

The logic of appropriateness and the shadows of the past

Analytical framework for policy translation in post-communist countries

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Abstract

In the early 2000s, several post-communist countries launched reforms of university management and governance marked by the influence of a ‘modernization agenda’ for higher education (HE) governance, which was promoted by the World Bank, the OECD, and the European Commission. This modernization agenda was employed differently in different countries even when these countries shared similar starting points for the reform and similar international pressures, as was the case in Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia. The paper provides analytical framework through which I study in my dissertation the diverging paths of three post-communist countries - Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia – in translating the modernization agenda. The framework combines historical institutionalism concepts with the logic of appropriateness. The basic idea is that the policy translation in early 2000s was influenced by two major groups of factors. First, the policy translation reflected historical legacies from the policy design processes taking place after the critical juncture following the collapse of communism in 1989 (Collier and Collier 1991, Pierson 2000, Pierson and Skocpol 2002, Bohle and Greskovits 2012). Second set of factors arises from the concept of the logic of appropriateness as defined by March and Olsen (2004) claiming that the human action is driven by rules of appropriate behavior organized into institutions. What is appropriate then mainly depends on the interpretation by the authoritative interpreters. The two theoretical streams are complemented by the insights from Christopher Hood (1998) pointing out that the current reforms are reactions to the weaknesses of previous reforms while the definition of these weaknesses as well as their solutions – including use of modernization agenda - depends on the interpretation of the authoritative interpreters and actors who have legitimacy to influence the policy design process.