4. UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN POLAND AND UKRAINE

Institutional Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the modes of governance of public sectors have undergone substantial changes in most of the Western European countries (e.g. Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2004; de Boer et al., 2010). These public sector wide changes were in many cases inspired and driven by the principles of ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) that can be viewed as one of the global models of world society (Pollitt, 1990). This shift has also influenced public sector policies in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (Antonowicz & Simonová, 2006; Zgaga et al., 2013). We know that NPM has many faces (Hood, 1991) and that forms, timing and outcomes significantly vary from country to country (Kehm & Lanzendorf, 2006; Paradeise et al., 2009). This also applies to Polish and Ukrainian higher education, where reforms have taken place with the intention of transforming their higher education systems in order to align them more with European higher education systems.

We have chosen Poland and Ukraine as two CEE countries with, at first sight, a common socialist past but with a different present. Nowadays, Poland is a developed country that became an EU member in 2004, while Ukraine, having undergone two revolutions in 2004 and 2013–2014, is only striving for EU membership and is lagging behind in economic progress.

In this research, we will focus on one specific public sector, namely higher education, and more particularly on changes in higher education governance in these two countries. The key question addressed in this chapter, therefore, is how the models of university governance in Poland and Ukraine have changed since 1990 through the diffusion of the global model of NPM and how differences and similarities in these patterns of change in governance can be explained. To answer these questions, we will use insights from historical and sociological institutionalism. Historical institutionalism, in particular the concept of path dependence, emphasizes ‘historical sequences in which contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains’ (Mahoney, 2000, p. 507). Sociological institutionalism provides
a useful perspective for exploration of the impact of a world society on shaping the structure and behavior of the nation-states (Meyer, 2010). The combination of these two approaches of neo-institutionalism allows us to explore the institutional phenomenon from different perspectives and can strengthen our understanding of the policy making process in higher education (Dobbins, 2015; Dobbins & Knill, 2009; Nicholson, 1998). Thus, our study aims to address the void in empirical research about policy making in higher education governance applying institutional analysis that is based both on historical and sociological institutionalism.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONALISM

Historical and sociological institutionalism can be considered as complementary approaches, which allow the exploration of institutional development from a variety of perspectives (Nichols, 1998; see also Dobbins, 2015). Historical institutionalism views this development as incremental and path dependent (Krasner, 1989; Steinmo & Thelen, 1992; Pierson, 2000). As historical developments are path dependent, the choices that are made affect future possibilities (Krasner, 1988). The early historical events are viewed as contingent occurrences, which are of primary importance for the final outcome of the sequence. Within the framework of path dependence, two main types of sequences are defined: self-reinforcing and reactive (Mahoney, 2000). In historical institutionalism change is explained by critical junctures that punctuate historical events, creating branching points for the establishment of a new path (Gourevitch, 1986). Change occurs because actors can act strategically within the historically shaped institutional context. Simultaneously, while actors constitute institutions, institutions themselves are also an outcome of agency action. In such processes of institution-moulding or institution-construction, struggles among actors are inbuilt into them, leading to both intended and unintended outcomes (Hay & Wincot, 1998). The abilities of actors to influence institutions are restricted by asymmetric distribution of knowledge about institutions and access to resources (Hay & Wincot, 1998). Mahoney (2000) explains institutional reproduction through a power-based approach, according to which institutions at the same time offer an advantage to one group of actors and disadvantage others, which leads to conflict of interest and promotes incremental change.

Where historical institutionalism is eclectic in nature and combines both calculus and cultural approaches, sociological institutionalism is mainly based on the cultural approach (Hall & Taylor, 1996). World society theory, generated by sociological institutionalism (Meyer et al., 1997) addresses the issue of the impact of global institutions as ‘cultural models’ or ‘models of actorhood’ on shaping the behavior, identities and structure of the nation-states, organizations and individuals worldwide (Meyer, 2000, 2010). World society theory considers the nation-state as being culturally embedded and constructed (Meyer, 1999; Meyer et al., 1997; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) and the culture involved is built on a worldwide basis.