participate in playing with different scenarios (...) That was just behind closed doors." (Interviewee: M08; some parts of the text were left out intentionally).

Data processing was highly centralized, meaning that the Ministry of Education made the final decision on the outcome of the ranking and classification exercise with little transparency about the exact procedure. Institutions could not express their opinion on which category they would like to belong and neither did they get the chance to initiate internal discussions about their future mission in line with the proposed institutional profiles (Interviewee: M07). Rather, the Ministry of Education exercised substantial influence in defining which university should be doing what types of activities, based on their past performance and relying on centrally set thresholds, which separated universities and programmes into different classes and ranks.

"We were confronted with a huge controversy there. On the one hand, when you declare a university as research intensive, what should we take as a reference? Should we take the benchmarks which are European or global, or should we take national ones? Well, if you take European benchmarks, no university in Romania would have been a research intensive

university. So, we decided to take, for the time being, national benchmarks." (Interviewee: M02)

Following such national benchmarks the results of the classification and ranking exercise were ready in July 2011, but were published publicly only in October, at the beginning of the academic year (Interviewee: M01). The class of a university and that of its study programmes was only determined once all the data was included in the scheme and performance indicators calculated. This means that the results of both the classification and the ranking exercise emerged from the same database. In total 87 higher education institutions were classified in one of the three categories[72], and 1.074 study programmes from 59 study domains ranked in the predefined five groups[73] (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). Nine universities were classified as advanced research universities (class C), 22 as research and teaching universities (class B), 48 as teaching universities (class A) (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). The latter group included all the private universities, despite the fact, that some had also A ranked study programmes (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). The results of the ranking exercise are shown in the next figure.

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[72] 'C' representing an advanced research university, 'B' representing a teaching and research university, and 'A' representing a teaching university.
[73] From A, representing the best to E representing the weakest programmes.

Figure 12: Breakdown of the programme ranking in Romania
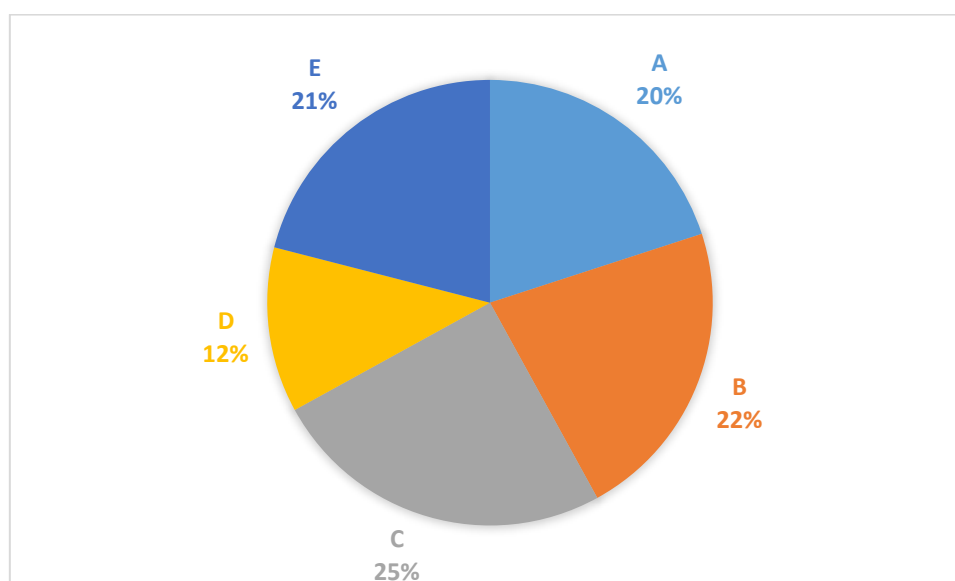
Source: Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015

The results of the classification and ranking exercise became the first tangible outcome after the adoption of the Law on National Education in 2011. However, many institutions saw them as an imposed view of reality criticizing the Ministry of Education for potentially manipulating the data processing and overstepping its power. These challenges are described in the next part.

4.8.3. Challenges of implementation

The implementation of the policy faced several problems. Probably, the largest one among the many was the significant number of individuals who openly opposed the reforms. As some interviewees noted, especially older generations of professors were reluctant to accept the changes advocated for by the policy.

"You remember me telling you that there were lot of old professors in the system. Many of them were colleagues of mine and they were all interested in preserving the system as it was." (Interviewee: M02).

"(…) and the people in the system, out of which many considered that they still have captive markets so basically there's no need to really strive harder." (Interviewee: M07; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

Many academics challenged the way the ranking and classification exercise tried to measure their productivity. It was commonly seen as a "sort of pressure produced by the central authorities in order to make them write more ISI papers" (Interviewee: M04). According to their perception, the only way to progress in the rankings was to become more productive in publishing academic papers in international journals, which many saw as an illegitimate claim, considering that Romania offers only limited financial support to do internationally relevant research (Interviewee: M04). Thus, many criticized the policy for putting too much emphasis on international standards and having too little sensibility towards the condition of the Romanian higher education system. This argument is presented by the next quote.

"Then, there was also a sort of nationalistic reaction against it. Why do you put the national system in such a bad picture? Why do you want to compare to European universities? They have a different history, a different past." (Interviewee: M02).

Another challenge related to the confusion generated by various evaluation exercises taking place in the Romanian higher education system, almost simultaneously. Public authorities have imposed different data collection mechanisms that were mandatory for most higher education institutions and resulted in a lot of tension and confusion (Ciolan et al. 2015). At least four different evaluation exercises are worth mentioning. There was the information flaw managed by CNFIS and the Ministry of Education for gathering data on institutional financing; the national education reports that were in line with the Eurostat methodology and managed by the National Institute of Statistics; the institutional and programme evaluations for quality assurance managed by ARACIS; and last but not least, the national classification and ranking exercise that used its own criteria, standards, and indicators, and was managed by the Ministry of Education and UEFISCDI (Ciolan et al. 2015). Since there was no integrated information system in place, institutions had to comply with all these requests on a case to case basis (Ciolan et al. 2015). Therefore, it might not be too surprising that many institutions

reacted to the classification and ranking exercise, which they saw as just another data collection process, with hostility and not seeing it as a priority for their institution.

But the strongest reactions concerned the financial consequences of the policy, which considering its magnitude was much more drastic than when the qualitative component of the previous funding methodology was established (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). Not long after the publication of the result from the classification and ranking exercise the Minister of Education altered the distribution of publicly funded study places accordingly.

"It meant that universities that were in the first class received much more [publicly funded] study places at master and PhD programmes. While the others received a small number, and the differences were very large." (Interviewee: M06; clarification added in brackets)

Institutions that were classified as universities with advanced research and educational programmes (i.e. 'C' class universities) received more grants for students enrolled in master and doctoral programmes. Institutions classified as education and research universities (i.e. 'B" class university) received roughly the same amount for students enrolled in master programmes, but got less funding for doctoral students. In contrast, education oriented universities (i.e. 'A' class universities), which accounted for roughly 60% of all institutions, received drastically diminished grants for master and doctoral students (Miroiu and Vlasceanu 2012). Therefore, higher education institutions that were classified as belonging to class 'A' did not see any benefits from it. In fact, as an interviewee stated "they lost immediately" (Interviewee: M07). First of all, they lost part of the public funding for their master and doctoral programmes, which can be substantial considering that universities receive twice the amount of for a master student, and even more for a PhD student, then for an undergraduate student (Interviewee: M06).

"Because, when you say that only advanced research universities have the right to produce doctoral students, in terms of public funding you have serious losses (...) So just imagine that. From the beginning you lose an important share of the public money that you were used to get from the ministry. So actually it was a sort of money problem." (Interviewee: M04; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

In addition to the potential demise of public funding, the loss of doctoral education raised a moral question for higher education institutions. Several universities, especially those who proved to have a poor research record, considered the act of withdrawing doctoral programmes as a move to downgrade their status to merely teaching institutions. This concern is depicted in the following quote:

"Doctoral studies are considered as part of the institution's prestige. And somehow they feel like a university, which has no doctoral studies, is not really a full-fledged university." (Interviewee: M07).

The policy implementation also faced some problems in terms of transparency. The prolonged publication of the results and the lack of information about the evaluation process made universities question the outcome of the classification and ranking exercise. Neither the exact methodology of data processing nor the criteria for establishing the classes or ranks were made public. Only institutional reports were accessible that showed the results on an aggregate level (Ciolan et al. 2015; Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). Therefore, some even referred to the classification and ranking exercise as a "game", meaning that the way the ministry selected indicators and applied weights was first and foremost a political decision and not a professional one (Interviewee: M03).

*"But, you know, all these weights adjustment is also a political process. Because, some win and some lose. And since this **was done actually behind the doors of the ministry**, universities were quite nervous. They say the process was not transparent."* (Interviewee: M08; emphases added)

*"When you have an exercise that affects the universities on such a big scale you should be much more transparent, debate it, and discuss it. And all these debates and discussions took place when the methodology was developed. (...) But, then at the end of the day, after the data was collected, **playing with the weights and the indicators was done just by the ministry behind closed doors.**"* (Interviewee: M08; some parts of the text were left out intentionally; emphases added)

Additionally, the implementation of the policy was also seriously delayed. According to one of the interviewees, the law was completely approved and signed by the president of Romania on the 1st of January 2011, but until June nothing happened (Interviewee: M01). It

was postponed primarily by the minister of education who feared a large opposition to the reform. It took several months for the members of the Presidential Commission to convince the minister to start the evaluation process (Interviewee: M01). This delay, just added oil to the fire. Many people started to be suspicious about the reform, especially because several months passed between the data collection for the ranking and classification exercise and the publication of the results. The fact that the process lacked transparency and that it had immediate financial consequences was the basis for serious criticism, which many universities uttered. However, some of the top universities in Romania, like the University of Bucharest and Babes-Bolyai University, were relatively supportive towards the reforms, although they did not convey their position.

"Generally the good universities were supporting the process, because it was a logical thing for them to do. (…) actually, I think because of more money." (Interviewee: M04: some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

Smaller and regional institutions that were classified as education oriented universities, or whose programmes were ranked lower, constituted the main opposition to the policy. The university *Ştefan cel Mare University* of Suceava even decided to start a judicial action against the government stating that the ranking and classification exercise is unconstitutional. Despite widespread opposition, the result of the classification and ranking exercise was not surprising for many. As an interviewee explained, the people already knew implicitly which university is the best in which area, but the evaluation exercise made it more explicit (Interviewee: M01). Or as another interviewee put it:

"One of the most important aspects of making a ranking is that it would match more or less the common knowledge of the members of the academic community." (Interviewee: M06).

However, it is obvious that some expectations were not fulfilled, which brought the policy's implementation to a standstill, not long after the results of the classification and ranking exercise were published. Still, one aspect of the policy continued to be implemented. This was the qualitative assessment of Romanian universities and is described in the next part.

4.8.4. EUA institutional evaluations

According to the Law on National Education the quantitative part of the institutional evaluation was to be supplemented by a more qualitative assessment of all higher education institutions in Romania. It also required that this part of the evaluation be carried out by an international organisation, at least in the first year of the policy's implementation. Following a decision by the Ministry of Education in late October 2011 the European University Association was chosen as the most appropriate international body to conduct this evaluation (Interviewee: M03). EUA agreed to carry out the qualitative assessment as part of a project run by UEFISCDI and financed through European structural funds. The project was officially launched on the 9th of January 2012 by the Romanian minister for education and relied on EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) guidelines for evaluating institutions.

Key individuals involved in the development of the policy had personal connections to EUA. Therefore, it is not very surprising that this organisation has been selected to carry out the qualitative assessment of the Romanian universities. As one of the interviewees explained:

"I think they [the ministry] shortlisted a few prestigious institutions, and EUA was chosen because it's the biggest association of universities and they [the ministry] also had some personal connections with people inside it." (Interviewee: M08; clarification added in brackets)

"We had personal connections with people from the European University Association for many years. We gave talks to them, we did research with them, and so on. So we asked them to come and give some kind of international flavour to what we are doing here." (Interviewee: M01)

The latter quote also hints at the reason why some of the policy makers thought it would be beneficial to involve an international organisation into the implementation of the policy. They were convinced that the reform needed to be given more credibility by ensuring an objective and transparent evaluation that is up to high standards (Interviewees: M07). In this regard, EUA was supposed to provide the necessary legitimacy for the reform, which could not be achieved by involving only local organisations.

"ARACIS had not enough credibility to do it [qualitative assessment]. So first, in order to increase the credibility of the outcome of the classification. Second, to increase the impact and legitimate the process, because there were so many against it. I said okay, we need an international body in the beginning which has a higher prestige than ARACIS and could start the process." (Interviewee: M01)

The evaluation process started in 2012 after a public call was issued for Romanian universities. About 90 universities registered on a voluntary basis to participate in the EUA's institutional evaluation programme, and just a handful of them, mainly smaller universities decided not to register for it (Interviewee: M03). The evaluations were carried out in two phases. First, 42 institutions belonging to the first two groups of the classification (i.e. 'C' and 'B' class universities) were evaluated. The remaining 48 institutions belonging to the 'A' category of education oriented universities were evaluated in the course of 2013 and 2014. EUA's assessment process was based on an institutional self-evaluation report and site visits by the evaluation team. The evaluation team consisted of representatives of different European universities, student's organisations and higher education experts, however no one from Romanian was involved (Interviewees: M04). The evaluations focused on a broad range of issues, including quality assurance, strategic management, and how the mission set by the institution related to the results of the classification exercise (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015). Assessing the distance between the institution's stated mission and performance was particularly important, considering that most of the Romanian universities had very little ambition to develop distinctive profiles, rather each tried to claim to be a research university.

"If an institution puts in its mission the phrase 'intensive research', then it should fulfil higher standards than the others. If it doesn't, then it's a B or A class institution. But anyhow, if it declares that I am the best, then you should see what the reason is for that, what are the arguments behind it." (Interviewee: M05)

EUA evaluated each institution one-by-one, and published a final report for each university. The aim of these reports was to help institutions identify ways in which they could be better positioned within their respective categories (Interviewee: M03). Taking into account that the classification and ranking exercise predated the qualitative assessment, this was

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probably the only connection between the qualitative assessment and the quantitative one. Even in the case of a positive evaluation by EUA, there was no possibility for the qualitative assessment to overrule the results of the classification and ranking exercise, despite the fact, that EUA has previously stressed the limitations of a classification and ranking exercise based only on quantitative data (Interviewee: M08). This highlights that even though EUA was involved in the policy formulation and implementation process from the beginning, the organisation distanced itself from the concept of a classification and ranking exercise. This is confirmed by the following two quotes.

*"Clearly, they [EUA] were very reluctant. Very reluctant. We [domestic experts] had to argue about the classification and **convince them that it is not a ranking. They didn't want to get involved in rankings**. They had strong reactions against rankings."* (Interviewee: M02; clarification added in brackets; emphases added)

*"Okay, we [ministry] cannot base the ranking on qualitative indicators, we cannot do it. For that we have to have quantitative indicators, but then we will validate the quantitative with the qualitative data. **And EUA accepted this proposition, but with some reluctance**. Because, when they came, they said: We are not supposed to validate anything. We give only recommendations to universities as an advisor, as a consultant. That is the philosophy of our own programme. And they [EUA] were very keen on preserving their philosophy in their programme. And we said okay. You make your own evaluation according to your principles, and then at the end of the day, we the ministry, will see if there is a discrepancy between what you said and our ranking."* (Interviewee: M08; clarification added in brackets; emphases added)

There were some other difficulties as well with linking the institutional evaluations conducted by EUA to the classification and ranking exercise. First of all, EUA's IEP is supposed to look at institutions and not evaluate individual study programmes. This made it impossible to relate the outcome of the evaluation to the results of the ranking exercise. Secondly, another principle that EUA sought to uphold was, that they evaluate universities on voluntary basis. This means that even though the Law on National Education required from all universities to undergo this evaluation process, EUA would not carry it out if the institution did not consent to it (Interviewee: M08). Thus, there were several trade-off that the Ministry of Education had to agree to in order to have EUA conduct the qualitative evaluation process,

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since the organisation insisted on following its own methodology and principles. It also points to the fact that not only were the two exercises (i.e. the quantitative and the qualitative evaluation) based on different methodologies, but also on different philosophies.

4.9. *Expectations from the Romanian diversification policy*

The new higher education policy was supposed to fulfil several different societal and political expectations. Diversification of the Romanian higher education system was just one of the many, and one could argue, not even the most important one. However, this does not deny the fact, that the idea to encourage institutional differentiation has been successfully combined with reaching other expectations. Institutional differentiation seemed as a viable policy solution to combat a number of problems, including the challenge of so called "fake research universities", the problem of declining student numbers, the issue of adverse market competition, the problem of an outdated funding model that did not incentivize institutions to perform better, as well as the problem of lack of information about institutional performance in general. All of these problems related directly or indirectly to the quality of the Romanian higher education system and will be discussed one by one.

The mushrooming of new universities that followed after the fall of communism raised serious concerns about the quality of Romanian higher education. Since 1993 the Romanian government made several steps to address this problem, but the general concern for the quality, especially of newly established universities, continued. Therefore, the recent policy reforms can be easily drawn into connection with a persistent anxiety about the quality of Romanian higher education (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). In this regard, the lack of quality was one of the main issues the reforms tried to address by offering a new incentives structure to universities. This is emphasized by the following quote:

"The number of people willing to enrol in a higher education programmes decreased very much and that became an important problem for all the Romanian universities. Especially for private universities. In order to continue to work, they did what was quite expected. In spite of the force of the agency for accreditation, they lowered very much the quality of the programmes they

*offered. So **one of the main objectives of the law was to provide new incentives for the universities to increase the quality**."* (Interviewee: M06; emphases added)

Instead of replicating the previously tested policy approaches, which sought to combat law quality in a top-down fashion by enforcing strict accreditation procedures, the new higher education policy was designed in a way to offer different incentives for universities to boost the quality of their work. The idea was underpinned by external examples from western countries, like in Germany and England, where bottom-up policy approaches were used to ensure the competitiveness of their national higher education systems. These examples convinced domestic policy makers that a similar approach has to be followed in Romania, which should rely on the extensive use of a classification and ranking exercise.

"So there are this kind of trends [rankings and classifications]. I was very aware about them and I said okay we have to do something similar here." (Interviewee: M01; clarification added in brackets).

Based on the design and somewhat short-lived implementation of the classification and ranking exercise it is evident that the purpose of the use of such policy instrument went beyond the simple measurement and assessment of institutional performance, and could be characterized as a governance tool through which the government sought to influence and control the behaviour of higher education institutions.

"Why should you evaluate if you don't use it. I mean assessment is not a purpose in itself. We made assessments in order to improve things. Otherwise, why for?" (Interviewee: M01).

"So that was the idea in our exercise. To have some policy consequences related to it, not just as a transparency tool." (Interviewee: M08)

"And then, there were the consequences, especially for the public universities. For the private universities, in fact there were no other consequences, except that people knew about this. But for the public universities there were consequences." (Interviewee: M06)

As the above quotes outline, the implementation of the classification and ranking exercise had immediate effects on certain universities. These consequences were geared towards incentivizing universities to perform better, but at the same time intended to limit (or even penalize) the activities of universities whose performance was considered as poor. In this

sense, the policy was less about enhancing institutional diversity in the system, instead made the existing differences between institutions more visible and by that justified the different treatment of institutions, favouring especially those universities that could be more competitive on a global scale.

"I wouldn't say that diversification was so much a concern, it was a concern but from another perspective. In Romania, all new universities mimic traditional universities. So all newly founded universities define themselves straight as a university, having research objectives, doing as many programmes as possible in order to attract more students and get more money, developing master programmes eventually and also developing PhD programmes. But, the policy makers, those who devised the law, they were aware that in fact there were huge differences between well-established universities, traditional universities, like the University of Bucharest, and new born universities that lacked financial means, human resources, capacity and wanted to call themselves universities and had big research ambitions. And in the fact, **they [policymakers] wanted to segregate them and say: there are well placed universities who focus on research and there are other universities that don't have the means to compete with the first one** *on research, but they should set themselves other objectives, like doing more education, doing programmes with the local or regional employers, develop study programmes that are necessary for the labour market, and so on."* (Interviewee: M08; clarification added in brackets; emphases added)

"And he [former minister of education] insisted very much on the idea of rankings, but again from the quality perspective. Not that much having in mind the diversification, rather as he said: the idea is to enhance the quality. And **how can you enhance quality, well by differentiating between clusters of universities and giving them specific mission and allocating money according to different missions***. Well, after all anywhere in the world ranking is linked with quality. That's how the idea was driven."* (Interviewee: M08; clarification added in brackets; emphases added)

Although, the main objective of the Romanian higher education reform was not necessarily to create more institutional diversity, the prevailing homogeneity in the system was clearly perceived as a cause of its poor quality. The late massification of the Romanian higher education system, which took place after the fall of communism, created favourable conditions for institutional isomorphism. Most of the higher education institutions tried to follow a single model by offering similar programmes, engaging in similar activities, and providing similar services.

"All the new universities, which exceeded in their number the traditional universities, wanted to imitate the traditional universities. So you had a sort of model of the university, which was provided by the traditional universities, and that was imitated." (Interviewee: M02)

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Policy makers associated the increased homogeneity between institutions with the overall decrease of higher education quality. Newly established universities sought to imitate the traditional model of universities in order to attract more students. However, student demand failed to reward the universities with the highest quality, because many students preferred to study at less demanding institutions. This led to adverse market effects, where institutions that were very similar in terms of their mission started lowering their educational quality to remain competitive.

*"Many people wanted just to have a diploma, and they avoided going to well-established universities, because they were demanding in terms of what you as a student should do, and rather went to those institutions who really just sold diplomas. So this institutional isomorphism was coupled with a lot of diversification on the axis of quality and by the fact that **those who lowered quality were the most competitive** while the others were confronted with a lot of difficulties in coping with the financial burden or pressure of increasing staff salaries."* (Interviewee: M02; emphases added)

The above quote highlights that the student market pushed higher education institutions to lower their academic standards, while at the same time, the existing system of public financing was indifferent towards those institutions that tried to uphold or even improve their quality. In such a system, there were no incentives for universities to recognise and build distinctive missions. This model was described by one of the interviewees in the following way:

"The more programmes you have, the more money you get. The more students you have, the more money you get. The more research output you have, the more money and prestige you get." (Interviewee: M08).

Since all the institutions followed similar incentives they were more likely to adopt similar missions, despite the fact that there were large differences in their competitive positions. This led to the emergence of so called "fake research universities" that did not have the capacity to engage in serious research, but anyhow, defined themselves as universities (Interviewee: M05). Therefore, one of the expectations from the new policy was to isolate the weak performing universities and/or study programmes.

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"As a first step, those which are very low performing will no longer receive public money, even if they belong to state universities. In the second step they are annihilated, since they will no longer be accredited by ARACIS. But in the first step their public funding will be cut, but they can still do everything, just not with public money." (Interviewee: M01)

The adopted ranking and classification exercise was expected to identify these "fake research universities", many of which were established in smaller counties of Romania due to political interests. As reported by several interviewees, local politicians lobbied a lot on the national level to establish a university in their hometown, either to improve the status of that particular town or the public perception of that political party. In any case, these institutions often failed to live up to the name of a university.

"All those small cities or regions had universities, which were established by politicians out of prestige." (Interviewee: M02)

"Mircea Miclea wanted to get rid of this kind of fake universities, or as we say, degree mills. You got not only factories and other businesses in many cities, but also universities, because this gives prestige." (Interviewee: M08)

This proves that the intentions of the Romanian higher education policy went beyond incentivizing institutional performance by encouraging differentiation among universities. It was also expected from the policy to identify and crack down on institutions that could not meet some basic quality standards, a task, which was previously reserved for the accreditation procedure. In this regard, the policy outlined a couple of alternative solutions for universities that did not want to close their doors. They would have been pushed to make institutional adjustments by shutting down some of their study programmes, or by finding synergies with other universities (Interviewee: M07). Thus, one of the alternative routes weak performing universities could have taken was to merge with another university in order to reach a critical mass and improve the quality of its work. While the policy tried to encourage unification of institutions (as shown in the quote below), until 2013 only two such cases occurred (Curaj, Deca, and Hâj 2015).

"You [the university] are anyhow going to be faced with a shortage of students, so instead of keeping as many study programmes as you have now, you better merge with some other university. Join forces, increase your infrastructure, diminish some of the study programmes, and then you may survive. And we [the ministry] give you money for this merging." (Interviewee: M02; clarification added in brackets)

The policy also wanted to anticipate some future challenges. There was a strong belief that some universities will face serious financial problems in the near future due to declining student numbers. In order to prevent this, policy makers wanted to make universities aware of the fact that some programmes will have to be shut down. The ranking of study programmes could have assisted the university management in making such difficult decisions.

"We [the ministry] realized, when we looked at the demographic figures that by 2013 there will be a sharp demographic decline. So the demand for higher education will go down dramatically, but the number of institutions was high. So some of the universities will be very badly affected. Instead of making universities fight for resources, public or private, we wanted them to look for resources, which would better fit their mission or profile." (Interviewee: M02; clarification added in brackets)

The classification and ranking exercise was supposed to play an important role in identifying, but also justifying why some institutions might become underfunded, and consequently forced to close down, cut some of their study programmes or merge with another institution. In this regard, many feared that the policy's further implementation could endanger access to higher education, because the universities that would have been affected the most were often regional ones serving rural students who cannot afford to travel and live in major cities. This was one of the main criticisms regarding of the policies intention to sanction weak performing universities in Romania.

Another important expectation from the policy was to promote competition among higher education institutions. Not just any type of competition, but competition according to the criteria that were defined by the classification and ranking exercise. An interviewee closely involved in drafting the policy noted the following in this regard:

"I saw competition as a way to improve the quality all over the system." (Interviewee: M01)

Competition was to be strengthened by the fact that universities and their study programmes would be periodically re-evaluated. The best universities would try to maintain their position, while the weaker institutions would try to improve it. An important element of this rational was, that public funding would be related to the outcome of the evaluation process.

"If you are re-evaluated then you can lose your position and lose money. If you are better, then you receive more money. So that was the idea. The better you become, the more money you receive." (Interviewee: M01)

The outlined economic rationale assumes that competition in higher education works perfectly. However, the critics of this expectation argued that this is not true. In traditional markets, smaller organisations try to differentiate their products in order to gain a competitive advantage. In the Romanian case the classification and ranking exercise rewarded those institutions that could demonstrate high quality research. Trying alternative routes, like excellence in teaching, was not nearly as rewarding as improving research output; at least in terms of public funding. Universities classified as research intensive were supposed to receive additional public support, enabling them to maintain or improve their position, while institutions classified differently would be denied a portion of their public income, making it harder for them to improve research activities. These rules would have acted as barriers to competition in Romanian higher education.

"They [the ministry] thought that by providing incentives, rational incentives, they will encourage universities to perform better. It's a discussion whether the playfield was levelled. Because, how can a university in a poorer area compete with those in Bucharest? Universities in Bucharest have a long experience, tradition, resources. They can never reach the same level because the gap is already big." (Interviewee: M08; clarification added in brackets)

As presented by the above quote, universities operate in very different environments, which calls into question whether playing fields are equal. If this is not the case the policy could hardly achieve the level of competition policy makers were hoping for. Since the classification and ranking exercise was supposed to be linked to the amount of public funding its consequences would have been experienced differently by different institutions. Those, who

would be identified as "the best" institutions would receive more public funding enabling them to perform better. Better performance would assure their top position and to attract more students in the long run. On the other hand, low ranked universities would immediately be affected by a reduction in public funding, making much more difficult for them to improve their work, except if we can assumes that quality improvements do not relate to the amount of available funding.

Related to the need to foster institutional competition among Romanian universities was the policy expectation, which sought to achieve a better management of public money, primarily by concentrating public funding in the best institutions in terms of quality. For this purpose the ranking and classification exercise was expected to help universities identify their niche in the higher education market and develop it further with supplementary public funding.

"There is no quality culture inside the universities, and the cause of it is the extensive development of the university instead of an intensive development." (Interviewee: M01)

"So what they [universities] did was the following. They came each year in front of the public and said that this academic year we have 5 new disciplines, two new faculties, 16 new study programmes. Amazing! Without looking at the niches! Without looking at what's their strength! They didn't say: Let's cultivate our strength! Let's try to be the best in the world in that area! Not try to develop on the horizontal scale, but develop on the vertical scale. So they created a lot of study programmes, a lot of faculties, including some hilarious faculties" (Interviewee: M01; clarification added in brackets)

The concentration of public funding was also linked to broader ideas about **fairness**, **rationality**, and **global competitiveness**. Concerning the first aspect, many interviewees noted that it is not fair towards the public if its government provides equal funding to institutions which produce qualitatively different outcomes. A frequent example was the case of medicine, in which students take a national exam after graduation. The success rate of the students at this exam depends very much on the institutions they come from. Students who graduated at research-intensive universities tend to perform much better, then the ones from regional universities. This problem has been outlined by the following interviewee:

"The government gives the same amount of money to each university for a student, which is completely unfair. Why not give more money to those institutions that educate and train much better the students?" (Interviewee: M01)

"The [former minister], always said that he needs to prioritize public money by giving more to the best performing programmes, and he shouldn't waste money on poor performing programmes, because he has the responsibility of spending the public's money where it's the most productive." (Interviewee: M08; clarification added in brackets)

The second reasoning was based on rationality. Many domestic policy makers perceived the Romanian higher education system as evolving in a non-rational way. According to them, universities failed to identify their strengths and this could harm in the long term the overall quality of the system.

"We have a system which is diversified enough. What we are interested in is differentiation of universities. To see in which track each university stands a better chance of progressing. And we have to make them [universities] aware of this track. I mean, you might want to be an astronaut. You can have dreams, but you might not have the slightest chance. So you can't get any closer to that dream. So why don't you became a little bit more realistic about where you are and compare yourself with the others." (Interviewee: M02; clarification added in brackets)

The third reasoning for the concentration of public resources was based on the lack of international competitiveness of Romanian universities, and the struggle to make a few institutions stand out in the global higher education market. This concern is visible in the next quotes:

*"In the Shanghai ranking only a few European universities are on the top. The others are on average, just because they don't concentrate the resources. My impression is that **if you concentrate the resources you receive the same effect as in economy**. So if you concentrate the capital or resources in one place then you have an added value there. If you use the same capital but you spread the capital in several places you receive nothing."* (Interviewee: M01; emphases added)

*"In this country **you cannot have 102 universities on an internationally competitive level**. You cannot have! So we [the ministry] said, let's try to concentrate public money and resources in a few universities."* (Interviewee: M01; clarification added in brackets; emphases added)

The last identified expectation from the new higher education policy was to help employers and the students make better decisions when choosing a place to study or recruiting graduates. The information provided by the classification and the ranking exercise should have

corrected for some of the adverse market effects present in the Romanian higher education system (see discussion on page 220). However, some stakeholders had very mixed opinions about the ranking and classification exercise. Some, like the student unions, even opposed the idea.

"I discussed with the representatives of the students and they have been completely against the hierarchy of universities. At the beginning I was puzzled (...) and then they explained me why. They told me that if someone comes from a lower ranked university then that person will have fewer chances on the labour market. So they said, they didn't want to have different chances on the labour market. They wanted to be on the same level, doesn't matter what kind of university they came from." (Interviewee: M01; some parts of the text were left out intentionally)

Students were also eager to point out that the policy could undermine their mobility across different institutions. Their fear was based on the assumption that the best universities might become increasingly selective and even discriminatory towards students who come from lower ranked study programmes and who wish to continue their studies at a better institution.

Considering all the outlined expectations from the Romanian diversification policy, we can state that it was primarily developed to enhance the quality of the Romanian higher education system, by using transparency tools as means to differentiate institutions and study programmes. These differences could have been exploited (a) to identify weak performing institutions and force them to close down or alternatively merge with another institution, (b) to prevent possible financial problems in light of decreasing student numbers, (c) to promote competition between institutions based on a different set of criteria, (d) to concentrate public funding in the best institutions in order to become more competitive internationally, and (e) to provide information to future students and potential employers about the quality of universities. These expectations were supported by external conditions, which shaped the conceptualization of the policy. Certainly, policy makers were aware of the **economic problems** faced by the country, especially the scarcity of public resources, the **demographic problems** in terms of declining student numbers, the **failing market conditions**, which offered marginal incentives

for universities to invest in quality improvements, and the **unsuitable regulations** (i.e. quality assurance and accreditation) that made universities comply only with the minimum requirements instead of incentivizing them to perform better. This shows that while the idea of a diversification policy in Romania might have originated from a European policy narrative, it was at the same time localized to address the most urging problems of the country's higher education system. These problems related directly or indirectly to a broader policy concern, namely the poor quality of the Romanian higher education in a global comparison.

No country can afford to have mediocre higher education, or to finance mediocrity. These ideas guided Romanian policy makers who felt an obligation to increase the efficiency of their national higher education system. Since the previous reforms failed to deliver the expected qualitative improvements in Romanian higher education, the government introduced specific rules to incentivise institutions to perform better. That is, control over performance would have been exercised through a bureaucratic instrument (i.e. classification and ranking exercise) containing rigid indicators undermining the role of academic norms or market demand in shaping the activities of higher education institutions. For instance, student demand for a specific study programme or the academic tradition of a specific field of science were side-tracked by the evaluation exercise that favoured centrally defined and more-or-less universal performance criteria instead.

This proves that the higher education reform in Romania indeed planned to strengthen the influence of the state over higher education matters. It reaffirms an instrumentalist view of higher education where tight control mechanisms are replaced by precise rules for reward and punishment. Academic decision-making is demoted, because the criteria for quality and efficiency are externally defined and assessed through a national comparison. Moreover, the power of the state to exercise control over the appropriate mission of higher education institutions and the way that this control was to be exercised reassemble the characteristics of

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the sovereign state model described by Olsen (1988). While it is still possible to interpret the Romanian higher education reform as a move towards a minimalist state involvement, it would be a misleading view. As many of the interviewees outlined, the policy actually represented a more intense state control. This occurred in two ways: first, institution's performance would be assessed more frequently and in a more transparent manner, enabling the government to take immediate action against low performing institutions, but also justifying resource concentration in a few institutions. Secondly, it sought to evaluate institutional performance against indicators that were set by the government, and not necessarily by academics or other stakeholders such as students or regional authorities. These indicators were developed within a national context, but they also reflected international developments. The definition of indicators followed global examples of such instruments, and universities had to conform to global expectations concerning the quality of research and teaching. Thus, performance was assessed nationally, but according to rules and criteria that originated from outside, but were legitimized and strongly supported by the national government.

4.10. Summary

In this chapter I theorized that a European discursive idea, which concerns the need to diversify higher education, has successfully been taken over by the Romanian government. Although it appears that the policy failed in its implementation that does not discredit the causal process depicted in my analytical framework (see page 146). This process offers a plausible explanation for how European policy discourses relate to domestic policy change. Based on my empirical findings I am going to test whether all the stages of this process were present in the Romanian case.

First, I want to underscore that the Romanian diversification policy was very similar to the policy narrative that we observed on the European level (see chapter 3). The Romanian policy emerged out of a broader concern for the quality of the country's higher education

system and identified the growing homogeneity between institutions as one, if not the most important cause of the problem (see page 219). An identical causal link between competitiveness and institutional homogeneity has been establish by European narratives, which justify the implementation of diversification policies. Considering the policy solution promoted by the Romanian reforms, they resemble those of the European discourse as well. In this regard, the national policy sought to establish a hierarchy of institutions and programmes, despite claiming that institutional classes does not need to be qualitatively different. This corresponds to European arguments, which also stressed the importance of higher education stratification. Finally, considering the relationship between the measures promoted on a European level and the ones that have been implemented in the domestic context, we can only recognize a partial match. The European discourse emphasized the need for (a) increasing institutional autonomy, (b) strengthening managerialism at institutional level, (c) creating more transparency about institutional performance, and (d) aligning public funding to institutional performance. Out of these four, only the last two have been embraced fully by the domestic policy makers. The Romanian diversification policy supported the idea to implement a classification and ranking exercise and also was very much in favour of linking public funding to its outcome, however, did little to increase institutional autonomy or support the strengthening of managerialism at universities. Despite the fact that the policy did not follow entirely the European policy narrative, it was very much in line with how the idea was conceptualized (see Table 17).

Table 17: Comparison between the European policy narrative and the Romanian diversification policy

	European level	**National level**
Policy problem	Lack of competitiveness	Lack of competitiveness
Policy solution	Vertically stratified higher education systems	Vertically stratified higher education systems
Policy measures	- Institutional autonomy - Managerialism - Transparency of performance - Concentration of public funding	- Transparency of performance - Concentration of public funding

A number of interviewees confirmed also that the diversification policy, or more precisely the idea to introduce a national classification and ranking exercise, had a European origin. The following quotes illustrate that domestic policy makers were actively looking abroad for innovative policy ideas, but also trying to anticipate what the future trends might be concerning the development of higher education.

"To put such a project high on the agenda, you have to be crazy not to take into account all the inputs and all the ideas around." (Interviewee: M03)

"Because, those who designed the application of the law, who stipulated that we should constitute a ranking exercise and so on, they looked at what happened in Europe, what big things are happening in Europe, and also worldwide." (Interviewee: M08)

"So actually those who wrote the law, they borrowed these ideas from what was happening outside." (Interviewee: M08)

"We knew for instance about this ranking [U-Multirank]. We knew that that was coming. We knew that. I was involved from very beginning in that. And, so we had to anticipate that. Anyhow, Romanian universities are going to be involved. So we do it first. They [universities] learn it ahead of time, and then they position themselves within this ranking. So we wanted to anticipate some of the European developments, expecting that we can move faster." (Interviewee: M02; clarification added in brackets)

"That [diversification] was an idea of European origin." (Interviewee: M02; clarification added in brackets)

In addition, most of the key figures involved in the formulation of the policy were experts with a lot of international experience. The former education minister, Daniel Funeriu worked as a researcher in France and Germany. Professor Lazar Vlasceanu acted as Deputy

Director of UNESCO-CEPES between 1992 and 2007 and coordinated and implemented a large variety of projects related to higher education in Europe. Mircea Miclea, who in many ways directed the formulation of the new policy, had also extensive knowledge about European and global trends in higher education. Hence, they were reformist with a European vision. In this regard, one of the interviewee noted the following:

"And some of the people that really worked on the ranking and the classification were exposed to western European ideas. It was not a process born in Romania just like that. So these people went, or had their experience outside. Came back to Romania with it and tried to reform the system accordingly. So this is not a genuine idea." (Interviewee: M04)

The accounts of the interviewees testify that the key policy makers were well integrated into a network of European policy experts, which helped them to endorse elements of the European discourse on the diversification of higher education. This supports our initial hypothesis about the role of epistemic communities in the Romanian policy reform. I also assumed that there was a crisis in domestic policy making, which acted as a necessary but insufficient condition for a paradigm change. Evidence for such a crisis was little, but there were a couple of reference to a 'crisis'. Among others, the former president of the National Council for Higher Education Funding noted that there was a lack of vision for higher education. Based on a similar perception UEFISCDI assumed the necessity to conduct a foresight project concerning the development of the Romanian higher education system. Elements of the crisis can also be found in the strong emphasis on the lack of quality in Romanian higher education that were continuously expressed by all interviewees. These two perceptions combined created the space, for a new policy paradigm to emerge. The new paradigm looked at the high level of homogeneity between institutional missions, and the way this homogeneity created unfair advantages for those that were undermining the quality of higher education, as a major problem. Slowly, as this paradigm became widespread among domestic policy makers it resulted in a specific policy outcome, namely the Romanian diversification policy.

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The next step in the analytical process assumed that members of the epistemic community acquired important roles or positions in the domestic policy context so to have the power to implement the specific policy outcome. These actors have occupied various positions between 2007 and 2011, but their most important meeting point was the Presidential Commission. Membership in this organisation enabled them to elaborate the new higher education policy without much political disturbance. They maintained very good relationships with the heads of almost all relevant public authorities, which helped them to circulate their normative beliefs about the value and importance of higher education diversification more broadly. During my fieldwork, I encountered scepticism towards these beliefs only from the former president of ARACIS, while other relevant organisations were highly supportive towards the work of the Presidential Commission. Eventually, strong arguments have been developed in favour of higher education diversification, which persuaded both the Ministry of Education, the political parties, the trade unions, and many individual higher education institutions, that such a policy would be beneficial for the overall system. This broad consensus (which was physically inscribed into the National Pact for Education) gave the green light for a diversification of higher education to be operationalized in the 2011 Law on Education. This confirms that all aspects of the casual chain link up, with evidence underpinning every stage in the process (see Table 18).

Table 18: Causal mechanism depicting the development of a diversification policy in the case of Romania with empirical evidence

X1 Independent variable	X2 Independent variable	Necessary but insufficient condition (contextual condition)	M1	M2	M3	5 – Dependent variable
European organisations	Epistemic communities	Domestic policy actors	Epistemic communities	Epistemic communities	Domestic policy actors	Domestic policy actors
The European discourse about the diversification of higher education gets constructed	Domestic experts internalize elements of the European discourse	Dissatisfaction with previous approaches to higher education policy (i.e. crisis)	Position themselves as relevant policy actors in the domestic policy context	Promote the European discourse as a necessary policy direction	Perceive the policy direction as the most beneficial one.	Integrate elements of the European discursive idea into the Law on National Education
The European Commission acted as a strong advocate of higher education diversification.	The same justification, problem definition, and policy measures were promoted by a number of Romanian higher education experts, as the ones outlined on a European level.	There was a strong conviction that the quality of Romanian higher education is low, and that previous reforms failed to address this issue.	Individual members of the epistemic community were associated to different national councils, independent organisations, as well as governmental bodies.	Diversification of the Romanian higher education appeared as a necessary policy direction first in documents produced by an organisation in which members of the epistemic community had a strong presence (i.e. Presidential Commission)	Representatives of the government and different organisations supported the idea of diversification, which manifested in their signature of the National Pact for Education, containing the basic elements of the policy reform.	In 2011 the new Law on Education came into force, detailing the steps of higher education diversification.

The thesis supports the claim that Romanian policy makers acted according to the logic of appropriateness. Since the country joined the European Union, there was a strong feeling that it has to endorse European policy directions. However, it would be somewhat misleading to assume that Romania only followed international policy recommendations in the area of higher education. In many ways, Romanian policy makers wanted to become opinion leaders in higher education policy. During the Bologna Ministerial Conference in Bucharest in 2012, Romania supported a set of key ideas, including the diversification of higher education, and by that tried to upload its own national policy priorities into European processes (Curaj, Deca, and

Hâj 2015). However, the policy, which was very much in line with the broader European discourse on higher education diversification, was itself in the process of being altered (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Zulean, et al. 2012). Considering that it was rather short-lived, suggests that we should look at it as an experiment, which ultimately failed.

Conclusion

The aim of the concluding chapter is to synthesize the findings of the previous analytical chapters into a coherent argument that explains the policy rationale for supporting the diversification of higher education, both nationally and internationally. First, we have to acknowledge that during the past fifteen years higher education has been regarded as a fertile ground for policy experimentation in Europe. This trend was by and large driven by transnational trends, such as the Bologna Process, which acted as a positive example of European cooperation in the area of higher education. Perhaps one of the main consequences of the emerging European Higher Education and Research Area has been the harmonization of different national systems. This process, which is still enduring, is likely going to create structural pressures that could force institutions to become more alike in the long run. This is an expected outcome that accompanies every political effort to create a single organisational field with harmonized rules, consolidated resources, and tighter organisational relationships.

The convergence of national higher education systems in Europe naturally raises the question how differences between organisational types, profiles and statuses will be affected by this process. In the second chapter of my dissertation I looked at possible explanations for organisational convergence within an increasingly integrated European higher education system. While the scholarly literature on policy transfer, diffusion and convergence can explain the growing similarity of institutional arrangements across Europe and might even point to the dominance of one specific model for organizing higher education systems, it fails to capture the developments on the organisational level, and neither does it consider the choices that higher education organisations are faced with. Therefore, building on the organisational theory literature, I devised an explanatory model, which predicts that the structuration of a European higher education system will create homogenizing pressures that manifest themselves in different forms of isomorphism. Regulations, which act as catalyst for coercive isomorphism,

seek to create stability within the new European higher education system. The price of such stability is that some aspects of diversity could be reduced, so that national differences do not undermine the overall functioning of the organisational field. Beside regulations, the interactions of organisations are also important sources of isomorphism, be those competitive (for European resources) or cooperative (for defining a joint meaning). These assumptions suggest that the continued structuration of the EHEA and ERA can result in the loss of external diversity if:

- it leads to the establishment of compulsory rules for organisational behaviour;

- it encourages competition for resources under similar conditions;

- it legitimizes an integrated professional identity.

Besides pinpointing the sources for organisational convergence in higher education, the developed explanatory model can be also used for establishing guidelines for mitigating such pressures. The blueprint of diversification policies often involves the revision of existing rules, resources and relationships between organisations, which are the three structural elements of any organisational field. For example, new rules might be adopted that would regulate which organisations can engage in certain activities; new funding mechanisms could be endorsed that use different criteria for certain types of institutions; and distinct professional norms could emerge that would be different from the traditional academic roles. Based on the propositions of the model, we know that diversification policies are more likely to be successful if they promote the separation of options from which individual organisations can choose. In case of the contrary, such policies might just promote one organisational model instead of the other. For example, providing additional support for research intensive organisations might actually contribute more to mimetic isomorphism than to diversification. It will signal to organisations that the expected organisational behaviour follows a strong research engagement and motivate

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them to shift their priorities towards it. Therefore, based on the devised explanatory model, I recommend that diversification policies should seek to:

- establish different rules for different profiles of institutions,

- broaden the types of funding opportunities,

- support alternative professional norms and values.

Presently, it appears as many of these recommendations are ignored by current European policy narratives that support the diversification of higher education. As outlined in chapter 3, the already diverse EHEA with its universities, universities of applied science, institutes of technology, grandes écoles, business schools, engineering schools, colleges of higher education, professional schools, polytechnics, academies, and so on, is likely to be further diversified first and foremost on a vertical scale leading to increased organisational stratification. Quality, measured essentially by the research performance and global appeal of higher education institutions, is constructed as a trait of the "few" that is first identified and then developed. This belief set the ground for the introduction of several European policy measures to encourage institutional differentiation. The main European policy assumption is that once given the **necessary freedom**, **right information**, **required managerial skills**, and **appropriate incentives**, higher education institutions are likely to differentiate their activities to satisfy societal and political demands for greater excellence (be it in the area of research or teaching). The following blueprint intends to visualize the mentioned aspects of the discourse, whereby the application of the depicted policy measures is likely to result in the projected solution, which in turn is expected to address the perceived policy problem.

Table 19: The construction of the discourse about the diversification of higher education

Productivity of the discourse (Policy measures)	Institutional autonomy + Managerialism + Transparency of performance + Concentration of public funding
Play of practice (Policy solution)	**= Vertically diversified higher education systems**
Signification of the discourse (Policy problem)	**= Competitiveness**

The policy recommendations I outlined before suggest that diversification policies are more likely to be successful if they establish different rules of operation for different institutions, if they broaden the range of available funding opportunities, and if they support alternative professional norms and values. However, when contrasted with the observed policy measures promoted by the European Commission it becomes apparent that many of these expectations are not addressed. It remains unclear what kind of rules should be devised by Member States for institutions with different types, profiles and statuses and neither is it explained how such measures can reinforce distinctive academic norms and values within a diversified higher education system. Concerning the second proposition, the intention of the European Commission to provide targeted funding for institutions that demonstrate excellent performance, might be considered as a form of broadening of the available type of funding opportunities. Nevertheless, the present European policy recommendations would still need to be fine-tuned to encompass also the other two conditions in order to mitigate successfully the forces of organisational isomorphism.

The case of Romania offered a perfect example for studying the possible implications diversification policies might entail. As proven in chapter 4, the national higher education

reform was advanced by rationalist policy makers[74] who were not just inspired by a transnational idea, but also tried to implement some of the policy measures promoted under the banner of the European diversification discourse. Romanian policy makers strongly believed that the use of transparency tools is needed to facilitate comparison of institutional performance, but also to legitimize a new approach to higher education funding. Consequently, a classification and ranking instrument was implemented to determine the profile of the universities in the country, by exploring in which area they are performing well. Additionally, the policy also sought to align the existing funding model to the assessment's results in order to incentivize better institutional performance in the future. This proves, that the new higher education policy in Romania related to universities mainly as "machines", which need to be efficient and steered towards optimal productivity[75]. Transparency tools were clearly built on this idea, since they measure the work of each university, as does any management system in a company, and provide clear production targets. However, in reality higher education institutions are much more than machines. They are also political entities caught up in power struggles of different politicians that are often closely affiliated to one of them. The political nature of the university also reflects the variety of interests within the institution itself or in the larger system. Last but not least, higher education institutions are also cultural entities with a well-established system of norms and habits that clearly define what appropriate behaviour is and what is not. These often unwritten rules together with the political interests of the organisation challenge the notion of machines, as they make universities less bendable towards the productivionist logic. Consequently, any effort to boost competitiveness by introducing measures that evaluate productivity hits on the already well-established political and cultural

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[74] According to Oakeshott (1967), rationalist policy makers bow down only to the authority of reason. They believe that social structures can be optimized based on rational considerations, which reassembles the work of an engineer, who takes precise measurements and based on that develops and implements the most appropriate technique (Oakeshott 1967).

[75] The example is taken from Gareth Morgan's metaphors concerning organisations (Morgan 1986).

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side of the organisation, which can easily result in policy failure (Meyer and Scott 1983). In the case of Romania the political and cultural resistance of universities against the extensive use of transparency tools proved to be too large. This drove the new government to abandon the policy shortly after its initial start, which also meant that the policy never fulfilled the transformative effect envisaged for it.

In the case of Romania it is hard to reconcile the concern for diversity with a rigid list of institutional types, which was imposed in a swift and top-down fashion that undermined the institutions' capacity to make strategic choices about their future missions (Andreescu, Gheorghiu, Proteasa, et al. 2012). Hence, the Romanian experience teaches us that diversification policies can mean much more than simply creating a larger variety of excellent institutions. They can also act to change the underlying values that drive these institutions by making rewards (public funding) contingent on performance. That is to say, without outstanding performance no, or just limited, public funding can be expected. Thus, the central issue in the Romanian diversification policy was a moral one that intended to establish a new hierarchy of values, where performance was supposed to be the new doctrine, replacing the idea that quality is equal to the number of students an institution can attract. Based on these arguments, I can conclude that policies, which utilize the idea of diversification are rarely confined to the objective of creating diversity in the system. Rather, they focus on making existing differences more visible and because of that, they can offer a justification to governments for differentiated public funding, usually favouring those universities that could be more competitive on a global scale. Therefore, the diversification of higher education might be considered as a discursive strategy to disguise intentions to reform higher education funding.

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Appendix 1

Type	Name	In Folder	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
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PDF	BFUG_Bologna Process Revisited_Future of the EHEA (2015)	Internals	12/5/2015 1:57 PM	NS	12/6/2015 4:22 PM	NS
PDF	BFUG_Bologna Secretariat Report from Bergen to London (2007)	Internals	12/5/2015 1:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 1:24 PM	NS
PDF	BFUG_EHEA in global context (2009)	Internals	12/5/2015 3:31 PM	NS	12/5/2015 3:31 PM	NS
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PDF	London Communique (2007)	Internals	12/5/2015 1:18 PM	NS	12/5/2015 1:18 PM	NS
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Appendix 2

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PDF	COM 208 (2006) Delivering on the modernisation agenda	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 477 (2010) Youth on the move	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 479 (2006) Reccommendation on EQF	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 481 (2006) Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 487 (2009) Report on progress in quality assurance in higher education	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 499 (2013) European Higher Education in the World	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 546 (2010) Innovation Union	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 567 (2011)_Supporting growth and jobs_an agenda for the modernisation of	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS

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PDF	Europes higher education systems						
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PDF	COM 6 (2000) Towards a European Research Area	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 61 (2007) A framework for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives (2007)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 620 (2004) Report on the implementation of quality assurance	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 669 (2012) Rethinking Education	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 669 (2012) Rethinking Education. Investing in skills for better socio economic outcomes	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 680 (2008) Modernising Universities for Europes competitiveness in a global knowledge economy	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 682 (2010) An agenda for new skills and jobs	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS

PDF	COM 77 (2006) Developing a knowledge flagship_The European Institute of Technology	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	COM 779 (2002) Investing efficiently in education	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	SEC 1063 (2011) Supporting growth and jobs_an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	SEC 1161 (2010) Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative - Innovation Union	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
PDF	The contribution of the European Commission to the Bologna Process (2007)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:24 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:25 PM	NS
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Appendix 3

Type	Name	In Folder	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
PDF	Conclusions on A reinforced European research area (2012)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/6/2015 4:24 PM	NS
PDF	Conclusions on Innovation Union for Europe (2010)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusion on developing the role of education in a knowledge triangle (2009)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusion on education and training in Europe 2020 (2012)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusion on establishing a European area of research and innovation (2000)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusion on mobilising the brainpower of Europe (2005)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusion on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness (2007)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusion on strategic framework for European	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS

PDF	cooperation in education and training (2009)					
PDF	Council conclusion on the role of education and training in the implementation of Europe 2020 (2011)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusion on the social dimension of education and training (2010)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusion the internationalisation of higher education (2010)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council Conclusions on investing in education and training (2013)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Council conclusions on the modernisation of higher education (2011)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS
PDF	Recommendation on further European cooperation in quality assurance (2006)	Internals	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS	12/5/2015 4:28 PM	NS

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