

# **Institutional Diversity in European Higher Education: Challenges for Policymakers and Heads of Institutions**

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Presentation for the EUA Conference,  
Palermo, 22 October 2010

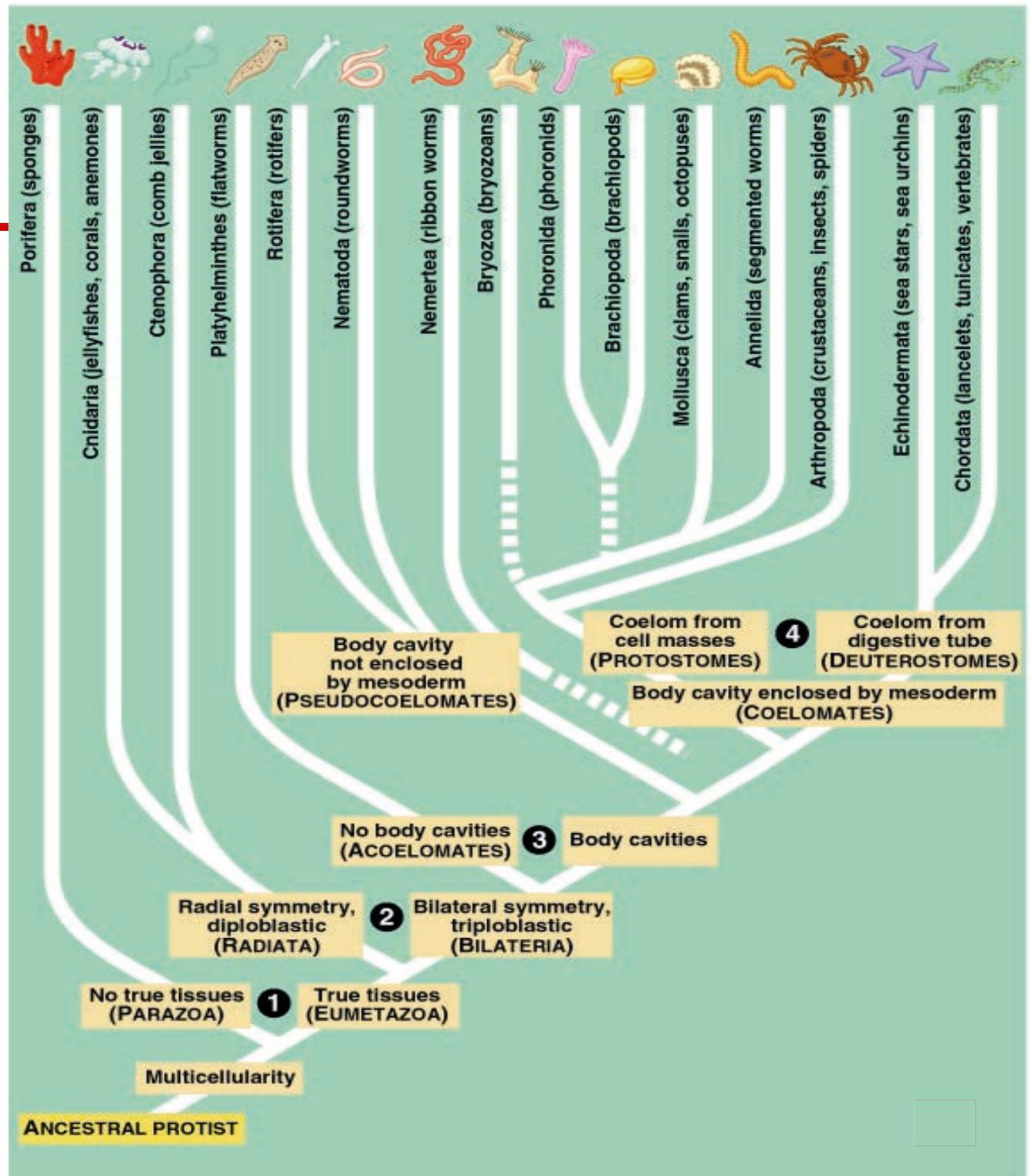
1. What are we talking about?

## Key Concepts

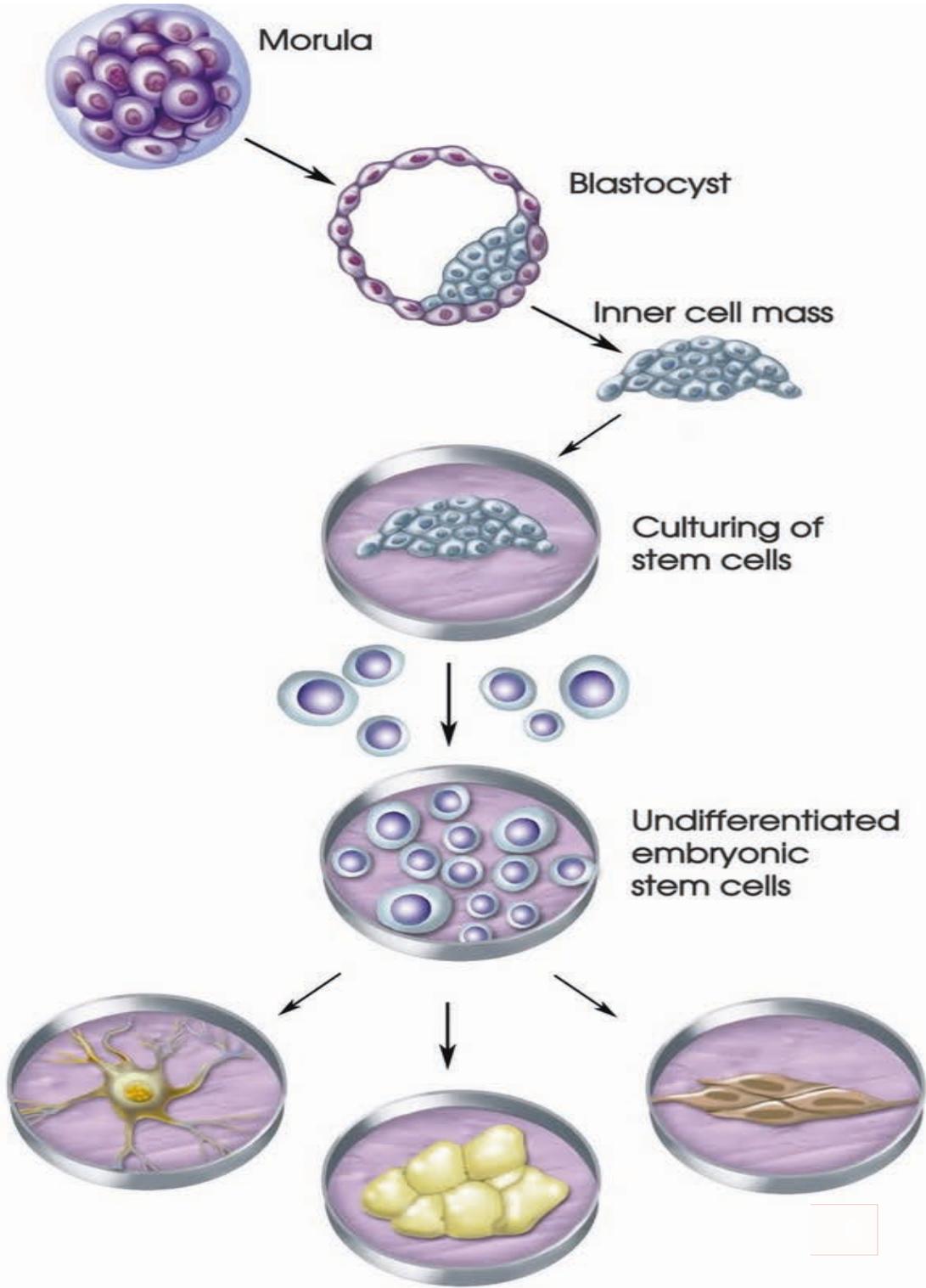
2. 10 theses about the values we attribute to diversity in HE and the conflict of forces which determine systemic and institutional approaches to diversity, based on empirical study 2009

3. What can policy makers and heads of institutions do about it?

# Diversity and Differentiation – biological metaphors for system sophistication



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# Great Expectations: Universities should...

- educate graduates to be critically minded, innovative, analytical, internationally adept, with good communication and team skills
- train and retrain people of different backgrounds and qualifications for diverse working contexts/ levels / life phases
- produce frontier research to compete internationally for best qualified researchers and research funds and help market knowledge environment to attract foreign investment
- produce applied research of relevance for regional and national innovation
- solve global environmental, technical, economic, social problems (climate, energy, hunger, health, mobility, access)

# Institutional Diversity as a Key HE Policy Issue

- Associated with massification of HE: widening participation ⇒ diversifying student profiles, diverging institutional profiles
  - More students = less money per student ⇒ declining quality of higher education
  - Additional HE functions (innovation, CE) have gained importance
  - diversified missions – mission stretch or overload?
- ⇒ demands for “concentration of excellence” because of limited public funds for international competition -- concentration of resources on competitive research universities
  - ⇒ demands for support for other functions HEI as motors of knowledge economy
  - ⇒ demand for diversity of institutional profiles (external diversity) to optimise capacity to address diverse needs and stakeholders
  - ⇒ questions of institutional coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, visibility

# Key concepts

- Institutional “diversity“ or “differentiation”: US discussion vs. European
- External diversity (institutional profiles) vs. internal diversity (staff, students, programmes, HE activity dimensions)
- Horizontal vs. vertical differentiation -- values attributed to different kinds of institutions/ functions / different types of diversity

# Vertical or horizontal differentiation

- Vertical differentiation = hierarchy of values for different dimensions of HE activities, different mixes among institutions  
Horizontal differentiation = parity of esteem
- England: Internally conflicted case of vertical diff: explicit diversity policy but strong emphasis on research quality and volume in funding differentiation
- France: shift from professional excellence to research as principle of vertical differentiation in elite part of system
- Norway: Traditionally more horizontally differentiated (strong emphasis on regional diversity) becoming more vertically differentiated along research performance measures
- Switzerland: values, laws, funding and regional influences support more horizontal differentiation (high level vocational/professional training highly regarded)
- Slovak Rep.: vertical differentiation through inst. typology

# Obsession with performance in league tables

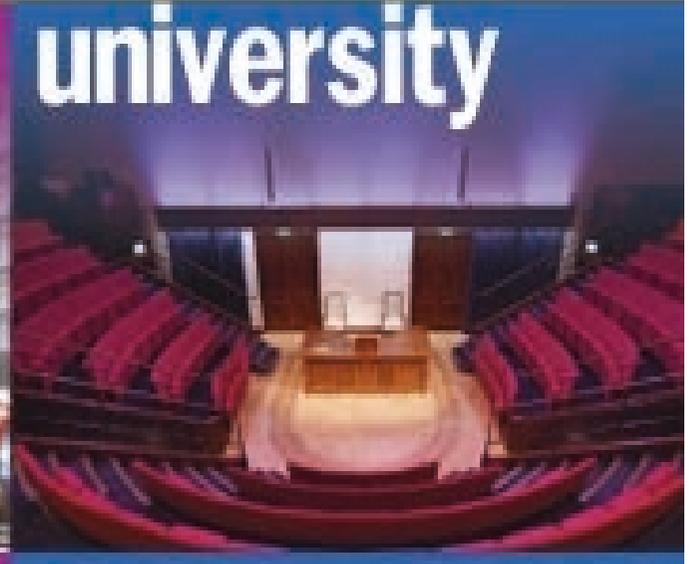
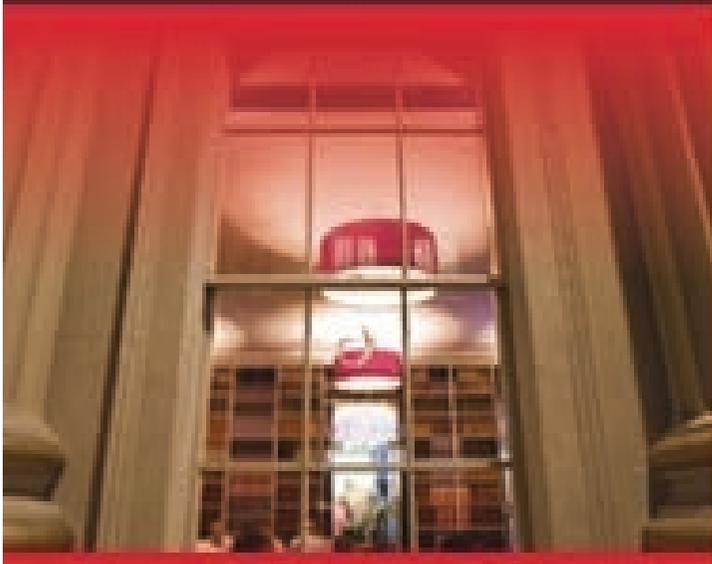
- Global competition of HEI for researchers and research funds is driving vertical differentiation in many HE systems.
- Research-based performance measuring criteria, size-dependent,
- Highly stratified systems do better in the top 50 than less stratified ones
- In spite of conscious policy choices in the past continental Europe does not like its clustering in the middle (US has fewer HEI in the 500 than Europe)
- Mobile students and researchers, investment need easily accessible comparative data to facilitate choices

# The Ranking Business – driving vertical differentiation

A Times Higher Education  
and Thomson Reuters  
conference

Building a  
**WORLD-CLASS**

university



# Thesis 1:

## International influences more convergent Regional influences more diversifying

International orientation strengthens focus on basic research and concentration of excellence, pushing vertical differentiation (but also stresses new functions), while regional orientation usually helps functional and horizontal differentiation.

- International orientation promotes particular kind of research, regional orientation more diverse types of research.
- Regional support for (diverse clientele, diverse needs, diverse types of research, business innovation, LLL (E, F, CH) and for cooperative structures

# So do we really all love diversity?



# Values of Student Diversity

- Key concern in the US, secondary concern in Europe -- only diversity of entry qualification levels prioritised often (46%) -- exceptions most often in England
  - Diversity of socio-economic backgrounds prioritised by only 31%
  - Gender balance not prioritised often, only for some subjects
  - Ethnic diversity found desirable at only a quarter of HEI, rarely a priority
  - Internationally diverse student body only prioritised by 22%
  - Religious background and age diversity rarely an issue
- Diversity of backgrounds not a value in itself, only if proactively exploited (team composition, projects, services)
- Problem with the “elite”: Need to maintain elites met obliquely with differentiated provision. Missed opportunities to redefine the elite and to develop appropriate compensatory measures needed to access and succeed in it.

# Values of Staff Diversity

- Diversity of academic and professional experience and diversity of functions important -- functional differentiation more often informal, more far-reaching in formally differentiated systems (CH, N)
- Tension betw. institutional and national priorities
- Gender more often a priority than for students (40%) but not as criterion for hiring (least important, together with age)
- Other aspects rarely prioritised: Diversity of ethnic background and national background only prioritised by 13% HEI, indifference to religious backgrounds – but interesting exceptions

# Value of Diversity with respect to Institutional Profiles

- Diversity of institutional profiles valued positively in all countries, E, N, CH
- can be associated with fragmentation, lack of transparency for students and stakeholders and lack of efficiency (F, SR, to some extent CH and N in the FH/ Univ. college sector)
- positive if linked to dense cooperation and flexible transitions: between complementary institutions or institutional types. (CH: „Passerelles“ & „Permeability“, F: PRES „regroupement territorial“, N: associations between univ. & UC, E: Links betw. Foundation degrees in FE and HEI)

## Thesis 2: Conditional love of diversity

Diversity in higher education is not necessarily a positive value, all depends on the aspect of diversity and on additional conditions.

- Ex.: Diversity of institutional profiles is appreciated if is accompanied by flexible transitions for individuals and by inter-institutional cooperation. Otherwise institutional differentiation may become institutional segmentation.
- Ex.: Diversity of student profiles may enhance or hinder the student learning process, depending on teacher attention to diverse perspectives and competence.

## Thesis 3:

Diversity values differ between the different levels of the system.

- Ex.: Programme diversity an asset for institutions (options/disciplinary interfaces for students and researchers). -- Raises questions of cost efficiency at system level. (programmes cut, joint programmes or doctoral schools encouraged)
- Ex.: Diversity of student qualifications wanted at system level but few institutions want to focus on the challenge of making less qualified students succeed.

# Thesis 4

## Missions vs. Reward Structures

3. Institutional missions differ significantly in their mixes in self-declarations – but are often contradicted by the implicit reward structures (convergence forces).

## Conflicting forces between:

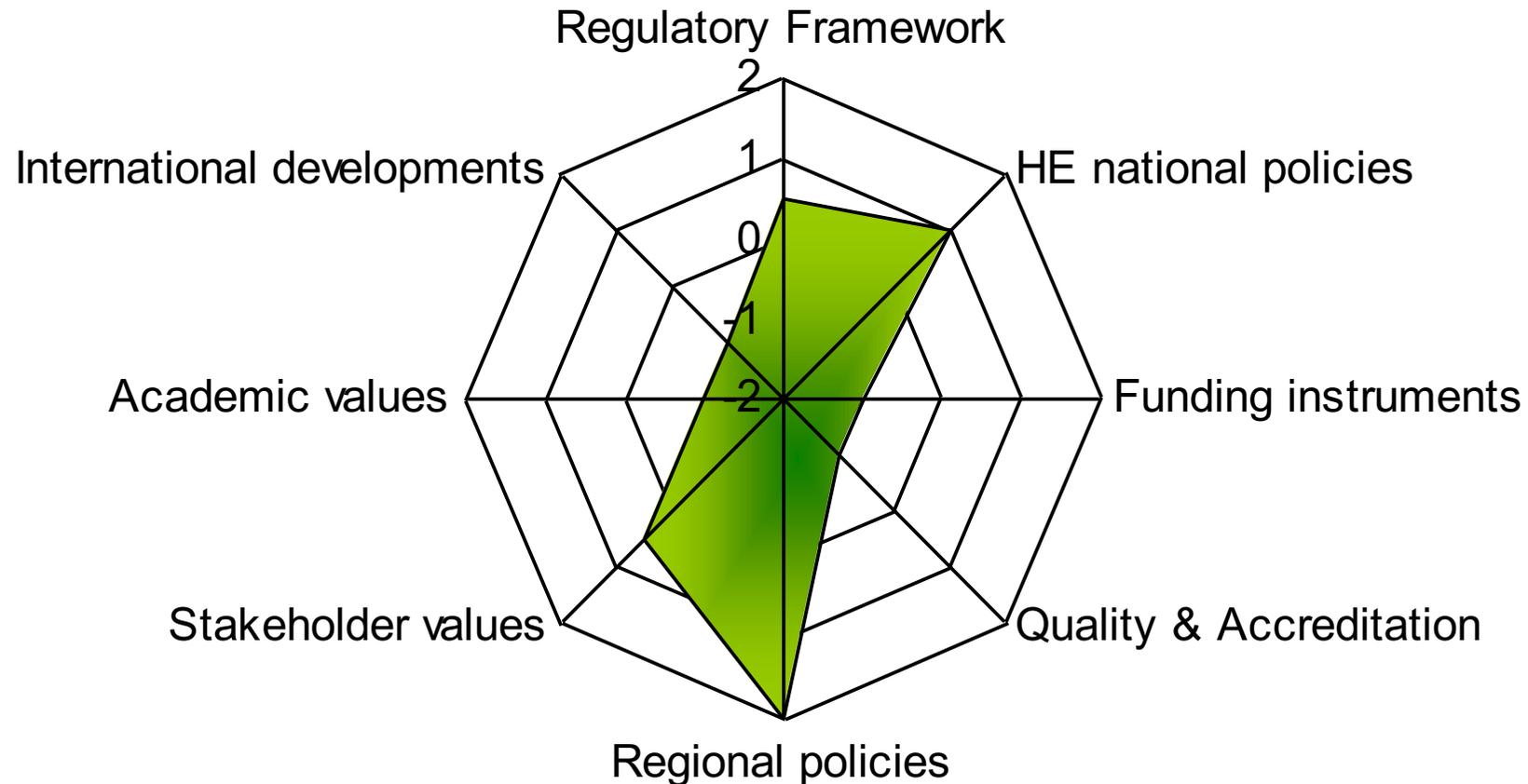
- National career structures and institutional missions /diversifying values
- National policies sound more diversity-aware while national funding more convergence-oriented
- National funding schemes (indicators) and institutional mission diversity (options of different indicator mixes would promote diversity more)
- National and institutional preferences
- Institutional leadership and academics

# Ex: Drivers of institutional profiles in England

Regulatory Fr.	Large degree of autonomy
Funding	Diversity of sources has increased, but strong dominance of res. excellence funding
National Policies & Coordination	Nat. policy very aware of diversity issues, but funding most strongly invested in res. excellence
Regional Influences	Increasing, strong factor in some regions, depending on capacity of RDA and stakeholders /HE traditions
Institutional Policies and rewards	Missions quite diverse, but mission conforming behaviour undermined by running for funding advant., strong intern. orientation strengthens basic research excell. dominance
Quality Assurance	Explicitly fitness for purpose, but inst. expectations give it mainstreaming / converging effect
Academic Career Structures & Values	Very research dominated
Stakeholder Values & Influences	Very strong in some fields (professional associations, accreditation standards), professional relevance of rising importance, status and elitism still strong drivers

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# Diversification or Convergence Forces in English Higher Education



# Reward structures promote research orientation

- Internal resource allocation rarely reflects mission mixes.
- Only mild reflection of mission mixes in hiring and promotion criteria: Research decisive most often (50% - 60%), teaching second (35% - 42%), then long gap, internat. experience imp. but rarely decisive (13-17%)
- All other functions rarely decisive for hiring or promotion (innovation often found important)
- CE, social engagement and institutional management most often found unimportant for promotion (by 36% - 39%)
- Exceptions: More teaching and CE in career profiles & rewards in CH, N

## Thesis 5:

- Missions and reward structures at institutional level are often undermined by reward structures at system level.
- Ex. Career patterns favouring research performance.
- Dual systems have an easier time maintaining diverse reward structures along lines of regulatory types.

## Thesis 6: Academic Values

- Academic values are a strong force driving convergence of diversity. But they are not as homogeneous as is often assumed.
- Ex.: academics at Fachhochschulen in CH, some post 1992 universities, non-traditional set of academic norms

# Academic values research- dominated but not homogeneous

- Mainstreaming (converging) effect reflected in hiring and promotion criteria and informal recognition of each others' performance -- increasingly dominated by international research performance indicators. But values are not as homogeneous as is often suggested:
  - At institutions where both teaching and CE are vital parts of mission, teaching is valued strongly by 70% of HEI (rather than 56%), applied research valued strongly by 65%, but basic research valued strongly by only 35% (vs. 62% average).
  - identification with the professional community linked to the field is stronger than with the scientific community (only 56%) while at „basic research-intense“ institutions, academics identify most strongly with the scientific community (80% i.e. 18% more than average)
- Career structures and perception of career opportunities, as well as financial incentives, are more often convergence forces than the academics' personal values. (Diversifying potential)

# Thesis 7: Institutional diversity in European HE is much greater than we think.

Mission mixes are greater than we think among institutions of the same regulatory type (“university”, “Fachhochschule” “University College”). The difference between dual systems and integrated systems is not as large as one thinks.



Sixty-five million years ago, when cows ruled the earth

# Formal vs. informal diversity

- Juxtaposition of rigid, non-autonomous, formally differentiated vs. flexible autonomous informally differentiated systems does not hold.
- The dynamics of diversification are not necessarily hindered by formal boundaries and not necessarily helped by their absence. Within formal types autonomy allows for differentiation. -- They are defined by the interplay between regulatory factors and a whole array of other forces.
- Institutional autonomy only opens wider choices in institutional orientation if that choice is not restricted by other factors (financial incentives, career structures, values).
- Underfunded institutions will scrounge for funds wherever they find them, even if it does not fit their mission.

## Some mission correlations

- Between finding basic research a vital part of mission and:
  - Research training for academia 75% ( + 28%)
  - Applied research 64% (+10%)
  - Research training for industry 41% (+ 15%)
  - Business innovation 39% (+7%)
- Between teaching and CPD a vital part of mission and:
  - Applied research 76% (+ 24%)
  - Business innovation 52% (+ 21%)
  - Addressing other societal challenges 50% (+23%)
  - Having innovative teaching approaches more often as decisive criteria for promotion (+ 28% = 61%)

# Research activity or orientation is not a differentiating feature among different types of institutions

- The differentiating feature between different groups is not the balance between the value attributed to research vs. teaching (“research-oriented“ vs. “teaching-oriented“) but the value balance between basic research vs. teaching !
- Applied research is being valued and rewarded just as highly as teaching at most so-called „teaching-oriented“ institutions.
- At basic research-intensive universities, teaching quality is rewarded more often than in the past.
- More differentiated rewards are needed also to promote different kinds of research.

## Thesis 8: Internal Diversity

- Mission mixes and institutional orientations diverge considerably within institutions. -- In many HE systems internal diversity is greater than external diversity.
- It has not been proven that internal diversity is necessarily less efficient than external diversity with respect to all aspects of HE activity.

# External vs. internal diversity?

- Internal diversity often accepted as response to diverse needs. Not necessarily problematic (Mission mixes, functionally differentiated staff).
- Different degrees of internal diversity allowed between countries, between institutional types.
- Emphasis on cooperation/ consortia increases internal diversity.
- External diversity preferred (better visibility, easier marketing) by well-positioned institutions.
- Different levels of tolerance to qualitative diversity and diversity of student qualifications.

## Thesis 9: Autonomy

Autonomy does not guarantee diversity of institutional profiles.

- Autonomy and competition/ market orientation may help to promote diversity and help niche policies but only if financial incentives + career patterns + values support such diversity.
- Restricted resources for HE result in the prioritisation of some policy aims and institutional dimensions over others, make policy declarations in favour of institutional diversity appear pale if compared with funding flows. Institutions will scrounge for funds even where their mission would not take them first.
- High social status of professional / vocational education helps prevent academic drift/ sustain institutional diversity

# Recommendations for Policy Makers

- Not explicit diversity policies but the confluence of implicit forces (regulations, financial incentives, rewards, quality standards, acad. and prof. values) is decisive.
- The quest for flexible and diverse HE systems will have to confront the whole complexity of forces, designing
  - Diverse funding regimes (performance indicators, grant schemes)
  - Accreditation criteria
  - Fit-for-purpose quality assurance
  - Diverse concepts and rewards of excellence
  - Diverse academic career paths (hiring and promotion criteria)

# Recommendations for Heads of Institutions

- Design a system of rewards that reflects the institutional mission and desired internal diversity, including hiring processes
- Ensure that quality assurance does not ignore any dimension in which your institution strives for excellence
- Do not underestimate symbolic rewards, create an institutional culture of recognition for diverse forms of innovation, creativity and success
- Contribute to national policy making regarding career paths and flexible contracts
- Ensure that research training prepares graduates for multiple career paths
- Leave free spaces for people who do not quite fit in

*see magnet for details* 



diversity week  
28 july - 1 august