Blurring the boundaries. University actorhood and institutional change in global higher education

Mike Zapp a, Marcelo Marques b and Justin J. W. Powell a

aDepartment of Social Sciences, University of Luxembourg, Esch–Belval, Luxembourg; bHertie School of Governance, Berlin, Germany

ABSTRACT
Higher education (HE) scholarship often focuses on the so-called ‘entrepreneurial’ university as a consequence of new public management reforms. Simultaneously, the remarkable expansion of private HE is said to fragment, specialize, and diversify HE systems. Such diagnoses are misleading as they ignore wider environmental pressures and simultaneous changes in both public, non-profit and for-profit HE. We argue that putative diversity in HE operates as a ceremonial façade behind which large-scale isomorphic change across national HE systems, sectors, and organizational forms occurs. Multiple causes trigger such change originating in the increasingly global HE environment, including a burgeoning international HE regime, accounting and accountability practices, increased permeability of HE systems facilitated by open borders, education markets, and global science as well as (neo)liberal ideologies stressing human capital and human rights. As other organizations, those in HE become subject to these pressures turning universities into more rationalized, standardized, and strategic actors.

KEYWORDS
Higher education; university actorhood; isomorphic change; façade diversity

1. Introduction

In this contribution, we look at how fundamental changes in the global environment of higher education contribute to blur organisational forms and sectors across national borders. Our point of departure is the organisational level to analyse this phenomenon and we argue that traditional foci on state-centrism and marketisation that emphasise diversity and differentiation overlook important transformations at the level of modern higher education organisations.

In the second section, we discuss two assumptions that have dominated the comparative higher education literature for decades. The first assumption follows a state-centric view and holds that institutional diversity and differentiation in higher education increase due to persisting national path dependencies, alongside convergence in governance structures towards a market model (Clark 1983; Dobbins and Knill 2014; Huisman,
Meek, and Wood 2007; Krücken 2003; Levy 2006). Such diagnoses of differentiation and stratification in both structure (e.g. organisational form) and substance (e.g. curriculum) as well as detailed analyses of sectoral distinctiveness and national idiosyncrasies in policy and governance are often supported in studies of organisational identity, missions, and branding (see Delmestri, Oberg, and Drori 2015; Kosmützky 2015). The second assumption emphasises marketisation in higher education and holds that universities are gradually transforming themselves into ‘public enterprises’ and ‘entrepreneurial universities’ operating within a system of ‘academic capitalism’ (Clark 1998; Deem 2001; Münch 2014; Neave 1998; Slaughter and Leslie 1997). Contributions from this perspective diagnose higher education systems as being increasingly affected by market logics, with reforms relating to ‘new public management’ (NPM) revolving around notions of efficiency, performance, and excellence (Ramirez and Tiplic 2014; Whitley and Gläser 2007).

In the third section, we contrast these views by arguing that university changes are caused by profound shifts in the globalising environment of higher education, with an international education sector made up of a growing number of international organisations and university associations linking colleges and universities and encouraging collaboration. More competitively, global university rankings pit individual higher education (HE) organisations against each other. These are generally embedded in a discursive sphere in which open borders and markets are touted, supported by (neo)liberal ideologies stressing human rights and human capital that recast universities as key organisations in the knowledge economy and society. As Neil Smelser (2013) has shown, universities everywhere not only have grown in student populations, but face increasingly diverse goals and expectations. Leading to conflicts over priorities, excellence and efficiency ideals challenge notions of accountability and sustainability. For the comparative analysis of higher education, two particular consequences follow from reconsidering these prevailing assumptions and the impact of university environments.

In the fourth section, we elaborate on these consequences. As a first consequence, such powerful environmental forces push universities to reinvent themselves as strategic actors seeking autonomy, yet also to be relevant – and accountable – vis-à-vis larger sets of stakeholders. Universities increasingly compete for (inter)national status and financial resources, responding with strategic organisational development that reflects beliefs in the superiority of professionally managed market-based competition (e.g. Chatelain-Ponroy et al. 2018). The transformation of universities into ‘complete’ organisations implies the ontological status of a social actor with features of sovereignty, intentionality, responsibility, accountability, and formal differentiation, reflecting organisational change more generally (Bromley and Meyer 2015). Universities across sectors and countries are undergoing similar changes captured by what we define as the construction of organisational actorhood. The actorhood thesis posits that organisations (including such disparate entities as companies, non-profits, public agencies, international organisations, cities and nations as well as universities) can no longer be considered mere contexts for action or instruments of interests (e.g. from board members or trustees). Instead, they are freestanding, strategic and integrated actors imbued with rights and identities (see Drori, Meyer, and Hwang 2009; Hwang and Colyvas 2013 and Pope et al. 2018 for general reviews and Krücken and Meier 2006 for a university focus). This novel type of rationalised organisation – on which we elaborate more in section 3.2. – increasingly replaces older forms of informal, collegial, and bureaucratic (or public administrative)
structure in higher education. A second consequence is widespread global isomorphism via cultural-cognitive (e.g. mimesis and emulation of organisational practices), normative (e.g. professionalisation and standardisation through organisational membership) and regulative (e.g. legal frameworks such as accreditation) mechanisms that originate in the higher education environment and penetrate universities around the world. This powerful sociological distinction of institutional change mechanisms captures the complexity of multi-level processes in global higher education and helps to identify the actors involved in these processes.

In the concluding remarks, we argue that the growing sameness of higher education organisations across countries, sectors and forms is largely obscured by prominent markers of stylised identity and fabricated brands, which might aid in competition, yet reflect organisational ‘façade diversity’ (see Boli and Elliott 2008) more than structural or substantive differences. We conclude by suggesting further avenues of exploration of the relationship between global integration and the transformation of universities into organisational actors.

2. Beyond state and market in higher education analysis

For decades, higher education scholarship has been nationally-focused, yet the most influential scholarship is largely Anglophone and has emphasised shifts in the governance of universities, mainly reflecting the market-oriented systems of the US, UK, and Australia, among others (see Daenekindt and Huisman 2020; Vlegels and Huisman 2021). Once relying primarily on state funding, universities, especially outside of Europe, are now believed to face a stark reality in which public support continuously decreases, with compensatory funds either sought externally or allocated on a competitive basis (Marques et al. 2017; Enders and Jongbloed 2007; Fernández Darraz et al. 2010; Neave and van Vught 1991). Here, universities are subject to nearly unavoidable continuous internal and external evaluations of performance, quality, and efficient resource allocation (Deem 2001; Gumport 2019; Paradeise et al. 2009; Teichler 2004).

From Europe, where universities are still heavily state-supported, such shifts are often seen as a dubious success story of the US model, in which public universities are termed ‘public enterprises’ and lauded as ‘entrepreneurial’ (Clark 1998; Deem 2001). While many state universities receive only residual funding from government for operations, they are subject to rules of public authorities. The resulting embeddedness in quasi-markets, referred to as ‘academic capitalism’ or the ‘triple helix’ of university-industry-government relationships (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000; Gumport 2000; Münch 2014; Slaughter and Leslie 1997), shifts the state’s role to that of ‘market regulator’ (Scott 1998) and ‘evaluator’ (Neave 1998) leading to ‘messy combinations of state, market and self-regulatory instruments’ (Enders and Jongbloed 2007, 64).

Analyses have tackled this reconfiguration by using conceptual combinations of new public management, network governance, and Neo-Weberianism, while stressing the legacy and path dependence of historical politico-administrative regimes of national higher education systems (Bleiklie et al. 2011; De Boer, Enders, and Schimank 2007; Ferlie, Musselin, and Andresani 2008; Fumasoli and Stensaker 2013; Paradeise et al. 2009). These analyses often stress country-specific idiosyncrasies and cross-national variations in a global higher education system that is marked by increasing diversity, differentiation, and stratification.
By contrast, we argue that such analyses based on either state-centrism or marketisation may be misleading as such accounts are incomplete, ignoring important changes in the wider environment in which universities are (more or less) embedded (see Ramirez 2006). These changes include not only calls for more accountability, but also for internationalisation (Zapp and Lerch 2020; van Vught, van der Wende, and Westerheijden 2002) as well as social and policy relevance (Watermeyer 2019).

Moreover, it is misleading to interpret the ‘entrepreneurial turn’ as a state-aided and market-driven invasion of business practices into a sector in which, according to most scholars, these should not have their place. Rather, the increasing environmental complexity, often rife with conflict between irreconcilable goals, multiplies the pressures on all organisations, in higher education and beyond (Bromley and Meyer 2015). As a mirror image of the environment, complexity in the internal structures of universities increases, most often adding new layers on top of existing organisational features.

Analyses centering on the state-market continuum are often informed by a problematic distinction between institutional and technical environments inherited from an older reading of neo-institutionalist organisational theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Such a distinction between institutional (or order-affirming) and technical (or task-performing) environments is certainly related to state-centrism – separating national political control from the global market (Rowan 2006) – and often resonates with similar concepts from organisational studies like ‘multiple’ or ‘conflicting’ ‘institutional logics’, ‘institutional pluralism’ or ‘allomorphism’ (Friedland and Alford 1991; Greenwood et al. 2011; Vaira 2004). However, such a false distinction has multiple consequences for the understanding of what is currently going on at the organisational level of higher education systems.

The institution-versus-market distinction leads to two separate analytical strategies focusing on public institutions as exclusively embedded in institutional environments and private organisations within markets. Extending this logic, such parcelling evokes the idea of public universities as increasingly ‘marketised’, with notions of efficiency, excellence, management, external funding, and internationalisation being considered indicators of such a trend. Conversely, the diagnosis for private higher education is one of being ‘underinstitutionalised’ and merely subject to ‘technically rational competitive forces’ (Levy 2004, 25). Consequently, the recent higher education privatisation bonanza is often seen as happening in some sort of institutional void or ‘policy vacuum’ (Kinser et al. 2010, 4) leading to wild organisational sprawl.

Such separation of logics (and by implication, sectors) suggests a good deal of organisational inertia, implying that environment-organisation relations co-exist stably over time in some kind of sectoral equilibrium. The temporal dimension is particularly important when considering formative phases in the emergence of new organisational fields or periods of (radical) institutional change (Zapp and Powell 2016; Greenwood and Hinings 1996). In higher education, the privatisation boom in the 1990s represents such a critical juncture. In fact, much privatisation literature acknowledges that the ‘policy vacuum’ had only been transient, with much regulation, standardisation, and mimesis gradually increasing (see below).

We claim, instead, that the strong focus on performance pressures in public tertiary education systems (e.g. diverse funding, competition, ratings and rankings) obscures the increased embedding of both public and private higher education within new
in institutional frames. These include, for example, the remarkable increase of often-mandatory accreditation and certification, the introduction of conditional funding, and inclusive admission policies. We argue that such practices reframe universities’ operations and make the conventional distinction difficult to establish, if not obsolete. Such blurring, we argue, occurs not only across organisations pertaining to different types and sectors (public, for-profit, and non-profit), but also across national systems. We provide empirical evidence for such isomorphic change when discussing various change mechanisms below.

Ironically, while many higher education scholars cannot agree on the common fate of national higher education systems, they do agree on the fact that academic entities from different countries have evolved from ‘specific organisations’ (Musselin 2004) to ‘normal’, ‘complete’, and even ‘empowered’ organisations (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Christensen, Gornitzka, and Ramirez 2019; Krücken and Meier 2006). This new kind of organisation, which we describe as the rationalised organisational actor in the following section, replaces traditional forms of organisation and imbues all universities with similar formal status and an enlarged set of objectives.

3. Higher education as an organisational phenomenon

With few exceptions, universities and organisation studies have met in earnest only recently and universities were traditionally treated *sui generis* by both comparative education and public administration scholars; either, as in the US, as a fragmented community and ‘organised anarchy’ (Cohen and March 1974) or, as in Europe, as a parochial entity torn between state reliance and professorial aristocracy (see Krücken and Meier 2006; Meier 2009 for reviews). National embeddedness and path dependency, state-centrism, and a focus on the ‘specific’ have been inherited in much policy analysis of public and private higher education (e.g. Kinser et al. 2010).

In contrast, we wish to contribute to a line of research that emerges across public administration and management scholarship, on the one hand, and comparative education scholarship on the other (Bromley 2016). This perspective understands higher education as an *organisational* phenomenon, bringing the construction of organisational identity, structures, and practices to the fore. We consider this construction as a cultural process entrenched in the rationalisation of institutional environments that (1) legitimises a more agentic version of higher education organisations and, (2) operates through cognitive, normative and regulative mechanisms across types, sectors, and countries – leading to large-scale isomorphism. The following sections introduce our perspective.

3.1 The changing environment of higher education organisations

We conceive of colleges and universities as open yet highly scripted entities seeking legitimacy from their environment (Bromley and Meyer 2015). While such insight is not new in organisational theory, its consequences for universities, we argue, deserve more attention. Indeed, it is important to sketch the changes in the wider environment of universities that have occurred over the post-World War II period up to the contemporary challenges of the ‘knowledge society’. Lacking a strong world state and dominated by a culturally liberal United States, the nascent post-WWII world society was built upon and held
together by a universalistic cultural frame rooted in the natural laws of science and human rights to which the university was central as it provided the basis for systems of legitimacy, meaning, and stratification (Frank and Meyer 2007; 2020). In the decades following World War II, the emphasis was on ‘national development and universities were viewed as serving their local communities and regions’ (Buckner 2016, 484). But, by the 1990s and 2000s, universities were seen as contributing to human development worldwide and their contribution to global sustainable development is now mediatised alongside their academic excellence (Zapp forthcoming).

Universities as organisations – not just the leading scientists they host – are now embedded in a global higher education environment, networked by international (inter-governmental and non-governmental) organisations, university associations, and quality agencies that stress open borders and markets, mobility and access, human capability and human capital, yet also social impact, sustainability, and responsibility (Zapp and Ramirez 2019). With environments becoming denser and more complex, demands on the modern university increase. The specific dimensions and consequences of the corresponding transformations are elaborated in the following, beginning with university actorhood, then isomorphism in structure, practice and substance.

3.2 Consequence I: university actorhood

Changes in the environment are reflected in organisational structure and action. We argue that universities increasingly resemble formalised and rationalised organisational actors, identifying five interrelated features of such organisational actorhood, which cut across sectors (public, private, for-profit, religious), tiers (prestigious vs. low-ranked), and countries. These are sovereignty, intentionality, responsibility, accountability, and formal differentiation.

Sovereignty. Sovereignty describes a fundamental characteristic of organisational actorhood. We prefer the term ‘sovereignty’ to ‘autonomy’ as the latter suggests that organisations are independent of their environment, which, in our view, they never are (King, Felin, and Whetten 2010). Formal sovereignty implies agency defined as the legitimate right and capacity to make decisions and pursue organisational goals, in contrast to action carried out on behest and behalf of other principals, such as state, congregation or family (Christensen 2011; Drori, Meyer, and Hwang 2009). Responsible and accountable resource allocation distinguishes the organisational actor from the organisational agent as does independent resource-seeking. No longer beholden to the state as their principal funding source where they were, universities increasingly obtain the financial means from industry, various philanthropies, and international organisations (e.g. the European Union). Where the state remains the principal funder, funds allocation has become increasingly competitive, not only in the UK, which has the first and most formalised system of research assessment for funding (Marques et al. 2017; Paradeise et al. 2009; Whitley and Gläser 2007).

Further, organisational actors draw boundaries between themselves and their environment, including many other organisational forms and organisations. Boundaries take the form of legal, accounting or symbolic demarcations. It is important to note that since all organisations seek the same sovereignty, such boundary work is not necessarily done in hierarchical (though sometimes competitive) figurations (Hasse and Krücken 2013).
Sovereignty also involves creating a special identity and image that stresses the unique purpose, history, profile, and structures, with corporate design and branding becoming ever-more important in globally-competitive higher education markets. However, these displays, upon closer scrutiny, reflect categorical membership more than substantive distinctiveness (Drori, Delmestri, and Oberg 2013; see below).

**Intentionality.** Organisational actors define their own legitimate and (more or less precisely) measurable goals, not those of an external sovereign. Goals can replace rules within organisations as they guide collective action and decision-making and structure temporality in an often highly project-laden context (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002). Organisational objectives specify roles for individuals, departments, and the entire organisation. The rise of mission and vision statements, for example, is a clear indicator of such rationalised intentionality. The fact that such statements serve more as a mirror of stakeholders’ claims and adversaries’ positioning underlines the internalisation of environmental claims and subjective perspectives on (relevant) competitors within the field. At the aggregated extreme, such a reconstruction of the environment means that organisations become a parallelogram of the claims that various stakeholders make about organisations, largely obscuring the actual substantive core (e.g. the services and products) of the organisation (Connell and Galasiński 1998; Davies and Glaister 1996).

Goals as celebrated markers of actorhood can be both trivial and excessive. In this sense, it does not seem trivial anymore to find that research and teaching are suddenly explicitly stated as an organisational purpose of universities (Krücken and Meier 2006) and in times of excessive globalising, it may seem plausible that the Chinese Nanjing Agriculture University aims to be among the top 500 universities in all subject areas by 2030, even though it only ranked 78th in the National University Ranking in agriculture.

**University responsibility and citizenship.** It is here where we deviate most from research that emphasises only the ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘managerial’ turn in higher education. An organisation’s social responsibility (Sørensen et al. 2019) or citizenship (Bromley and Meyer 2015) refers to its openness to a wide variety of stakeholders and social issues. The university as an organisation pays attention to employees’ and students’ rights, diversity, work-life balance, and sustainability. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) – an indicator long only discussed in the context of for-profits – is rising among universities around the world (Zapp forthcoming). Universities are now considered natural partners in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the first ‘Impact Ranking’ that measures universities’ contribution to the SDGs was published in 2019 by Times Higher Education.

In general, societal impact, both at the local and the global level, have become central criteria in acquiring funding (Watermeyer 2019). More recently, commitment to and involvement in broad social issues and protests such as gender equity (e.g. #MeToo), racial discrimination and police violence (e.g. Black Lives Matter), climate change (e.g. Scientists for Future) and decolonisation (e.g. Rhodes Must Fall) also suggest that universities and their leadership (as opposed to individual academic activism) are becoming increasingly visible participants in public debates with the aim to shape policy agendas.

**Accountability.** Input and output calculus are meant to coordinate and justify past and future actions. They assume causal relationships and suggest efficiency. They are used to create transparency at various levels of the organisational hierarchy as well as to the external environment, and their built-in standardisation facilitates the imagery of cross-organisational comparability (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000). New organisational
procedures like quality assurance, evaluation, accreditation, and incentive systems have been established, often linking resource allocation to performance (Whitley and Gläser 2007). Accountability mechanisms also challenge prevalent decoupling between formal and activity structures (Bromley and Powell 2012). Organisational goals and embeddedness are tightly monitored and evaluated. Meticulous reporting emerges, documenting progress toward desired, although sometimes contradicting or even unmeasurable objectives. Thus, small wonder that Korea’s Hanyang University ‘plans to progress further in order to join the world’s top 100 universities by 2039’ and evaluates such progress on sixteen different dimensions like research, alumni success, and overall university status (Meyer et al. 2006).

Managing inconsistent formal differentiation. It is conventional wisdom in organisational theory to see differentiation as an inevitable epiphenomenon of expansion (Blau 1970). Most explanations for why differentiation occurs, including in higher education, come in functionalist (Thompson 1967; Walters 2000) or social control fashions (Brint and Karabel 1991; Trow 1972). While we agree on the intra-organisational differentiation thesis (rather than inter-organisational diversity or distinctiveness), we emphasise that organisational complexity and differentiation reflect environmental demands more than technical realities. Acknowledging close and often conflicting relationships with the environment, modern universities unsurprisingly now have departments that make little or no contribution to the original tasks, which might help explain why these original tasks like teaching and research have to be explicitly spelt out in mission statements (Kosmützky and Krücken 2015). Examples of such organisational differentiation include sub-divisions for planning, public relations, international affairs, social and psychological counselling, environmental and diversity issues, special (educational) needs, technology transfer and, obviously, monitoring and evaluation to track such multidimensional change management. Such differentiation clearly contrasts with older, more monolithic university forms (Musselin 2004).

However, as loosely assembled operational units, they threaten the picture of an ‘integrated’ organisational actor (Meyer 2019). In the quest for cohesion and consistency, organisations turn to role specialisation and professionalised management and consulting, which does not necessarily replace professorial values and governance (Ramirez and Christensen 2013; Seeber et al. 2015). Instead, the organisation as an aggregated compound is perceived as in need of managerial solutions, which is not an academic particularity (Bromley 2016). Management is clearly on the rise both in international discourses (Ramirez and Tiplic 2014) and as a share of university staff (Krücken, Blümel, and Kloke 2013; Rhoades and Sporn 2002).

In sum, universities are increasingly penetrated by new models of ‘proper’ actorhood, yet the unidirectional changes tell only half the story. The emerging type of university as a socially embedded actor increases in internal complexity, including management and resource-seeking, performance and accountability, but also accessibility, social relevance, student rights, and social responsibility – aspects of formal organisation that are hard to understand when only focusing on the entrepreneurial shift. Paradoxically, while the wider organisational literature seems to agree on the blurring of the public-private divide and the emergence of ‘hybrids’ and ‘social enterprises’ (e.g. Billis 2010), comparative higher education research has not yet paid much attention to these twin processes to which we now turn.
3.3 Consequence II: isomorphism in structure and substance

The blurring of organisational boundaries between nation-states, sectors, and organisational forms is driven by diverse mechanisms: cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulaive mechanisms (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 2014). Isomorphic change reflects these dimensions as organisations are striving for (renewed) legitimacy, a key good in organisational survival, either by virtue of being culturally supported (cognitive), morally governed (normative), or legally sanctioned (regulative). Much institutional analysis thus identifies key forces in a given context and the extent to which these mechanisms contribute to reproduce or change the institutional order – or to replace it altogether.

3.3.1 Cultural-cognitive isomorphism

Cultural-cognitive isomorphism operates through mimesis and emulation. We argue that mimesis among universities is widespread, both across sectors and systems and, in many cases, reflects the great uncertainty associated with formative and less stable phases (Zapp and Powell 2016). With the rise of university actorhood, formal equality among otherwise very different organisations increases, leading to widespread comparison, competition, and collaboration (Hasse and Krücken 2013). Here, counting and accounting, ratings and rankings have forcefully reached higher education, after transforming other domains, intensifying inter-organisational interaction, both as competitors and collaborators (Brankovic 2018; Hazelkorn 2015; Lamont 2012; Marginson and van der Wende 2007; Ramirez 2010).

Discourses, ratings, and rankings serve as reference systems that circulate templates of excellence, world-class quality and efficiency on one hand and accountability, access, equality and sustainability on the other. For example, the World Bank’s most recent diagnostic tool in education, System Approach for Better Educational Results (SABER), has a specific higher education component featuring the first global assessment tool for private higher education (Zapp 2017). Similarly, new rankings have emerged that measure universities’ progress toward contributing to the UN SDG agenda (e.g. Times Higher Education’s Impact Ranking) and their efforts in preserving the environment (e.g. Universitas Indonesia’s GreenMetric World University Ranking).

While these templates come from external stakeholders based on (more or less) abstract indices and generic methodologies, mimesis works even more forcefully via peer organisations, across countries and sectors. Across sectors, Mizikaci (2011) identifies emulation within the Turkish private sector in terms of both academic and administrative practices such as programme structures, course designs, academic conferences, exchange programmes, scholarships, faculty recruitment, and English as a medium of instruction to reflect internationality. In China, successful student recruitment strategies introduced by some pioneering private universities are generously imitated by a large number of public followers across the country. Tuition and fee structures are almost identical among universities in the same province. Popular MBA programmes are offered elsewhere with the same title and courses. The more copying is done, the more difficult it becomes to identify the source and ‘in many cases the copies are merely reflections of weak originals’ (Cai and Yan 2011, 6). In Italy too, a similar curricular convergence has been identified (Trivellato 2007). Levy (2016), in his discussion on European higher education, notes that mimesis occurs mostly from the public into the private sector, as organisations from the latter...
seek legitimacy. Similar ‘free riding’ through imitation of public universities occurs in most of Central and Eastern Europe (Slantcheva and Levy 2007; Suspitsin 2007).

In general, such borrowing, emulation, and bricolage practices make cross-sectoral distinction increasingly difficult. For example, partial privatisation in the public sector thwart most attempts to draw clear-cut lines – through private modules in public organisations (Levy 2016; Slantcheva and Levy 2007), indirect and direct public financing of the private sector, private financing of public organisations (Salerno 2004), and routinised public-private collaborations (Suspitsin 2007). Complex private–public partnership arrangements such as ‘third-party government’, ‘contracting’ and non-profit-government relations add to the complexity (Boris and Steuerle 2006). The emergence of international branch campuses (public and private), which operate in foreign (public and private) postsecondary systems as well as the growing number of non-governmental, not-for-profit funding actors, such as the BRAC-Ford Foundation, also challenge such definitional exercise (Bjarnason et al. 2009; Kosmützky and Krücken 2015; Kosmützky and Putty 2016).

Tuition fees, traditionally seen as a clear indicator for private higher education, is another example often used to distinguish between types. Yet, again, while some public universities introduce tuition (Levy 2016), private for-profit universities often serve as low-fee mass educational institutions and make a crucial contribution to equality in access through socially responsible programmes and student loans reaching non-traditional and underprivileged students (Bjarnason et al. 2009; Cohen 2001). The fact that tuition fees are sometimes state-regulated and that public scholarships can be carried to private institutions does not make such a distinction easier (Jongbloed 2008; Salerno 2004).

Further distinctions use universities’ objectives or mandates as the main criteria. Here, religious organisations are often distinguished from secular universities. Yet, it seems that in higher education, what ends up happening is as has been reported for American Catholic schools, where religious branding mainly serves a signalling function, leaving few traces on operational processes (Baker 1992). Consequently, religious colleges, while ‘keeping the faith’ in their designations, ‘mostly copy without imagination or skill’ from other private and public peer organisations (Levy 2016, 18; see also Carpenter, Glanzer, and Lantinga 2014).

Beyond the faith-based segment, some researchers have started to compare universities’ mission statements and strategic plans, a relatively recent organisational phenomenon that is quickly becoming ubiquitous. Analysing such statements of public and private German universities over the 2000s, Kosmützky and Krücken (2015, 143) find them, ‘in fact, all the same: among other things, they state that universities teach, research, promote education and innovation, develop young scientists, and provide equal opportunities for men and women’.

By implication, awkward notions of putative distinctiveness at the organisational level extend to higher levels and increase over time. Tracing faculty composition by discipline in a global sample of universities across the twentieth century, Frank and Gabler (2006) identify a uniform increase in social sciences and a decrease in the humanities. Similarly, Buckner and Zapp (2020), analysing a vast sample of more than 12,000 universities worldwide, illustrate that a university’s founding era matters as much as its sector in predicting formal structure and curriculum. Faced with such blurring of organisational, sectoral, and national borders, even the most renowned privatisation scholars do not stand firm in their faith in increasing diversity (e.g. Levy 2016).
3.3.2 Normative isomorphism

In its original formulation, normative isomorphism is catalysed by professional associations, experts, and other certifying bodies (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). As indicated, this part of the higher education environment has expanded considerably. For example, where quality assurance is not required or handled by state agencies, universities can turn to the burgeoning (inter)national non-governmental quality assurance sector, including the International Accreditation Organisation (active in most fields), the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (for management, law, social sciences) or the US-based Council for Higher Education Accreditation, which maintains an International Directory containing contact information of about 467 quality assurance and accreditation bodies in 175 countries. For the US, the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity has sent almost two hundred recommendations to the Secretary of Education regarding recognition of accrediting agencies since 2012 and US national and regional accreditors offer their services in more than 65 countries (Altbach and Knight 2007). As with recognition, regional bodies burgeon, too. The European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) has, to date, accredited hundreds of higher education institutions in over 40 countries worldwide (EFMD 2016). Every world region now has its own higher education quality assurance body linked through the inter-regional International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the International Association of Universities (Zapp and Ramirez 2019; Zapp, Jungblut, and Ramirez 2020). At the global scale, the World Bank and UNESCO launched the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity in 2007 (UNESCO 2016).

Another aspect in the normative dimension, and prominently stressed in the initial conception (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), is mobility of personnel. High mobility both within emerging private sectors and across the public-private divide has been reported for many Eastern European countries (Slantcheva and Levy 2007). The case of China is particularly interesting, as Cai and Yan (2011) found that more than half of China’s private university staff is directly hired from public institutions, working part-time in their new jobs. The same faculty also switches between institutions within the private sector. In addition, the majority of new graduates hired as teaching staff come from public universities. All of them carry their teaching styles, syllabi, and ethos into the private sector. Such mobility is also observed for administrative and management staff that either crisscrosses the public-private boundary or is trained by public organisations to then work in private ones. Similar convergence in part-time and administrative faculty has also been shown in the US and many European countries (Stage 2020). Personnel overlap has also been observed in accreditation agencies. Here, senior professors from prestigious public universities are preferred candidates lending their reputation and expertise to the accrediting procedure (Fried 2006). It seems to matter little that accreditation is mandatory only for private universities (as in Germany, for example) or both public and private (as in the Netherlands for example).

As a novel phenomenon, consulting firms increasingly enter university reform processes carrying much rationalised advice. Consultancies are increasingly common in Spain and elsewhere (Serrano-Velarde and Krücken 2012). As they operate cross-nationally, they help diffuse organisational templates and institutionalised norms of appropriate ‘change management’.
3.3.3 Regulative isomorphism

Regulative isomorphism captures pressures that emanate from legal frameworks and financial conditionality. While the state remains an important source of such regulative authority, other actors at multiple levels are now involved in the ‘hard governance’ of higher education. Such regulative efforts may be found in the statutory recognition of a formal higher education institution, usually provided by a national ministry of education. Such recognition is often overlooked when discussing accreditation. Official recognition entails the permission to hold exams, grant degrees, apply for public subsidies and claim particular fiscal benefits, and it serves as prerequisite to become a member in university associations such as the IAU (Fernández Darraz et al. 2009).

Accreditation, then, aims to ensure quality standards and is in most countries handled by state agencies. In some cases, accreditation is explicitly based on the standards established by public universities. Standards include, among others, operational stability, personal and material resources, minimum quality in academic programmes and thorough internal quality assurance procedures. Importantly, both statutory recognition and subsequent accreditation also entail universities’ subjection to (an often constitutional) academic liberty of teaching and research. Germany’s Giessen School of Theology, a large evangelical seminary founded in 1974, illustrates the scope. During the lengthy accreditation procedure, the School had to renounce the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy as its ultimate conception of the Scripture, opening the way for a scientific interpretation. It also had to eliminate faith-based admission requirements and to shut down two departments whose goals were perceived more as an attempt ‘to exert a tortious religious influence than to further scientific work’ (Wissenschaftsrat 2008, 61). In China, where private higher education expansion was particularly poignant in the early 1990s, state responses came late, but were all the more pervasive. By now, regulations concern registration, minimum organisational size, qualifications of academic and administrative staff, infrastructures and facilities, non-profit status, limited foreign ownership, executive councils, boards of trustees, decision-making, academic programmes and evaluation processes (Mok 2012). In countries like Turkey, such a list is even longer, additionally including the structuring of academic years, degrees and students’ rights (Mizikaci 2011). A similar observation has been made in Central and Eastern Europe, the region where private sector growth was perhaps the most fulminant. Tomusk (2003) finds that a first wave of private higher education expansion was marked by strong distinctiveness and innovation (e.g. in terms of curricula), but was soon superseded by the legitimacy of the public university, state regulations and accreditation.

In general, it is a distinct feature of the privatisation story that regulatory instruments enter into force with some delay. In many instances, states were overwhelmed by the organisational mushrooming in the private sector during the early 1990s. Hence, legal responses lagged behind, yet once formulated, they struck with great rigour. In addition to the examples from above, case studies show such subsequent regulatory action in Germany (Fernández Darraz et al. 2009); in Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Georgia (Levy 2006; Pachuashvili 2011); in Poland (Musial-Demurat 2012) and in Thailand (Praphamontripong 2010).

Further, frameworks and initiatives to facilitate recognition of vocational and tertiary qualifications have grown remarkably in the past two decades, now including 150
countries (CEDEFOP 2013; Zapp and Ramirez 2019). Such work is often propelled by initiatives at the regional level where the overlapping European Qualifications Framework and the Bologna Process can be considered the most elaborate projects (Powell, Bernhard, and Graf 2012; Huisman and van der Wende 2005). Often neglected, however, most regions in the world have started similar initiatives and the first global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications led by UNESCO was adopted in 2019. Although the WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services has stalled since 2008, the original draft foreshadows the legal framework for global trade in education, while numerous bi- and multilateral treaties keep spurring the internationalisation of educational services (Altbach and Knight 2007).

4. Diversity façades in higher education?

Major changes in the environment of universities have challenged the analytical primacy placed on the state and its national path dependencies, and strict distinctions of sectoral logics. As a result, standard approaches in the political sociology of higher education lose a good deal of their explanatory power. What does the widespread phenomenon of organisation-level isomorphism mean for the comparative analysis of (higher) education in which diagnoses of national, sectoral and organisational diversity and distinctiveness prevail?

Diversity has been considered as a direct and almost natural outcome of HE markets (Geiger 2004; Levy 2004). However, general analyses of organisational responses to market competition stress that differentiation is but one result – alongside the imitation of successful competitors, a strong force for isomorphism. Gradual isomorphic change, in both competition-driven and highly institutionalised settings, is a key point manifest in institutional theory and organisational research. Thus, we posit that snapshots taken in times of abrupt change that focus on markers that might describe a façade more than the actual activity are problematic.

Similar to Boli and Elliott’s (2008) account of the individualisation of cultural differences, we argue that inter-organisational diversity and distinctiveness in higher education mainly reflect ceremonial façade-making. While we certainly do not claim that formal structure does not matter in the analysis of universities (or organisations in general), the focus on categorical features obscures change at the meso-level. To make this point clear, consider empirical illustrations such as universities’ mission statements (Kosmützky and Krücken 2015; Morphew, Fumasoli, and Stensaker 2018). Important findings, which are given little attention by these authors, include that, firstly, all universities in the sample started to write such statements within less than a decade, clearly an example of organisational mimesis, with earlier waves of diffusion in other countries (Davies and Glaister 1996). Secondly, the statements show strikingly little variation across the university population composed of universities old and new, small and large, public and private. Thirdly, the statements stress generic missions like teaching and research and, thus, contrast with the self-proclaimed unique organisational ‘image’ and identity. Universities may emphasise their distinctive historical founding moments, their strongly international character or their particular multidisciplinary profile, yet substantive differences have declined. While Kosmützky and Krücken (2015) emphasise these statements as instruments of strategic positioning, we argue that they also exemplify façade diversity. Organisations ‘dress
up’ for ubiquitous competition in the knowledge economy. While such masquerading is worth studying (see Delmestri, Oberg, and Drori 2015), it should not be confused with the actual organisational processes operating underneath, which are increasingly similar and, indeed, a force of homogenisation. Put simply, ‘comparative advantages’, ‘unique selling points’, and ‘branding’ are just different prints on the same basic university hoodie.

Beneath such façade diversity, higher education organisations are gradually morphing into legitimate and sovereign actors entering the global stage. As they do so, they free themselves from national systems, moving into a space where world society mechanisms complement and partially replace conventional governance at lower levels. In an ironic turn, perhaps, the interplay of the neoliberal evaluative state (Neave 1998; Scott 1998) and the burgeoning global regime could mean restoring the original universality and autonomy of the university vis-à-vis the state found to be characteristic of the pre-Westphalian order (Ramirez 2002; Riddle 1993; Rüegg 2004).

It is unlikely that the transformation described here will stall, especially as higher education after the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be far more virtual – and thus more accessible globally – than ever before. The global playing field for universities is likely to be further flattened in light of open markets and borders, a highly active international sector, and the worldwide diffusion and recognition of the theoretical equivalence of systems, organisations, and degrees – as well as worldwide markets for students and faculty – despite attempts by some populist and illiberal political leaders to contain academic liberty and expansion.

Therefore, beyond isomorphism, an interesting point of departure for further research consists of focusing on the global integration of higher education – and of research on higher education (Dusdal et al. forthcoming). As organisations move and morph within an increasingly similar environment and emulate an increasingly powerful universal tem-plate with ubiquitous global-spanning technologies, does it still make sense to conceptualise higher education as a patchwork of national systems? Affected by standardisation forces, such as the regional (e.g. Bologna process) and global (e.g. quality assurance), do not these new institutional frameworks instead represent corridors that provide safe global passage to increasingly free-roaming universities? The higher education currencies – credit points and degrees for students and publications for faculty – are clearly subject to worldwide norms, increasingly recognisable, and convertible.

Our perspective contrasts with traditional comparative research that has focused on comparing mainly national higher education systems and sectors, often relying on pre-mises of distinct institutional logics and path dependencies. By treating these aggregate entities as the primary level of analysis, we have argued, crucial changes at the meso-level of universities and their changing local, national, regional and global environments were obscured. Cognitive, normative and regulative environmental pressures operate across these levels and impact on universities as these transform themselves into rational and strategic organisational actors. As a consequence, both structurally and substantively, universities worldwide increasingly display isomorphic features, which reveal the alleged diversity and differentiation in higher education as being façades.

We stress that the ‘movement’ of structures (e.g. quality assurance offices) and practices (e.g. research evaluation; rankings) across countries, sectors, and organisations cannot primarily be explained by evidence of the superiority of any single model, even less so given the complexity of defining and measuring input and output in higher
education as a social, economic, political, and cultural institution (Rowan 2006). Here, it is important to remember that isomorphism does not necessarily assume that organisations move toward some (successful) real world model like the US research university – as is sometimes implied in analyses (e.g. Kodeih and Greenwood 2013; Paradeise and Thoenig 2013). Assessing the impact of cognitive (i.e. attention to practices in other organisations), normative (i.e. membership in associations of similar organisations) and regulative (i.e. accreditation) forces on the rationalisation of public, non-profit, and for-profit organisations, Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004, 302) emphasise that these pressures did not make organisational types look more like their peers from the same sector or those from another sector. Instead, these pressures made all organisations ‘look more the same, converging on a middle ground’. Universities as organisational actors occupy such middle ground, with convergence occurring among universities of all sorts: global champions known worldwide via rankings, publicly-traded and international chains, congregational seminars, virtual providers, and universities established by non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations, such as the United Nations. Surely, some of these global pressures might hit and hurt publicly-funded organisations more severely than private ones as they imply the (often radical) transformation of once bureaucratically-structured, state-protected entities. Yet, this does not mean that private universities are less affected by these changes. As debates on quality assurance and accreditation show, newly-founded private organisations (for-profit and non-profit alike) are actually, even more, subject to regulatory supervision as they are perceived as ‘suspicious’ newcomers in long-established fields.

In general, the new university actor, whatever its organisational and sectoral ancestry, is expected to incorporate more functions and respond to more claims than any of the previous organisational forms (Smelser 2013). It should account for quality and equality, excellence and access, social relevance and social responsibility, as a socially embedded and highly rationalised organisational actor. The fact that this includes a response to globe-spanning market forces is not a contradiction of the university’s institutional embeddedness. The internal differentiation of this empowered organisational form, a central feature of its transformation, responds to these growing demands. Yet this differentiation proceeds according to a global model that increasingly prescribes the new features and roles of legitimate higher education organisations in world society. A future research agenda, both small and large-N, would need to penetrate universities’ façade in order to identify and understand these new features and roles of universities in the global knowledge society.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

**Notes on contributors**

*Mike Zapp* is a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Social Sciences, University of Luxembourg. He held fellowship positions at Johns Hopkins University and Stanford University. His cross-national and comparative research is interested in institutional change in global (higher) education, the cultural construction of world society and the particular role of international organizations and science. Recent publications include *Imagining the World. Conceptions and Determinants of Internationalization in Higher Education Curricula Worldwide*. Sociology of Education, 2020 (with J.
Marcelo Marques is a postdoctoral researcher at the Hertie School. He works on transnational governance and Europeanisation processes in the field of education. In particular, he is interested in comparative institutional and organizational analyses to understand institutional change in higher education and research policies. Recent publications appeared in Higher Education, Higher Education Policy, and the European Educational Research Journal. His most recent co-authored book is “European Educational Research (Re)Constructed: Institutional Change in Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway and the European Union” (Oxford Symposium Books).

Justin J. W. Powell is Professor of Sociology of Education at the University of Luxembourg. His comparative institutional analyses chart persistence and change in special and inclusive education, vocational training, higher education, and science systems. His books include Barriers to Inclusion: Special Education in the US and Germany (Routledge, 2011/2016; Irving K. Zola Award); Comparing Special Education: Origins to Contemporary Paradoxes (Stanford University Press, 2011, with J.G. Richardson; AERA Division B Outstanding Book Award); The Century of Science: The Global Triumph of the Research University (Emerald, 2017, co-edited with D.P. Baker and F. Fernandez; ASHE Award); European Educational Research (Re)Constructed: Institutional Change in Germany, the UK, Norway and the EU (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2018, with M. Zapp and M. Marques); and International Handbook of Inclusive Education (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2021, co-edited with A. Köpfer and R. Zahnd).

References

Altbach, P. G., and J. Knight. 2007. “The Internationalization of Higher Education: Motivations and Realities.” Journal of Studies in International Education 11 (3-4): 290–305. doi:10.1177/1028315307303542.

Baker, D. P. 1992. “The Politics of American Catholic School Expansion, 1870–1930.” In The Political Construction of Education: The State, School Expansion, and Economics Change, edited by B. Fuller and R. Rubinson, 189–206. New York: Praeger.

Billis, D. 2010. Hybrid Organizations and the Third Sector. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bjarnason, S., K.-M. Cheng, J. Fielden, M.-J. Lemaitre, D. Levy, and N. V. Varghese. 2009. A New Dynamic: Private Higher Education. Paris: UNESCO.

Blau, P. M. 1970. “A Formal Theory of Differentiation in Organizations.” American Sociological Review 35 (2): 201–218.

Bleiklie, I., J. Enders, B. Lepori, and C. Musselin. 2011. “New Public Management, Network Governance and the University as a Changing Professional Organization.” In Ashgate Research Companion to New Public Management, edited by T. Christensen and P. Lægreid, 161–176. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Boli, J., and M. A. Elliott. 2008. “Facade Diversity: The Individualization of Cultural Difference.” International Sociology 23 (4): 540–560.

Boris, E., and C. E. Steuerle. 2006. Nonprofits and Government: Collaboration and Conflict. Washington: Urban Institute Press.

Brankovic, J. 2018. “How Do Meta-organizations Affect Extra-organizational Boundaries? The Case of University Associations.” In Towards Permeable Boundaries of Organizations? Research in the Sociology of Organizations, edited by L. Ringel, P. Hiller and C. Zietsma, 259–281. Emerald: Bingley.
Brint, S., and J. Karabel. 1991. *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bromley, P. 2016. "Policy and Administration as Culture: Organizational Sociology and Cross-National Education Trends." In *The Handbook of Global Policy-making in Education*, edited by K. Mundy, A. Green, R. Lingard and A. Verger, 470–489. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bromley, P., and J. W. Meyer. 2015. *Hyper-organization: Global Organizational Expansion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bromley, P., and W. W. Powell. 2012. “From Smoke and Mirrors to Walking the Talk: Decoupling in the Contemporary World.” *The Academy of Management Annals* 6 (1): 483–530.

Brunsson, N., and K. Sahlin-Andersson. 2000. “Constructing Organizations: The Case of Public Sector Reform.” *Organizational Studies* 21 (4): 721–746.

Buckner, E. S. 2016. "The Changing Discourse on Higher Education and the Nation-state, 1960-2010." *Higher Education* 74 (3): 473–489.

Buckner, L., and M. Zapp. 2020. "Institutional Logics in the Global Higher Education Landscape: Differences in Organizational Characteristics by Sector and Founding Era." *Minerva*, 59: 27–51. doi:10.1007/s11024-020-09416-3.

Cai, Y., and F. Yan. 2011. "Organisational Diversity in Chinese Private Higher Education: An Institutional Perspective." In *Public Vices, Private Virtues? Assessing the Effects of Marketization in Higher Education*, edited by P. Teixeira and D. Dill, 47–65. Rotterdam: Sense.

Carpenter, J. A., P. L. Glanzer, and N. Lantinga. 2014. *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

CEDEFOP. 2013. "Global National Qualifications Framework Inventory." Resource document. Accessed 26 October 2016. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/de/publications-and-resources/publications/2211.

Chatelain-Ponroy, S., S. Mignot-Gérard, C. Musselin, and S. Sponem. 2018. “Is Commitment to Performance-based Management Compatible with Commitment to University “Publicness”? Academics’ Values in French Universities.” *Organization Studies* 39 (10): 1377–1401.

Christensen, T. 2011. “University Governance Reforms: Potential Problems of More Autonomy?” *Higher Education* 62 (4): 503–517.

Christensen, T., Å Gornitzka, and F. O. Ramirez. 2019. *Universities as Agencies: Reputation and Professionalization*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Clark, B. R. 1983. *The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-national Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clark, B. R. 1998. *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities: Organizational Pathways of Transformation*. Paris: International Association of Universities Press.

Cohen, D. 2001. “The Worldwide Rise of Private Colleges.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 9, 48.

Cohen, M., and J. G. March. 1974. *Leadership and Ambiguity. The American College President*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Connell, I., and D. Galasiński. 1998. “Academic Mission Statements: An Exercise in Negotiation.” *Discourse and Society* 9 (4): 457–479.

Daeenkindt, S., and J. Huisman. 2020. “Mapping the Scattered Field of Research on Higher Education: A Correlated Topic Model of 17,000 Articles, 1991-2018.” *Higher Education* 80 (3): 571–587. doi:10.1007/s10734-020-00500-x.

Davies, S. W., and K. W. Glaister. 1996. “Spurs to Higher Things? Mission Statements of UK Universities.” *Higher Education Quarterly* 50 (4): 261–294.

De Boer, H., J. Enders, and U. Schimmack. 2007. “On the Way Towards New Public Management? The Governance of University Systems in England, the Netherlands, Austria, and Germany.” In *New Forms of Governance in Research Organizations*, edited by D. Jansen, 137–154. Dordrecht: Springer.

Deem, R. 2001. “Globalisation, New Managerialism, Academic Capitalism and Entrepreneurialism in Universities.” *Comparative Education* 37 (1): 7–20.

Delmestri, G., A. Oberg, and G. S. Drori. 2015. “The Unbearable Lightness of University Branding.” *International Studies of Management & Organization* 45 (2): 121–136.
DiMaggio, P. J., and W. W. Powell. 1983. “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields.” American Sociological Review 48 (2): 147–160.

Dobbins, M., and C. Knill. 2014. Higher Education Governance and Policy Change in Western Europe. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Drori, G. S., G. Delmestri, and A. Oberg. 2013. “Branding the University: Relational Strategy of Identity Construction in a Competitive Field.” In Trust in Higher Education Institutions, edited by L. Engwall and P. Scott, 134–147. London: Portland Press.

Drori, G. S., J. W. Meyer, and H. Hwang. 2009. “Global Organization: Rationalization and Actorhood as Dominant Scripts.” In Institutions and Ideology. (Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Volume 27), edited by P. W. Renate, E. Meyer, K. Sahlin and M. J. Ventresc, 17–43. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X(2009)0000027003.

Dusdal, J., M. Zapp, M. Marques, and J. Powell. forthcoming. Higher Education Organizations as Strategic Actors in Networks: Institutional and Relational Perspectives Meet Social Network Analysis. Theory and Method in Higher Education Research. Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

EFMD. 2016. “Equis Accredited Schools.” Accessed 8 October 2020. https://www.efmdglobal.org/accreditations/business-schools/equis/equis-accredited-schools.

Enders, J., and B. Jongbloed. 2007. Public-Private Dynamics in Higher Education, Expectations. Developments and Outcomes. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Etzkowitz, H., and L. Leydesdorff. 2000. “The Dynamics of Innovation: From National Systems and “Mode 2” to a Triple Helix of University–Industry–Government Relations.” Research Policy 29 (2): 109–123.

Ferlie, E., C. Musselin, and G. Andresani. 2008. “The Steering of Higher Education System: A Public Management Perspective.” Higher Education 56 (3): 325–348.

Fernández Darraz, E., G. Lenhardt, R. D. Reisz, and M. Stock. 2009. Private Hochschulen in Chile, Deutschland, Rumänien und den USA, Struktur und Entwicklung. HoF Arbeitsberichte 3/09. Wittenberg: Institut für Hochschulforschung (HoF).

Fernández Darraz, E., G. Lenhardt, R. D. Reisz, and M. Stock. 2010. Hochschulprivatisierung und akademische Freiheit. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Frank, D. J., and J. Gabler. 2006. Reconstructing the University: Worldwide Shifts in Academia in the 20th Century. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Frank, D. J., and J. W. Meyer. 2007. “University Expansion and the Knowledge Society.” Theory and Society 36 (4): 287–311.

Frank, D. J., and J. W. Meyer. 2020. The University and the Global Knowledge Society. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fried, J. 2006. “Higher Education Governance in Europe: Autonomy, Ownership and Accountability – A Review of Literature.” In Higher Education Governance Between Democratic Culture, Academic Aspirations and Market Forces, edited by J. Kohler and J. Huber, 9–133. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Strasbourg.

Friedland, R., and R. R. Alford. 1991. “Bringing Society Back in: Symbols, Practices and Institutional Contradictions.” In The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis, edited by W. W. Powell and P. J. DiMaggio, 232–263. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Frumkin, P., and J. Galaskiewicz. 2004. “Institutional Isomorphism and Public Sector Organizations.” Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 14 (3): 283–307.

Fumasoli, T., and B. Stensaker. 2013. “Organizational Studies in Higher Education: A Reflection on Historical Themes and Prospective Trends.” Higher Education Policy 26 (4): 479–496.

Geiger, P. L. 2004. “Market Coordination of Higher Education: The United States.” In Markets in Higher Education, edited by P. Teixeira, B. Jongbloed, D. Dill and A. Amaral, 161–183. Dordrecht: Springer.

Greenwood, R., and C. R. Hinings. 1996. “Understanding Radical Organizational Change.” The Academy of Management Review 21 (4): 1022–1054.

Greenwood, R., M. Raynard, F. Kodeih, E. R. Micelotta, and M. Lounsbury. 2011. “Institutional Complexity and Organizational Responses.” The Academy of Management Annals 5 (1): 317–371. Gumport, P. J. 2000. “Academic Restructuring: Organizational Change and Institutional Imperatives.” Higher Education 39 (1): 67–91.
Gumport, P. J. 2019. *Academic Fault Lines: The Rise of Industry Logic in Public Higher Education.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hasse, R., and G. Krücken. 2013. “Competition and Actorhood: A Further Expansion of the Neo-institutional Agenda.” *Sociologia Internationalis* 51 (2): 181–205.

Hazelkorn, E. 2015. *Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Huisman, J., L. Meek, and F. Wood. 2007. “Institutional Diversity in Higher Education: A Cross-National and Longitudinal Analysis.” *Higher Education Quarterly* 61 (4): 563–577.

Huisman, J., and M. van der Wende. 2005. *On Cooperation and Competition I and II. Institutional Responses to Internationalisation, Europeanisation and Globalisation.* Bonn: Lemmens.

Hwang, H., and J. A. Colyvas. 2013. “Actors, Actors! Actors? The Proliferation of the Actors and its Consequences.” In EGOS Annual Meeting, Montréal, Canada.

Jongbloed, B. 2008. “Funding in Higher Education: A View from Europe.” Resource document. Accessed 20 October 2016. https://www.utwente.nl/bms/cheps/summer_school/literature/brazil%20funding%20vs2.pdf.

King, B. G., T. Felin, and D. A. Whetten. 2010. “Finding the Organization in Organizational Theory.” *Organization Science* 21 (1): 290–305.

Kinser, K., D. C. Levy, J. C. S. Casillas, A. Bernasconi, S. Slantcheva-Durts, W. Otieno, J. E. Lane, P. Praphamontripong, W. Zumeta, and R. LaSota. 2010. “The Global Growth of Private Higher Education.” *ASHE Higher Education Report* 36 (3): 1–158.

Kodeih, F., and R. Greenwood. 2013. “Responding to Institutional Complexity: The Role of Identity.” *Organization Studies* 35 (1): 7–39.

Kosmützky, A. 2015. “In Defense of International Comparative Studies.” *European Journal of Higher Education* 5 (4): 354–370.

Kosmützky, A., and G. Krücken. 2015. “Sameness and Difference: Analyzing Institutional and Organizational Specificities of Universities Through Mission Statements.” *International Studies of Management & Organization* 45 (2): 137–149.

Kosmützky, A., and R. Putty. 2016. “Transcending Borders and Traversing Boundaries: A Systematic Review of the Literature on Transnational, Offshore, Cross-Border, and Borderless Higher Education.” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 20 (1): 8–33.

Krücken, G. 2003. “Learning the ‘New, New Thing’: On the Role of Path Dependency in University Structures.” *Higher Education* 46 (3): 315–339.

Krücken, G., A. Blümel, and K. Kloke. 2013. “The Managerial Turn in Higher Education?” *Minerva* 51 (4): 417–442.

Krücken, G., and F. Meier. 2006. “Turning the University into an Organizational Actor.” In *Globalization and Organization: World Society and Organizational Change*, edited by G. Drori, J. Meyer and H. Hwang, 241–257. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lamont, M. 2012. “Toward a Comparative Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (21): 201–221.

Levy, D. C. 2004. “The New Institutionalism: Mismatches with Private Higher Education’s Global Growth. Program for Research on Private Higher Education.” Working Paper. Albany: University at Albany.

Levy, D. C. 2006. “The Unanticipated Explosion: Private Higher Education’s Global Surge.” *Comparative Education Review* 50 (2): 217–240.

Levy, D. C. 2016. “The Relative Importance of Private Higher Education in Europe.” *PROPHE Working Paper Series* 21: 1–25.

Marginson, S., and M. van der Wende. 2007. “To Rank or To Be Ranked: The Impact of Global Rankings in Higher Education.” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 11 (4-3): 306–329.

Marques, M., J. J. W. Powell, M. Zapp, and G. Biesta. 2017. “How Does Research Evaluation Impact Educational Research? Exploring Intended and Unintended Consequences of Research Assessment in the United Kingdom, 1986–2014.” *European Educational Research Journal* 16 (6): 820–842. doi:10.1177/1474904117730159

Meier, F. 2009. *The University as an Actor.* Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag.
Meyer, J. W. 2019. “Reflections on Rationalization, Actors, and Others.” In Agents, Actors, Actorhood. (Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Volume 58), edited by H. Hwang, J. Colyvas and G. S. Drori, 275–285. Bingley: Emerald.

Meyer, J. W., F. O. Ramirez, D. J. Frank, and E. Schofer. 2006. “Higher Education as an Institution.” CDDRL Stanford Working Paper Series 57: 1–58.

Meyer, J. W., and B. Rowan. 1977. “Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony.” American Journal of Sociology 83 (2): 340–363.

Mizikaci, F. 2011. “Isomorphic and Diverse Features of Turkish Private Higher Education.” PROPHE Working Paper Series 18: 1–18.

Mok, K. H. 2012. “Bringing the State Back In: Restoring the Role of the State in Chinese Higher Education.” European Journal of Education 47 (2): 228–241.

Morphew, C. C., T. Fumasoli, and B. Stensaker. 2018. “Changing Missions? How the Strategic Plans of Research-Intensive Universities in Northern Europe and North America Balance Competing Identities.” Studies in Higher Education 43 (6): 1–15.

Musial-Demurat, J. 2012. “The Pyramid of Nonprofit Responsibilities: The Institutionalization of Organizational Actorhood Across Sectors.” Voluntas 29 (6): 1300–1314.

Neave, G., and F. A. van Vught. 1991. Prometheus Bound. The Changing Relationship Between Government and Higher Education in Western Europe. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Paradeise, C., and J.-C. Thoenig. 2013. “Academic Institutions in Search of Quality: Local Orders and Global Standards.” Organization Studies 34 (2): 189–218.

Paradeise, C., and J.-C. Thoenig. 2013. “Intra-Sectoral Diversity: A Political Economy of Thai Private Higher Education.” Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University at Albany, New York.

Pope, S., P. Bromley, A. Lim, and J. W. Meyer. 2018. “Growing Commonalities and Persistent Differences in Higher Education.” In The New Institutionalism in Education, edited by H.-D. Meyer and B. Rowan, 123–142. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Ramirez, F. O. 2010. “Accounting for Excellence: Transforming Universities into Organizational Actors.” In Higher Education, Policy, and the Global Competition Phenomenon, edited by L. M. Portnoi, V. D. Rust and S. S. Bagley, 43–58. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rhoades, G., and B. Sporn. 2002. “New Models of Management and Shifting Modes and Costs of Production.” Tertiary Education and Management 8 (3): 3–28.

Riddle, P. 1993. “Political Authority and University Formation in Europe, 1200–1800.” Sociological Perspectives 36 (1): 45–62.
Rowan, B. 2006. “The New Institutionalism and the Study of Educational Organizations.” In The New Institutionalism in Education, edited by H.-D. Meyer and B. Rowan, 15–33. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Rüegg, W. 2004. “Part 1: Themes and Patterns.” In Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800–1945). (A History of the University in Europe, Volume III), edited by W. Rüegg, 2–23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sahlin-Andersson, K., and A. Söderholm. 2002. Beyond Project Management. Malmö: Liber Ekonomi.

Salerno, C. 2004. “Public Money and Private Providers: Funding Channels and National Patterns in Four Countries.” Higher Education 48 (1): 101–130.

Scott, P. 1998. The Globalization of Higher Education. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Scott, W. R. 2014. Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities. Los Angeles: Sage.

Seeber, M., B. Lepori, M. Montauti, J. Enders, H. de Boer, E. Weyer, I. Bleiklie, et al. 2015. “European Universities as Complete Organizations?” Public Management Review 17 (10): 1444–1474.

Serrano-Velarde, K., and G. Krücken. 2012. “Private Sector Consultants and Public Universities: The Challenges of Cross-sectoral Knowledge Transfers.” European Journal of Education 47 (2): 277–289.

Slantcheva, S., and D. C. Levy. 2007. Private Higher Education in Post-communist Europe. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Slaughter, S., and L. Leslie. 1997. Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Smelser, N. J. 2013. Dynamics of the Contemporary University. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sorensen, M., L. Geschwind, J. Kekäle, and R. Pinheiro. 2019. The Responsible University. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stage, A. K. 2020. “Are National University Systems Becoming More Alike? Long-term Developments in Staff Composition Across Five Countries.” Policy Reviews in Higher Education 4 (1): 68–104.

Suspiritsin, D. A. 2007. “Private Higher Education in Russia: The Quest for Legitimacy.” PhD dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University.

Teichler, U. 2004. “The Changing Debate on Internationalisation of Higher Education.” Higher Education 48 (1): 5–26.

Thompson, J. D. 1967. Organizations in Action. New Brunswick: Transaction.

Tomusk, V. 2003. “The War of Institutions, Episode I: The Rise, and the Rise of Private Higher Education in Eastern Europe.” Higher Education Policy 16 (2): 213–238.

Trivellato, P. 2007. “Italy.” In The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe, edited by P. J. Wells, J. Sadlak and L. Vlasceanu, 213–256. Bucharest: Universul S.A.

Trow, M. 1972. The Expansion and Transformation of Higher Education. Morristown: General Learning Press.

UNESCO. 2016. “Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity.” Accessed 15 October 2016. http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/higher-education/quality-assurance/giqac/.

Vaira, M. 2004. “Globalisation and Higher Education Organizational Change.” Higher Education 48 (4): 483–510.

van Vught, F. A., M. van der Wende, and D. Westerhijden. 2002. Higher Education in a Globalising World. Dordrecht: Springer.

Vlegels, J., and J. Huisman. 2021. “The Emergence of the Higher Education Research Field (1976–2018): Preferential Attachment, Smallworldness and Fragmentation in its Collaboration Networks.” Higher Education 81 (5): 1079–1095. doi:10.1007/s10734-020-00600-8.

Walters, P. B. 2000. “The Limits of Growth.” In Handbook of Sociology of Education, edited by M. Hallinan, 241–261. Boston: Springer.

Watermeyer, R. 2019. Competitive Accountability in Academic Life. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Whitley, R., and J. Gläser. 2007. The Changing Governance of the Sciences. Dordrecht: Springer.

Wissenschaftsrat. 2008. Stellungnahme zur Akkreditierung der Freien Theologischen Akademie Giessen (FTA). Accessed 8 October 2020. https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/8496-08.html.

Zapp, M. 2017. “The World Bank and Education: Governing (Through) Knowledge.” International Journal of Educational Development 53: 1–11. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.11.007
Zapp, M., J. Jungblut, and F. O. Ramirez. 2020. “Legitimacy, Stratification, and Internationalization in Global Higher Education: The Case of the International Association of Universities.” *Tertiary Education and Management* 27: 1–15. doi:10.1007/s11233-020-09062-0.

Zapp, M., and J. Lerch. 2020. “Imagining the World. Conceptions and Determinants of Internationalization in Higher Education Curricula Worldwide.” *Sociology of Education* 93 (4): 372–392. doi:10.1177/0038040720929304

Zapp, M. Forthcoming. “Universities, Sustainable Development and the ‘Knowledge Turn’ in Global Governance – Causes, Mechanisms and Risks.” In *The Geopolitics of the Knowledge Economy*, edited by M. Parreira do Amaral. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zapp, M., and J. J. W. Powell. 2016. “How to Construct an Organizational Field: Empirical Educational Research in Germany, 1995–2015.” *European Educational Research Journal* 15 (5): 537–557. doi:10.1177/1474904116641422

Zapp, M., and F. O. Ramirez. 2019. “Beyond Isomorphism and Internationalisation. Towards a Global Higher Education Regime.” *Comparative Education*. 55 (4): 473–493. doi:10.1080/03050068.2019.1638103