Refocusing the Debate on Diversity in Higher Education

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Keywords

Abstract

This article gives an overview of the key concepts and values which structure current policy debates on diversity. On the basis of the results of the author's recent comparative study on approaches to institutional diversity in five different European higher education systems, the normative values which underpin more vertical or horizontal diversity approaches are analysed to reveal that institutional diversity is not always seen as unconditionally positive seen, as is often assumed. The author analyses the shortcomings of a primary focus on external diversity in policy approaches, arguing that key institutional challenges and the complexity of the forces at play in influencing institutional diversity are overlooked if the focus is limited to institutional profiles when describing the diversity of a higher education system.

Introduction

Responding to the growing demands of knowledge societies, higher education institutions are expected to fulfil an expanding range of roles and tasks well beyond the traditional functions of teaching and research. Higher education institutions are supposed to adapt their offer so as to allow an increasing proportion of an age cohort to access higher education and to cater also to those that return to higher education from the professional world to update their knowledge and broaden their range of competences. They are supposed to contribute to business innovation and knowledge transfer by providing relevant graduate competences and research collaboration. They are supposed to conduct research that may feed into regional and national core sectors as well to an increasingly fierce international competition. And, last not least, they are supposed to raise interest and understanding among citizens for the opportunities, implications and challenges posed by new global developments. In general, higher education activities should reflect regional anchoring and commitment as well as international orientation and market prowess. In view of stagnating higher education budgets, many higher education representatives observe that no institution can possibly do justice to such a wide array of demands. Indeed, to avoid "mission stretch" (Scott 2007), spreading institutional efforts too thinly over too wide a gamut of activities, institutional leaders and policy makers are increasingly pushing for a diversity of institutional profiles which would allow for more institutional coherence and efficiency. Under the heading of "institutional diversity", the need for diverse

profiling of higher education institutions has become a new focus of national and European policy debates.[1] "Diversity" in this context is synonymous to "differentiation" and would be discussed under the latter heading in an American higher education discourse where diversity is reserved for the composition of an institution's student body or staff with respect to its ethnic, religious or gender variety.

Higher education institutions (HEI) find themselves caught in a web of contradictory forces and conflicting calls from academics, students and stakeholder groups. On the one hand, they are have to live up to the challenge of international competition, where narrowly measured institutional reputation has become a key asset for attracting students and researchers. On the other, they are to respond to the wide range of expectations of their regional and national knowledge societies. Such conflicts and ambivalent institutional choices are also reflected in the conflicting approaches to institutional diversity at macro-level where policy makers, regulators and funding agencies choose different ways of promoting a particular range of tasks to be fulfilled by HEIs, sometimes targeting some types of institutions more than other, in other cases addressing them indiscriminately. To understand the different national approaches to institutional diversity, and as an introduction to the theme of institutional diversification in this volume, the following article reviews some key concepts and normative pre-conceptions of the European debates on institutional diversity, analyses values attached to different dimensions of institutional diversity in a range of European countries (section 1) and explores the forces which influence institutional behaviour (section 2). Finally, some key distinctions, which have structured research and policy discussions of institutional diversity, will be re-evaluated.

The analysis is based on a recent comparative study conducted by the author for EUA (Reichert 2009, called the EUA diversity study henceforth) which explored the values, conditions and methods with which higher education systems and institutions in England, France, Norway, Slovakia, and Switzerland promote or undermine institutional diversity. In competing for limited resources with other institutions, and in responding to their key stakeholders and to their own norms and values, institutions (or units within them) prioritise those dimensions that they feel will most easily provide access to resources and other rewards. Quite often, such institutional choices may increase homogeneity rather than diversity, even in those countries where explicit diversity policies and instruments exist. The study showed how such choices are brought about by the array of conflicting reward structures at system and institutional level. Unlike most previous literature on institutional diversity or diversification, which often take the term as a positive value that any higher education system should pursue, such value judgements become the object of inquiry in the study, revealing interesting divergences within systems and institutions. The study also differs from previous literature on institutional diversity in taking a broad view of a whole range of aspects of diversity, rather than just focusing on one aspect of institutional diversity and tracing changes over time. Values, policies and implementation measures are compared at system and institutional level, with special focus on tensions and inconsistencies in approaches to institutional diversity, in particular between explicit policies and funding instruments. The data sources of the study comprised an online survey of institutions of all types (from research intensive internationally visible universities to regionally oriented more purely professionally oriented higher education institutions) in the five countries (with return rates ranging from 33% to 70% of the public higher education sectors) as well as in-depth interviews of with higher education representatives with different functions at national and institutional levels, including institutional leaders, academic staff, presidents and general secretaries of rectors conferences, directors of quality assurance agencies, funding authorities and research councils.

1. Diversity Concepts and Values

1.1 Dimensions of Diversity

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[1] In an American higher education policy or research context, similar discussions would be termed institutional differentiation instead, while institutional diversity would be associated with staff or student profile. In contrast, there does not seem to be much of a national debate or widespread concern regarding institutional differentiation, given the highly diverse higher education landscape and funding sources.

To put the current European higher education policy debates into perspective, it should be noted that the term institutional diversity or diversification is most often used rather restrictively, referring, firstly only to external diversity, i.e. the divergent profiles of higher education institutions, rather than the diversity which institutions have to address within their institutional boundaries (internal diversity). Secondly, European diversity discussions most often refer to diversity of missions, which is understood to signify the varying institutional emphases on particular types of higher education activity, such as research, teaching, innovation or continuing education. Curiously, other possible dimensions of mission and institutional identity are not discussed under the heading of mission diversity or mission stretch.

Currently, the most prominent preoccupation with mission diversity concerns the intensity and form of research engagement as a criterion for institutional differentiation. This concern has gained urgency in recent years with the rise of international rankings since the latter focus primarily on measurable research activities which are registered in internationally accepted data sources (Hazelkorn 2009, Rauhvargers 2011). The mono-dimensionality of this research orientation has given rise to intense discussions but not yet led to more differentiated approaches to mission diversity (see also Hazelkorn's article in this book). There is a growing number of institutions, however, which define their missions well beyond the rhetoric of research intensity even though they would describe themselves as research intensive and teaching, e.g. highlighting their teaching or curricular approaches, such as Maastricht University in the Netherlands or Jacobs University or Leuphana University in Germany. Moreover, the self-confidence of institutions which see themselves as research-oriented in alternative ways, e.g. more responsive to regional needs and business innovation concerns, is on the rise in some national contexts where sufficient symbolic and financial incentives have been set, as for example in Finland or the Swiss Fachhochschul sector. The transparency instruments such as U-map and its relatives in Norway and Estonia (see Kaiser's and Skodvin's articles in this book) have been designed to reveal the diversity of institutions also in different functional respects to ensure that institutional engagement in functions that have not gained sufficient attention in public or policy debates are receiving a new prominent data-based recognition. The hope is that they would also serve as a basis on which more differentiated financial incentives could be designed so as to promote more diverse forms of excellence orientation.

Another differentiating dimension that has receded into the background in the last two decades consists in institutions' regional orientation. This dimension of institutional diversity was a prominent concern in the wave of institutional expansion in the seventies and eighties all over Europe. After the fall of the iron curtain, the expansion of higher education systems in Eastern Europe has also valued regional distribution as a key criterion for institutional diversification, as documented in the Slovak case study of the EUA study as well as the Slovak research system evaluation of 2008. More recently, the regional role of higher education institutions and concurrent need for diversification has been highlighted in a major OECD study (OECD 2008) as well as in the EUA study on knowledge regions (Reichert 2006). With the shift of attention to internationally visible research as a politically wanted criterion for institutional differentiation, regional distribution seemed to have receded from policy attention. Political attention is focussed on critical mass and concentration of resources rather than on regional distribution. However, recently, an interesting new development can be observed where regional cooperation between HEI and other research institutes, enterprises, NGOs or other public interest organisations is increasingly highlighted as a comparative advantage in research funding selection criteria for project grants. Likewise political actors voice concerns regarding an increasing perceived bias toward internationally oriented fundamental research to the detriment of national and regional educational and innovation aims, e.g. the German Science Council (Wissenschaftsrat 2011) in its recent recommendations on institutional differentiation.

Other dimensions of diversity could concern the composition of academic and administrative staff or of the student body. This is the key concern with diversity in the US, resulting in diversity offices and diversity management. In the comparison of the five European countries of the EUA study, this dimension of diversity was shown to have only played a significant role among policy makers and institutional leaders in England. Likewise, student selection is a criterion of differentiation that plays a large role in some countries, such as the US and England, while it is currently of only minor importance as a differentiating feature among institutions in others, such Norway, Switzerland or Germany. Interestingly, in these systems where secondary school diplomas

give theoretically widespread free access and even right of access to higher education institutions, institutional methods of selecting students are also on the rise wherever they are legally possible, e.g. at the level of graduate education or for certain subjects that are in high demand. Nevertheless, given the internal differentiation of institutions in these systems, the degree of selectivity with which students are admitted is still not regarded as one of the primary characteristics of institutions, as it would be in the US where College guides or rankings group institutions according to this criterion.

Last not least, institutions could be and often are differentiated on the basis of perceived quality differences with respect to overall research or teaching performance. These judgements are sometimes based on national evaluations, such as the Research Assessment Exercise and National Student Survey in England or the ARRA reports in Slovakia, but are also often based on partial or reputational data, as is the case in some rankings. While partly corroborated through data on some aspects of institutional performance, such summative judgements are often based on subjective perceptions and reputation. Some rankings, such as US News and World Report and Times Higher Education Supplement Ranking use reputation explicitly as a criterion of ranking institutions, ignoring the tautological error thus committed (US News &World Report) or implicitly through their peer review scores (former Times Higher Education Supplement Ranking) where "experts" in a particular field are asked to pass judgements on whole institutions, i.e. on performance well beyond their field of expertise, thus having to refer to their own subjective impressions and familiar institutional reputations (Rauhvargers 2011). With the various excellence initiatives in continental Europe, quality or institutional performance differentiation is also gaining ground in national funding schemes.

Table 1: Dimensions of diversity

Institutional size	Usually described in terms of student numbers, also number of academic staff and support staff. Budget volume or third party funding is also sometimes used to differentiate institutional volume
Subject profile	From comprehensive universities, covering all subject groups, to universities with only groups of subhects (e.g. technical universities) or specialised single subject higher education institutions (e.g. management schools).
Emphases on types of activity	Conducting curiosity-driven research, identifying new problems and challenges Conducting application-driven research, in collaboration with external partners Contributing to social and economic innovation and addressing societal challenges Teaching the next generation, forming subject-specific and transferable competences to succeed in a wide variety of working lives and in different biographical phases Continuing education and professional development, updating of knowledge and skills Education citizens and providing informed discussion platforms for citizens on issues of public concern
Teaching approaches and methodologies	Variety of teaching methodologies from traditional lectures to interactive incl. project-based learning, student-centered learning Distance and blended learning
Student clienteles	Different student profiles (school leavers, mature students, students of different ethnic, national and social backgrounds, professional part-time learners, adult education for citizens)
Student selectiveness	From highly selective to non-selective in student admissions. Used as an institutional differentiating criteria in the US and England.
Regional distribution	Distribution of higher education institutions across the national system, as motors of regional development, incl. responsiveness to regionally relevant sectors
Target communities/ stakeholder orientation	Orientation toward 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, regionally, nationally or globally.

Reputation/ Quality standards	Implicit or explicit judgements of the overall quality of research and teaching of an institution as conveyed in summary rankings, implying a stratified system, as for example in the English RAE and National Student Survey in England, or the CHE Excellence Ranking in Germany.

1.2 Diversity values

Not only the quality dimension of institutional diversity implies value judgements. The varying prominence of a particular dimension in policy attention and funding schemes reflects that all dimensions are subject to culturally and historically bound value judgements.

From the beginnings of a diversity discussion in higher education, the term diversity has been valued positively. It was associated with adaptive behaviour toward environmental conditions, comparable to the dynamics of biological populations, which is often used as a basic analogy for the investigation of diversity in higher education (Birnbaum 1983, Huisman 1995). Using the analogy of adaptive behaviour of populations, Birnbaum provides a first list of arguments in favour of diversity that many later studies have adopted and built upon. According to Birnbaum, institutional diversity within a higher education system is a normative value since it allows it to:

1. meet students' needs
2. provide opportunities for social mobility
3. meet the needs of different labour markets (with an increasing variety of specialisations)
4. serve the political needs of interest groups
5. combine elite and mass higher education (cf. also Trow 1979)
6. increase the level of higher education institutions' effectiveness
7. offer opportunities for experimenting with innovation in a few institutions, thus limiting the high risks connected to the failure of such an experiment

Most studies and policy approaches to institutional diversity in higher education have espoused this positive value attached to diversity and have linked it to the positive performance of a higher education system (Huisman 1995 and 2000; Meek, Goedegebuure et al. 1996; Van Vught 2008). Only few researchers have attempted to present institutional diversity more critically by analysing conflicting motivations and forces of convergence and divergence in higher education systems (Kivinen and Rinne 1996) or pointing to additional systemic features which are needed in order to ensure the responsiveness of HE systems (Neave 2000, Douglass 2004, Guri-Rosenblit, Sebkova and Teichler 2007, Teichler 2008).

In contrast to the majority of studies on institutional diversity, this author's study for EUA made the values associated with institutional diversity themselves an object of inquiry. Taking a closer look at the normative dimension of national approaches to institutional diversity, a comparison of the five countries investigated reveals, first of all, that institutional diversity is not valued positively without exception or without any conditions attached in any national context. The high level of diversity of institutional types in France, for example, is felt by many policy makers and institutional representatives to produce a lack of transparency for users and high degree of fragmentation. In most countries, diversity of institutional types or profiles seems to be valued positively only if it goes hand in hand with sufficient transparency as regards the definition of access criteria to different institutional types or profiles, as well as with sufficient flexibility, cooperation and exchange between the different types of institution. Indeed, three of the five countries (England, Norway and Switzerland) have paid considerable attention in recent years to improving flexibility and mobility between institutional types. This is the case for the transition from so-called Foundation degrees to university degrees in England and for transfer from University Colleges or Fachhochschulen in Norway and Switzerland. Moreover, to prevent institutional diversity from leading to fragmentation, wasteful duplication and unexploited synergies or economies of scale, most national systems have introduced incentives to promote cooperation in teaching and research between HEIs. In institutionally diverse contexts cooperation is meant to achieve several aims at once:

- to exploit the complementarity of diverse institutional profiles with respect to disciplines, functional emphases and student and staff profiles,

- to increase flexibility by facilitating recognition and transfer between institutions for students and staff,

- to share costly infrastructures and cost-intensive research. With rising science costs, the latter concern is becoming a key issue for national funding agencies, regional ministries or development agencies, which promote inter-institutional cooperation arrangements to justify development of major research emphases and to ensure sufficient critical mass and international visibility.

A widely discussed example of the alignment of institutional diversity and inter-institutional cooperation can be observed in the French introduction of the PRES (*Pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*), in which institutions of different profiles are grouped together at regional level to exploit complementary expertises and share research investments and infrastructures (such as Doctoral schools or major research facilities). Cooperation is also a key concern of policy makers and funding agencies in Switzerland where substantial research funds have been made available to encourage inner-Swiss cooperation in areas with high scientific or innovative potential. Support for Doctoral schools is made available on the condition of inter-institutional cooperation in order to facilitate complementary research portfolios and critical mass. In Slovakia, inter-institutional cooperation has become a concern with respect to the relations between universities and the institutes of the Academy of Sciences, with new funding instruments developed to promote closer links. Only in England does inter-institutional cooperation not seem to be a prominent policy issue. Only at some research councils, some research funds have been made available for cooperative research infrastructures. However, industry has called for more efforts to complement institutional diversity through closer inter-institutional cooperation (CIHE 2003).

In this context, the recent Excellence Initiatives in Germany and France are also a good case in point. While the Excellence Initiatives are designed to promote internationally oriented research capacity, selecting particularly research intensive institutions for prioritised support and thus fostering vertical differentiation in the system, both funding programmes also emphasise cooperative structures between research intensive universities and other types of institutions, be they public research institutes outside of the university sector (Max Planck or Helmholtz in the German case or the CNRS institutes in the French one) or other higher education institutions in the region that are not primarily research-driven (e.g. the PRES regional pole cooperation in the French context).

Hence the value of institutional diversity is increasingly being linked to the value of inter-institutional cooperation, creating structures that soften the rigidity of inter-institutional boundaries and making HE system internally more osmotic and synergistic.

Functional diversity as priority

The largest transnational consensus with respect to institutional diversity values concerns the desirability of functional diversity, i.e. varying emphases on the different functional dimensions of HE activities, such as research, teaching, services aiming at business innovation or continuing professional development. Such functional diversity is also the focus on most public debates on mission diversity in recent years. At system level, judgements and choices diverge considerably not only with respect to the overall distribution of functional emphases but also as to how big the mission overlap between the different institutional profiles should be, and what hierarchy of values should be attached to the various functions. Functional differentiation within the overall HE sector has become a key concern of institutional steering, at system as well as at institutional level. In public debates and media, such functional debates seem to focus on the role, orientation and intensity of research activities, particularly internationally oriented basic research. Thus it may come as a surprise to see that the survey of institutional leaders in the author's EUA study revealed that teaching and applied research are placed highest in priority: teaching is found to be a vital function by 61% of all institutions and an important one by another 31%, and applied research is declared a vital function at 52% of institutions and important at another 40%. Applied research is valued significantly more highly than basic research. Interestingly, in the formally

differentiated sectors institutional functional preferences with respect to research diverge more than the formally integrated so-called unitary systems. In the formally differentiated systems, universities prioritise basic research significantly more highly while the other higher education institutions limit their research activities to applied research, most often with a regional focus. Such differentiation is also reflected in staff hiring criteria. In the integrated systems, preference are less clearly differentiated in this respect.

The author's EUA study also confirmed that the value of internationally visible research for the competitive profile of an institution has risen in the perception of policy makers and institutional leaders in all five countries, as well as in Romania (Andreescu, in this volume) and Germany (Wissenschaftsrat 2011). The expansion of the research capacity of HEIs plays a differentiating role in all five national contexts, but in very different ways. In England and Slovakia, research has become the key criterion for vertical differentiation among institutional types – formally, through legislative definitions and accreditation criteria in Slovakia, and informally or implicitly through the weight of the funding instruments in England. In Norway and Switzerland, increasing research capacity is also associated with the applied research functions of the university colleges or *Fachhochschulen*, thus allowing for more horizontal differentiation in this regard. In France, research seems to become a new differentiating principle, cutting across the old divide between the elite professional sector and the freely accessible, largely egalitarian university sector. But in all five countries one can observe internationally oriented research exerting a homogenising effect on institutional profiles. Where international research is the most decisive determinant of funding flows, as is the case in England, the mainstreaming effect is stronger than in national contexts such as Switzerland or Norway, where multiple types of research funding sources exist to sustain research with different orientations from international and basic to regionally oriented and applied research.

The positive value associated with functional differentiation is not just associated with external diversity between institutions but also with increased internal diversity. At institutional level, functional diversity is often emphasised in declared missions or strategy documents, although such declared priorities are not always reflected fully in staff hiring and promotion criteria or resource allocation criteria. But some degree of functional diversity with varying emphases on teaching, research, innovation, continuing education and institutional administration is promoted through differentiation of contracts and promotion criteria for other academic staff positions. But while two thirds of all responding institutions prioritise diversity in academic staff's relative inclinations to contribute to research, teaching, innovation or service to society, institutional attempts to differentiate are often undermined by homogeneous career patterns at national and international levels. Only in those countries where some differentiation of staff profiles for different types of institutions is laid down by law (such as in Norway or Switzerland), institutions showed more differentiated staff conditions (including hiring and promotion criteria, task descriptions and salaries).

In contrast with the American diversity discussions, the examination of values attached to diversity in Higher Education in the EUA study also reveals that European institutional diversity approaches rarely focus on diversity of staff or student composition in terms of ethnic, religious, social or even national or gender composition. With respect to gender diversity, institutional policies rarely include respective prioritisation of gender as part of hiring criteria of academic staff. Likewise, ethnic, social or international diversity of the student body is a priority only at a few English HEI. Only with respect to qualification profiles among the student body diversity is an issue.

Horizontal vs. vertical differentiation

In any system of values, some values are emphasised more than others and prioritised in their guiding force for action. With respect to institutional diversity values, the research literature distinguishes "vertical diversity" and "horizontal diversity" to describe value systems which prioritse highly or hardly. The terms "vertical diversity" or "vertical differentiation" of institutions describe those higher education systems which clearly favour one type of institution over others. Conversely, "horizontal differentiation" would describe systems in which equal value is attributed to different types of institutional profiles. With all attempts to create diverse institutional profiles and attribute some value to all types of institutions, some types of institutional orientations seem to be more

highly valued than others in all higher education systems, according to dominant social norms. Indeed some degree of vertical differentiation, whereby some types of institutional emphases receive more support than others, seems to be present in any national system. But in some systems the values attached to different institutional choices diverge more strongly than in others, the EUA study reveals. Indeed, some systems openly foster vertical differentiation, as could be observed in Slovakia where research intensity is rewarded more than any other dimension of institutional engagement. Moreover, even those systems that explicitly claim to foster horizontal differentiation in their policy documents where different types of institutions would be valued equally will find their explicit policies undermined by reward systems, especially funding instruments and sources and quality assurance criteria.

The clearest case of vertical differentiation to be found in the EUA study may be said to be the Slovak higher education system. The Slovak system has been expanding rapidly over the last two decades and had developed a high degree of horizontal differentiation in the first phase of expansion in the 1990s, with different institutional profiles emerging in different parts of the country, largely in support of regional needs. While some of these portfolio differences have subsisted, institutions have expanded further, often moving toward a model which was found to be more advantageous in the competition for students, namely that of the comprehensive university. In the process, given that resources were not sufficient to support the expansion, quality problems emerged. Moreover, the "university" title began to be used indiscriminately for any institution, regardless of size, portfolio, or the presence of any research activities. Meanwhile, the pressures of research competitiveness have increased, pushed by national attempts to implement the Lisbon agenda and increasing visibility of research-biased rankings. Under these pressures, the value system adapted, resulting in calls for a higher education system which would apply quality standards more rigorously, would differentiate funding accordingly, and which would strengthen the research capacity of its universities. Ultimately, the national policy solution became a blending of these calls into a new form of institutional differentiation which would use the volume and quality of research as its sole differentiating criterion. This policy took several years to be implemented, but it was conceived from the beginning as a model of vertical differentiation using a formal method of differentiating institutional types while clearly setting one type (that of the research-based university) above the others. In the meantime, with the first phase of implementation where the classification of institutions were revealed, the government bent under the pressures of the influential institutional representatives and abandoned the system before it was fully implemented. The Romanian reform outlined in the article of Andreescu et al. in this volume seems to follow a similar logic of the original Slovak vertical differentiation approach.

An internally conflicted case of vertical differentiation can be found in the English system. Here, values and national as well as institutional policies seem to make a strong case for horizontal differentiation, with equal values being attributed publically to different mission types of institutions. The dividing lines are mostly soft and self-organised, rather than regulated, and follow criteria of research intensity and attention to diverse student clienteles, discriminated positively according to quality of qualifications and social background (less privilege receiving special promotion). At the same time, however, the dominance of funding for research and the strong visibility of research performance for the reputation of institutions creates a strong vertically differentiating force within the system.

France is an interesting case since one model of vertical differentiation seems to currently by succeeded by another, although a more horizontal broadening of values attached to HE adds further complexity to the picture. Traditionally, the French system is highly vertically differentiated, with clear lines drawn between a selective elite sector (the professionally oriented *grandes écoles*) and free access universities. In neither did research play a decisive role, since research capacity and its most highly performing functions were largely associated with the CNRS, which was linked to the universities but separately run. However, with the growing importance of research for national competitiveness and reputation, research has recently become an important vertical differentiating criterion for institutional position. Most institutions, universities and *grandes écoles*, are expanding their research strengths in their most promising areas to attract public recognition, funds, students and regional support. Given the accompanying promotion of cooperation (e.g., PRES, etc.), a new landscape is

emerging in which new forms of vertical differentiation are combining with new forms of horizontal differentiation (e.g. again through the PRES).

Norway has so far had a largely horizontally differentiated system, with formally differentiated types, universities and university colleges, performing different functions. In recent years, the system has been transforming into a more vertically differentiated one, with research and research training intensity again the differentiator. The traditional emphasis on regional diversity is increasingly overshadowed by concern with institutional positioning through competitive research funding successes. Some higher education researchers would traditionally have called such a shift "academic drift", but it should be noted that the research which plays the differentiating role is no longer just academic basic research, but contains a wider range of different types of research, including research which is not only applied, but even often explicitly oriented to the needs of the businesses. Thus the term "research" has become more inclusive in its scope while its practice has become more exclusive through its differentiating function. Instead of "academic drift", the label "research drift" would be more fitting. As Teichler shows in this volume, the academic profession, its values and practices, reflect the omnipresent increase of research orientation. While the result seems to be a convergence of institutional types in the traditional sense (and the formal boundaries have been redefined to enable them to be more easily crossed), new institutional types may be emerging, as Skodvin is suggesting in this book.

Finally, Switzerland could perhaps be seen as the most horizontally and least vertically differentiated system of the five. While research also plays a high role on the national agenda, the distinction between more internationally oriented research, and more regionally responsive research and innovation, which serves to support the dividing line between the two sectors, is not associated with a strong difference of social status or public recognition. The two types of research are catered for through separate funding channels, as are the institutional types in which they are conducted, thus allowing for the comparatively horizontal form of differentiation noted above. The high esteem in which the *Fachhochschulen* are held is embedded in a tradition which attributes comparatively high social status to high-level vocational education and which confronts academic education with a comparatively high degree of scepticism unless it is seen to serve as a foundation for innovation in the long run. As a result, the binary line seems relatively stable and rooted in the national value system, although boundaries are significantly more blurred in some subject areas (such as engineering and pedagogical training) than others. In addition, within each institutional type an increasing internal differentiation can be observed, with respect to expanding missions and functional emphases.

The EUA study showed clearly that there are two conditions upon which horizontal differentiation and parity of esteem must be built: first, it needs visible, strong and different reward structures which help to sustain the differing orientations and value systems on which they feed. Second, and as a consequence of the first, horizontal differentiation needs relatively high levels of expenditure in order to provide sufficient incentive to support the diversity sought. Without considerable funding, any parity of esteem will dissolve in the face of limited resources and prioritised activities. With this conclusion, we have moved into the heart of the discussion of the drivers of diversification.

2. The Interplay of Forces Driving Diversification or Convergence

For policy makers and institutional leaders who wish to promote particular aspects of diversity the key question is what the key drivers of diversification or convergence are in a higher education system, so that they may design effective methods accordingly. In the research discussion of such drivers, the following have been identified:

1. *Scientific developments* which involve a growing complexity of bodies of knowledge and consequently also the emergence and growth of new disciplines as well as increased fragmentation within and among HEIs (Clark 1978 and 1983). This often results in attempts to build bridges between disciplines, programmes and institutions.

2. The *regulatory framework* which may lay down distinct missions of institutional types, as is the case in formally diversified systems. These missions may differ legally not just in the scope of functions attributed to different types of institutions as core dimensions of their institutional missions (often differentiating the role regarding research, research training, or continuing education). They may also regulate access, recruitment and contract conditions for exercising particular functions in higher education, e.g. the status of professors or other groups of academic staff.

3. *Funding instruments*, such as:
   - institutional grants which are usually distributed on the basis of some input or output indicators, which may act as strong incentives for institutional behaviour
   - additional development grants for special purposes or projects, e.g. widening participation, introducing new learning technologies, particular reforms
   - competitive research grants distributed after open calls for projects
   - scientific infrastructure resources granted ad hoc or competitively

4. *The expansion of changing composition of the student body.* This could involve the emergence of new clienteles, with a wider range of talents and qualifications, and socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Hence programme orientation, pedagogical methods and support services may diversify to respond to the various needs. Diversification may also result from changed or increased demand with respect to a particular student group, as has been the case for doctoral candidates in recent years or professional mature learners updating the knowledge and skills.

5. *Societal and stakeholder demands.* Such demands influence institutional policy choices, programme development as well as student and staff orientation. As a recent study showed (Kaiser et al. 2007), governance changes in HE in many countries in Europe have most often implied an increase of direct influence of stakeholder and societal demands on HE development, through stakeholder boards or external members on executive boards at institutional level, and even at the level of individual programmes. Indirect influence is being exerted through the perception of such societal needs by academics and students, which informs their teaching or study choices.

6. *International developments* in higher education or its environments. One obvious example is the Bologna Process which proposes and imposes a number of structural convergences on the European national HE systems. While there have been some studies on policy convergence through the effect of the Bologna reforms (Bleiklie 2001, Huisman and van der Wende 2004, Witte 2006), its effects, convergent or diversifying, on programme definition, student clientèles or institutional profiles, is still unclear. Only the effect of convergence between institutional types has been noted (Witte 2006). Another example is the emergence and growing influence of international ranking schemes, and of global markets for researchers, research training and research products at least in some scientific areas (such as the natural sciences and medicine). These have had profound effects on the perception of HEIs of their possibilities as well as of the characteristics needed to sustain a "competitive" HE system.

7. *Quality assurance and accreditation criteria and standards.* These affect diversity in so far as they may or may not take account of different institutional missions and profiles. Thus, recommendations arising from institutional or programme evaluations may contain assumptions about mission emphases or programme orientation which could promote convergence, some quality assurance methods may be more neutral with respect to diverse missions, such as fit-for-purpose quality evaluations, which take the missions and aims of an institution as a point of departure. Indirectly. convergence could also be pushed through attitudes of the peers (see 8.). But fit-for purpose evaluations could also recommend institutional developments that would strengthen the uniqueness of institutional profiles and thus promote differentiation. Accreditation often impose particular standards of institutional structures, size, staff profiles and even curricular content and thus are likely to result in more convergence.

8. *Academic norms and values.* These have been recognised as key factors contributing, most often, to convergence since the reproduction of the professoriate tend to follow homogeneous selection and reward criteria. According to several researchers (Riesman 1956, Birnbaum 1988, Clark, 1993, 1996), faculty members tend to identify more closely with their discipline than with their institution and

department. Success for academic staff is thus achieved primarily through behaviours and success that are nationally and internationally recognised by their peers in their fields or disciplines.

2.2 Formal vs. informal methods of diversification

With respect to the second and third of the above-mentioned drivers, higher education researchers have emphasised the distinction between formal and informal methods of promoting institutional diversity (i.e. external diversity in this context). Formal methods of promoting diversity emphasise the role of state regulation for sustaining the separate institutional types, including legal definitions of the institutional types, their often separate funding authorities and instruments, as well as respective accreditation and quality assurance criteria. Such formal diversity approaches are realised in binary systems but also in the new HE classification systems of Slovakia (since 2008) and Romania (2011, see article by Andreescu et al.). Informal methods of promoting diversity focus on inter-institutional competition for resources and thus on appropriate funding instruments. The underlying assumption of such approaches usually liken HE systems to markets in which institutions compete for resources. If these resources are limited, each institution would seek to identify the market niches in which it would have the best capacity to increase its resources (according to resource dependency theory). Funding instruments have to be designed in such a way that different financial sources would respond to the core strengths of different mission mixes or institutional groups.

Higher education research is divided over the question as to which approach, formal or informal, would ensure or develop institutional diversity most effectively. While Birnbaum (1983) makes government regulation (formal approach) responsible for convergence in several higher education systems between 1960 and 1980, finding diversification of institutional types hampered by centralised state planning and rigid accreditation criteria, Huisman, in his study of the effect of Dutch government policies on institutional diversity, observes that such policies, or the second-guessing of government policy, contributed to increasing programme diversity (Huisman 1995 and 1996, Rhoades 1990). Conversely, Skolnik (1986), Huisman (1998), Morphew (2000), Codling and Meek (2006), and others point to the convergence effects informal methods of differentiation which rely only on competitive resource allocation without mission regulation. In both cases the focus is on the dangers of either restricting institutional autonomy through regulation or of allowing institutional types to converge by dropping regulatory differences between institutions. Such institutional convergence or "mission creep" most often refers to the academic drift of formerly professionally oriented HEI, but could also occur through the vocational drift on the side of the university sector e.g. in the context of the Bologna reforms with the emphasis on employability as a key goal of higher education. As the discussions in this volume show (Hazelkorn, Andreescu et al, Skodvin), the discussion is still ongoing.

The author's diversity study showed that the opposition between formal and informal methods of promoting diversity, or between binary and integrated higher education systems may not be as clear-cut as is often suggested in policy debates, with rigidity associated with the former, or flexibility associated with the latter. With respect to the dynamics of institutional development and shifting mission mixes, an informally differentiated system which gives institutions unlimited autonomy to orient itself in any direction, such as the English, may not be more flexible than a formally differentiated one, such as the Swiss. There are two main reasons why this harsh juxtaposition is misleading. One reason is that the flexibility of development of regulated types has been underestimated. Even regulatory distinctions are adaptable, as has been shown in the expansion of the research function of the Fachhochschulen or university colleges in all binary systems, which reflects mission development without necessarily implying mission creep. In all binary HE systems, the research mission of professional HEIs emphasises the applied character and orientation toward regional needs, in particular of small and medium enterprises. As Lepori observes, the introduction of an explicit research mandate to professionally oriented non-university higher education institutions has added complexity at system and institutional levels which cannot be reduced simply to the notion of academic drift. Rather, a dynamic of specialisation and differentiation concerning research that could lead to either convergence or to stronger differentiation or even reinforcement of the binary divide, depending on the implementation methods, can be noted (Lepori 2008). This

may even diverge between subject areas within the same national context or institution. With the introduction of research into the sector, new institutional profiles have emerged some of which are even experienced as institutional types. The UAS7 in Germany see themselves as a mission group, for example.

A second reason why the juxtaposition between formally or informally regulated systems is exaggerated concerns the limits of institutional flexibility in the informally differentiated integrated systems. Even though institutional autonomy should theoretically allow development in all directions. In policy debates as well as in some of the research literature, the assumption is often made that the degree of institutional diversity is linked to the degree of institutional autonomy in the system. It is supposed that greater institutional autonomy would allow institutions to adapt to varying needs more flexibly and thus to explore and occupy varying institutional niches. This assumption cannot be confirmed in this unconditional formulation by the findings of the EUA study. The reality is clearly more complex and less linear. First, while it may appear that institutional autonomy in a given area opens a wider field of choice in institutional orientation, the choice may be restricted by many other factors, such as the values or prestige associated with different options, or the opportunity costs connected with one line of action compared to another. These restrictions are not just set by academic values, though these may indeed act as a counterforce, but may be a more subtle combination of contextual and institutional forces such as career structures, financial instruments and conflicting market opportunities, as is illustrated by the English case study. Moreover, the relationship between institutional autonomy and diversification is not linear because systems which are formally differentiated, i.e. which regulate institutional types, do not necessarily prohibit institutional autonomy altogether, but rather set limits to developments, while other forms of differentiation may still be allowed, foreseen and even promoted through incentives, as is illustrated by the research funding incentives for Fachhochschulen in the Swiss case study.

In short, if diversification of institutional profiles is to occur within or between the legal or other boundaries between different institutional types, incentives and values also have to be diverse enough to sustain such diversification. The dynamics of diversification are not necessarily hindered by formal boundaries and not necessarily helped by their absence. Rather, they are defined by the interplay between regulatory factors and a whole array of other forces. Institutional autonomy and inter-institutional competition only promote differentiation if values and rewards (symbolic and financial) are supportive. The choice to define some institutional types through regulation is one way of creating a framework which supports alternative reward structures. The choice between formally differentiated systems (binary or multi-partite) should not be misrepresented as an either/or decision between de-regulation of institutional mission and institutional autonomy on the one hand, and regulated missions and no institutional autonomy on the other. Formal and informal methods of promoting diversity are not diametrically opposed choices, but part of an overall set of factors which together define the degree of support available for institutional choices, and in which institutional autonomy is not present or absent absolutely, but by degrees. If alone and unsupported by other factors, institutional autonomy will have little effect on differentiation; but supported by other factors, it allows for more possibilities. Where institutional autonomy is very restricted, institutional development will not be able to adapt to changing conditions and new challenges. Where institutional autonomy is permitted, institutions will adapt in those directions for which the greatest symbolic and financial rewards are granted.

2.3 Academic values

The last-mentioned driver of diversification of the above list has also received prioritised attention by higher education researchers, ever since Riesman's study of imitating behaviour of universities and isomorphism (1956): universities push for prestige by emulating the most highly regarded. This orientation is driven by the norms of faculty members who identify primarily with their academic communities rather than with their own institutions and who are anxious to create structures and programmes which correspond to their image of the ideal university environment which is not necessarily related akin to their own university's mission and resources. Thus, competition between higher education institutions should not be seen only as competition for resources but also, through the value system of academic staff and leadership, as competition for stature, prestige

and legitimacy, which encourage "conformity to prevailing models rather than attempts to distinguish themselves from their competitors" (Rhoades, 1990, p.191). The consequent academic drift reduces the diversity of institutional types and programmes, even if the latter are incentivised through government funding measures. To illustrate such norm-inspired academic drift, one may point to the dominance of internationally visible research publications as the primary measure of institutional and individual success in a majority of countries all over Europe, as confirmed by our study (see also Teichler's and Hazelkorn's article in this volume). Academic staff's attitudes affect research funding choices (through peer review), institutional orientation (through self-government) and higher education policies (through consultative bodies). The hegemony of such academic values, if given free reign (i.e. in the absence of other strongly regulatory forces sustaining diversity of institutional profiles), is found to be the prime cause of academic drift by a whole range of researchers (Rhoades, 1990; Meek 1991, Meek 2000; Skolnik, 1986; Huisman 1995, Huisman and Morphew, 1998; van Vught, 2008).

While our study confirms the dominance of some academic values (the international research bias) and its influence on academic career decisions and, indirectly, also on national career structures, it still shows a slightly more varied picture than is often assumed. Both interviews and survey data showed that academic values do diverge between different institutional and national settings and have undergone considerable changes in the last decade. In particular, the increased interest and recognition of contributing to business innovation through relevant research and teaching orientation can be noted in England, Norway and Switzerland. In this volume, Teichler will shed more in-depth light on the variety of academic values and working conditions, shifting the diversity discussion from its primary institutional focus to the importance of other influential social settings. But inspite of the larger than expected variety of academic staff values, funding and career structures are still dominated largely by the recognition of more narrowly defined types of research performance, either because the traditional research-biased values still determine the majority or most influential group of academics, or because these values are not strong enough as drivers of behaviour when compared with funding and career opportunities found (resource-dependency overriding norm-dependency in this respect). Whichever the case may be, we can conclude that academic values are not the decisive impediment to institutional diversification in the national contexts investigated.

2.4 Conflicts of Forces

The study raises the question whether the forces influencing the overall movement to institutional diversification (or convergence), when looked at across the cross-national sample, are found to be aligned or in conflict with one another. The most obvious recurrent conflict of forces found is the inconsistency between national attempts to diversify HE missions (through regulated institutional definitions, explicit policies or funding instruments) and the homogenising effect of national career regulatory frameworks, which tend to be more conservative and hierarchical and favour particular kinds of research products as the main hiring or promotion criterion. The homogenising effects of traditional academic career patterns dominated by research performance are often reinforced by the internationalisation of academic careers. By contrast, strong regional orientation (e.g. in Norway or Switzerland) helps to raise the importance of other criteria of academic success, e.g. in research that is relevant for business innovation, or continuing education achievements.

In all countries, national and institutional policies were in conflict with one another with respect to programme or subject diversity. In general, institutions have an interest in expanding their portfolios to meet new student and scientific demands, e.g. through interdisciplinary Master or Doctoral programmes which explore new interfaces between subject areas, while national policies are more interested in cost-saving concentration effects.

In general, institutional diversity results from a complex interplay of different often conflicting forces which include explicit national regulations, policies and funding instruments, but also other rewards and incentives which are sometimes too easily ignored in national approaches to diversification, such as quality assurance standards, career advancement practices, stakeholder values and support, regional policies and support as well as international and scientific developments and academic values. Policy makers and institutional leaders who wish

to develop proactive policies with respect to any aspect of institutional diversity should take into account the whole array of such forces if they wish to be effective.

3. External vs. internal diversity – institutional boundaries revisited

Higher education research literature on institutional diversity has focussed primarily on external diversity, on diversity of institutional profiles or types at the level of the overall system, rather than on the internal diversity of institutions. Indeed, little attention has been paid to the motivations and attempts of institutions to differentiate internally, with respect to their programmes, clienteles and audiences, their services, policies, services and other organisational responses to diverse stakeholder needs or student profiles. Within one institution, different units and individuals may pursue and are often even encouraged to pursue different emphases regarding their types of activities, their primary types of students, their external partners. Some departments may be primarily geared toward an international academic community while others seek their successes in relation to industrial innovation and training of business leaders. Continuing education may be regarded as core business in one unit and as marginal in another. While such internal differentiation and diversity could be seen as part of mission stretch, it could, at least theoretically, also be seen to create more flexible learning, teaching and research environments and hence to release creative potential. Indeed it is hardly self-evident that diverse societal expectations would have to be met by a wide variety of different types of institutions that should be relatively coherent internally and homogeneous in their missions, as is so often assumed, rather than by diverse institutional responses which vary mostly within institutions. Why do most diversity discussions simply assume the desirability of external diversity of institutions, rather than at least also considering the advantages and disadvantages, and challenges of internal diversity?

The EUA diversity study noted many institutional attempts to address and even to promote diversity internally, not just in terms of diverse student profiles but also disciplines, functional orientation, stakeholder emphases, many of which were seen to be not just tolerable but even beneficial forms of internal differentiation.

Of course, there are areas where external diversity and institutional coherence would seem to be obviously preferable. With regard to institutional visibility and marketing, institutional coherence helps position the institution in its most advantageous market niche, and is clearly more efficient and effective if it addresses a more homogeneous range of students and staff in terms of qualifications and expectations. In light of the increasing pressures to promote institutional reputation internationally, calls for increased external diversity thus most often supported by those who want to position their institutions or systems in international markets. Too wide a range of student qualifications may result in unrewarding or even frustrating learning and teaching experiences in many cases, as has been confirmed by the data gathered in our study.

In all other respects, however, it is simply an assumption that external diversity would provide the better answer to the challenge of diversifying demands and achieving maximum institutional responsiveness, an assumption that has been repeated enough to become a common belief. Moreover, given that the primary identification of most academics lies with their disciplinary or interdisciplinary community, well beyond the boundaries of the institution, the emphasis on institutional coherence may seem curiously exaggerated. It results, one may surmise, from the discovery of the institution as coherent actor in European higher education. This has been achieved through institutionally oriented governance reforms, which have increased strategic and central steering capacities searching for institutional coherence. It has also been pushed through higher education reforms such as the Bologna reforms, which have required a lot of internal coordination and communication, increasing the institutional sense of community and common purpose. Moreover, the European-wide exchanges on policy changes and institutional reforms have strengthened communication channels between policy makers and institutional leaders alike, creating a European-wide consensus regarding the necessity of stronger institutional steering mechanisms (De Boer et al. 2007) and the desirability of recognisable, more coherent institutional profiles. As beneficial as the increased steering capacity, visibility, and coherence of institutions as actors in the higher education systems may be for many aspects of innovation and institutional positioning, it is not as clear as current policy debates make it sound that it is equally needed for optimal institutional diversity. The latter does

not have to be achieved primarily through relatively coherent institutions diverging from each other. Such a bias may even become outdated sooner or later as institutional coherence is being simultaneously undermined through many new incentives for institutions to cooperate or even to form consortia or merge. As cooperative networks become increasingly intertwined, strategic developments aligned and common structures formed, institutional boundaries soften and often even dissolve. The ideal of HE institutions as coherent actors in the system is becoming more and more difficult to uphold in today's densely networked world of co-authored science, open innovation, joint curricula and common institutes. In future, debates on institutional diversity may thus have to revise such key assumptions. Inter-institutional thematic networks may become the recognisable units positioning themselves, rather than the nebulous holdings calling themselves institutions from which they emerge. But today, we still live in a historical phase where the problematic sclerotic effects of formerly highly de-centralised institutions can be experienced all over Europe so that institutional steering capacity is appreciated much more than an array of chaotic clouds of unsteerable networks with an indomitable array of external partners. And yet, the future is not so far away. The diversification of funding sources and partnerships and the wide-reaching effects this has on institutional steering have already become an object of study and policy concern (Estermann and Pruvot 2011). How important will institutional boundaries remain in tomorrow's world of global challenges and networked solutions?

To conclude, the author proposes that external and internal diversity be looked at jointly, taking account of the increasingly fuzzy boundaries between institutions. This study has shown how often diversity is valued and approached in conjunction with different kinds of cooperative arrangements. Hence, the understanding and measurement of institutional diversity in any higher education system only in terms of external diversity – that is, by looking at the number of units, programmes and institutions of different profiles, target groups and orientations – falls short of recording the complexity of real institutional responses.

4. Conclusions from the Bologna Higher Education Researchers' Conference Discussions on Diversity in Higher Education

In response to the previous reflections and the five papers on institutional diversity presented in this volume, the three sessions on diversity in higher education at the Bologna Higher Education Researchers' Conference highlighted four central concerns as areas for more differentiated policy attention:

1. 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 which society expects higher education institutions to meet. It should be recognised, for example, that a wide variety of different forms and orientations of research are needed, not just those expressed in terms of international high impact journal publications but also problem-solving research which may fuel business and societal innovation. In teaching, institutions have to compete not just for the most highly qualified students but should also cater to the diverse demands of students with a wide range of qualifications and of diverse backgrounds. Instead, one has seen, in recent years, a concentration of public resources on a narrow notion of research performance accompanied by a decreasing investment in a whole range of higher education tasks, including teaching quality and innovation which would be necessary to take such Bologna reform goals as student-centred or competence-based teaching and learning seriously. Thus, the competitiveness agenda which originally helped to justify the Bologna reforms is now undermining its meaningful realisation.

2. Institutional diversity is often too narrowly discussed in terms of external diversity, i.e. in terms of diversity of institutional types and profiles. This overlooks, firstly, the fact that institutions of one type vary widely among each other and that the differences between individual parts of one institution may be greater in terms of primary missions than those between different institutions or institutional types. Secondly, this internal variety has not been proven to be necessarily problematic or inefficient. Internal functional diversity is even needed to provide educational and research breadth. Policy makers and institutional leaders have to distinguish more clearly for

which aspects of institutional orientation one needs internal institutional coherence and for which internal diversity would be more beneficial. And thirdly, it does not take account of the fact that academics are increasingly densely cooperating with external partners, softening the boundaries of institutions, so that the institution should not be the only unit of focus for dealing with diversity in higher education.

3. The development and implementation of new transparency instruments (such as U-Map) do not just reveal a surprising degree of diversity of intensity with respect to dimensions of institutional activity. They also show how important it is to find more differentiated descriptors for HE activity in order to develop differentiated incentives to underpin diverse systems of higher education. Multidimensional indicator-based descriptors can help the dialogue between national policy makers and institutional leaders if they are complemented by other kinds of qualitative information.

4. Recent HE research does not confirm that academic values are a mainstreaming force in higher education systems. There is more diversity in this respect than is often assumed. But national and institutional reward systems, especially with respect to funding instruments and hiring or promotion criteria, do not give academics the change to follow diverse career orientations and paths. National policy makers have to develop more diverse reward systems if they want to prevent homogenisation in their higher education systems.

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