

**ACADEMIC ELITE CHANGE AS A SOURCE OF QUALITY ORIENTED HIGHER
EDUCATION REFORM: THE CASE OF ESTONIA**

ABSTRACT

Two tendencies in the existing research on higher education reform are observable. On the one hand, the research about higher education reform in the CEE/FSU suffers from limited amount of academic interest and methodological shortcomings. On the other hand, the abundance of publications on the reform efforts around the world that in one way or the other confesses the limited success of educational reform progress has led to tendencies to complicate the theory of (higher) education reform.

Therefore, the research that I intend to undertake as a Ph.D. candidate is to break the chain and return to a simple, elegant and parsimonious understanding of education reform. Rather than adding variables and making the understanding of education reform more complicated, my theory intends to simplify. It aims to show that, as it is often the case in economics and politics, elite change (rather than the change in legislation or governance) is also the fundamental source of real change at universities.

Indeed, in sharp contrast to political and economic elite change, which has attracted a considerable academic interest, extremely little attention has been paid to academic elite turnover and its effects on educational reform. The close case study of Estonian academic elite will be one of the first empirical inquiries, allowing to report how the regime change has effected the faculty turnover and quality of higher education. More particularly, the study to be undertaken to looks for an answer to the question what facilitates the real change in university student's learning experience, in particular, and quality improvement in education, in general. For that, Estonian academic elite reproduction and circulation will be closely observed and examined. My hypothesis is that academic elite circulation leads to actual quality improvements in education such as changes in curriculum, teaching style, evaluation techniques, and course content.

Based on my research, two types of contributions are likely. First, it may well turn out that the research I intend to will contribute to the scholarly literature generally -- by supplying a comprehensive literature review on higher education reform in ECE/FSU countries and outlining the post-communist academic elite identity. More importantly, however, I expect to contribute with a theory claiming that faculty change is the major source of quality improvement in university education. While, the former should attract the interest of the scholars and policy-makers interested in ECE/FSU higher education reform, the latter, intends to attract wider interest among the scholars interested in elite change, academics (as professionals/intellectuals) and quality oriented education reform.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TOPIC

Despite many recent attempts to treat higher education as a particular production process and the recent, on might wish to say – hysteria – of the entrepreneurial university, there are significant differences between higher education and industrial production. One of them is that little trust is put in an industrial producer while there is no product to be seen. Higher education seems to be able to legitimate itself through other means. At times its *value added* can be close to zero but the institutions still enjoy high prestige. In the process of symbolic exchange the students' actual learning experience may be far less important than the symbols obtained. The latter may have an effect of self-fulfilling prophecy – those who have been prophesied by the wise men to become the leaders will do so anyway. What we have in these days in Eastern Europe is largely overpopulated and under-funded higher education that tries to build a new legitimacy that could possibly boost its status by any means. The mix of measures that are undertaken is inconsistent and fails to address the most crucial issues – the restoration of the academic community and the radical reform of the students' learning experience. As such these measures may, in the long run, give less positive effects than currently expected (Tomusk 2000a: 34).

Schools of all levels are influential institutions that socialize people and transmit knowledge, skills, culture and values. On top of this, universities are expected to offer answers and solutions to multiple problems that modern societies face¹. This growing importance of universities in the modern societies has brought the higher education reform to the top of the policy agenda in many countries around the world. Although the underlying motivations do differ (equality of access and/or quality), one can, nevertheless, speak about the global educational reform efforts which are not limited to a single continent or group of countries².

In fact, the more underdeveloped the country, the higher the expectations that education is the magic medicine that takes away all pain, cures all illnesses and grants everlasting joy and prosperity. More than anywhere else, education³ in the third world countries is expected, in addition to being a means of developing one's potentials, also to cure the country from its economic, political as well as health problems. For instance, it is meant to help in nation building and functioning of democracy; reduce fertility, inequality, criminal behavior, welfare dependency, ethnic exclusion and conflicts. For all these reasons vocal arguments are made for enlarging educational opportunities and improving the operations of existing school systems.

In developed world, the education reform has additionally emerged as a reaction to global socio-economic as well as ideological changes. That is, the triumph of social democracy, turning education from a

¹ See for extensive elaboration on the universities' growing responsibilities to society a collection of papers and conference discussions edited by Neave 2000.

² See for discussions of regional and to some extent even global reform efforts Clark 1998, Dokumente Zur Hochschulreform, Green, Sabloff, Mauch & Sabloff, Tjeldvoll, World Bank 1994.

³ George Psacharopoulos argues that in less developed countries, investing into primary education has the highest social return (27%), which, however, does not eliminate the return from secondary (16%) or higher education (13%) (Psacharopoulos 1981: 333-34).

privilege into a human right⁴, has led to massification of higher education. This, together with the decline of welfare state and increasing globalization, technological change and free movement of labor means financial pressure on national budgets bigger than ever. To meet the social demand and, at the same time, keep the budgetary expenditures under control, governments are constantly forced to reform their schools by making them more efficient.

In post-communist world, the political and economic regime change of 1989 has brought especially fundamental ideological and socio-economic changes. Similarly to many other sectors the transformation in higher education has been about westernization and *return to Europe* (Tomusk 63)⁵.

More particularly, the revolution of 1989 brought hope that fundamental changes in higher education are desirable and feasible. In addition to getting rid of socialist legacies such as separation of research from teaching, lack of institutional autonomy, and highly centralized curriculum design, it was expected that two additional changes are around the corner. First, the emerged ideological freedom allowed to expect that institutions can escape from the narrow vocationalism and ideologically driven academic programs and (re)create the missing departments and lacking disciplines⁶. Second, the change "from plan to market" created a need for new professionals in areas such as law, business and public administration (Darvas).

⁴ Zorana Gajic indicates that education as one of the basic social rights has found its way into national constitutions as well as international documents such as the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the 1952 European Convention on Human Rights (Paris). Last but not least, one can add here the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, not mentioned by Gajic.

⁵ Two clarifications must be made. First, although there does not exist such a thing as "western" or "european" higher education (see Clark 1983) ECE/FSU higher education officials nevertheless have their own personal notions of what it means to be a normal/respectful university. Second, it is worthwhile to point out that the *return to Europe* has not been solely an East European idea, Hans van Ginkel, for instance, quotes one of the recommendations of the 1992 European Rectors' Conference (CRE) in Bonn: "One of the major issues for CRE in the next future is to bring eastern and western European universities into equalization. We hope ... for providing eastern European staff and students with access to western universities' ideas and practices" (CRE-action in Ginkel 12-13).

⁶ Which departments should "a respectful" university host is a hot topic in ECE/FSU higher education institutions for several reasons. First, there are rectors who reform their institutions (i.e. add "necessary" departments and study disciplines) with the aim of building up legitimacy in the eyes of their Western colleagues. Second, there are the self-interested academics who try to secure their jobs and promote their disciplines. Finally there are administrators, faculty as well as current and former students connected to national universities, who try to secure their elitist status. Therefore, they argue that the new higher education institutions, established or renamed from polytechnics within last ten years, cannot be classified as universities because they lack departments and disciplines typical to a "university" (see, for instance, Aaviksoo 2000 and Allik). Although it is not made explicit, one gets the feeling that these people base their arguments either on the structure of medieval or modern university. That is, one senses from the arguments that a real university should mimic either the medieval university which had four departments: law, medicine, theology and philosophy; or the reformed modern university which typically has three basic departments: natural sciences, social sciences and arts/philosophy which all the sub-disciplines and study programs under them.

Have the desired changes of (west-) Europeanization taken place? To answer that question is harder than it seems. In quantitative terms, the transition need for new professionals⁷ seems to have been met by social demand⁸ and institutional supply⁹. This point has found further support from the longitudinal survey carried out by a group of Estonian sociologists over a period of 30 years. Their methodologically sound research allows to conclude that the regime change of 1989 has transformed the meaning of education. While it used to be the case that university education had a value in itself (or perhaps as a means of joining the cultural and intellectual elite), after 1989 it became an investment as well as a signal - a means of achieving a higher socio-economic position (Helemäe, Saar & Vöörman 270-278).

In qualitative terms, however, the picture is less clear. The regime change was expected to bring an end to many socialists' legacies. In 1990 the problems to be overcome, were numerous and have been listed by many observers (see for instance Constanitinescu, Filisowski, Ginkel, Holenda, Lalov, Mühle, and Švec). To provide a summary, these deficiencies included anti-democratization, over-centralization, overregulation, overspecialization, inefficient financing, and ideologically driven academic programs in humanities and social sciences. Ten years later, some, like Voldemar Tomusk, have tried to assess the change and have suggested that not much has changed--often the westernization of the system has meant cheap cosmetic changes (Tomusk 2000a: 224). Unfortunately, Tomusk's statement is not based on methodologically very sound research rather than personal impressions collected. Hence, the real extent of quality change in ECE/FSU higher education institutions is largely a mystery. In order to assess the quality and measure the success of (West-) Europeanization of ECE/FSU university education, it is reasonable to ask whether there has been any fundamental transformation in the way in which classes are conducted and what students are expected to learn? If so, how deep is the change and what is behind it? In other words, studying the ECE/FSU higher education transformation offers a unique chance to learn what facilitates the quality improvement (real change) in university education to everybody interested or involved in education reform around the world. Therefore, it should serve as the research question for the Ph.D. dissertation to be undertaken.

⁷ The Chief Economist of the EBRD, Willem Buiter, advises the Russian government to foster of the adaptation of skills for a modern, service-dominated economy. He admits that "[t]he educational system of the former Soviet Union produced a labor force that was literate, numerate and sophisticated". But "[a]dmittedly, the skill mix inherited by the Russian Federation exhibited a fair degree of mismatch from the point of view of modern market economy, which is predominately service-based. There were too few accountants, lawyers, actuaries, financial analysts, applied economists, managers, management consultants and marketing specialists and too many rocket scientists (Buiter 616).

⁸ Depending on country, there has been 50-300 per cent growth in ECE/FSU higher education student enrollments, according to Tomusk's estimates (Tomusk 2000a: 172).

⁹ For instance, the number of institutions of higher learning in Romania was 44 in 1989 and 130 in 1994 (Tomusk 217). The corresponding numbers for Russia in 1991 were 570 and five years later 830 (Tomusk 173).

TERMS AND CONCEPTS USED

It is understandable that the terms "academic elite" "education reform", and "quality" may mean many different things to different people. It is therefore desirable to make explicit straight from the beginning what is meant by each in the research to be undertaken. Moreover, careful and concrete definitions should avoid sloppiness, possible misinterpretations and conceptual stretching in the future.

ACADEMIC ELITE

There is no agreed way how to define the elite(s) in general. In fact, there seems to be a considerable amount of confusion over elite definition. David Lane has most remarkably drawn attention to it and argued that poor elite definition has in many instances caused serious methodological problems. Indeed, the way one defines elites, influences the outcome of the research to a great extent, and it should be needless to add that, therefore, a clear definition is desirable.

Theoretically, elite members can be identified and tackled in terms of formal rank, office or title, educational background, (family) wealth, social connections, consumption and behavior habits. Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, in his book *Homo Academicus* has done something similar about the French academic elites. One could probably construct something analogous for post-communist academic elites. But rather than attempting that (which actually can come out of the research as a by-product), the research to be undertaken identifies the academic elite functionally. More specifically, everybody who holds a teaching positions at the highest possible level of educational system, university, is regarded as academic elite. To get a complete picture, my definition and research following from it does not limit itself to the full time professorate at state universities, which is to say that the research shall not discriminate against part-time faculty members at state or private universities. Yet, it does exclude individuals who hold solely administrative or research positions. In short, the research is exclusively interested in people who actually teach at university level, with no exceptions.

QUALITY ORIENTED EDUCATION REFORM

Broadly speaking, there are two types of education reforms: access reforms and quality reforms. Although the two may overlap and be interconnected, as it has been the case in ECE/FSU where increase in access has had effects on quality, one can still reasonably well distinguish the goals of one from the other. Javier Corrales has summed up the priorities and aims of the two reform types as follows.

Access reforms call for increasing the availability of educational programs and opportunities. These reforms normally involve investment to increase the numbers of schools, classrooms, teachers, teachers' salaries and teaching supplies. Access reforms are commonly understood as expanding the coverage of the education system. ...

Quality reforms, on the other hand, involve efforts to improve the efficiency of invested resources, with the goal of improving the academic performance of students, increasing teacher productivity, reducing student drop-out or repetition rates, achieving optimum

teacher/student ratios, penalizing teachers' inadequate performance, granting greater autonomy to school boards etc (Corrales 5).

As the title of the current research proposal clearly indicates, the dissertation will concentrate on quality reform. Yet, as also indicated by Corrales' quote, people may mean very many different things by quality reform. With the hope of avoiding misunderstanding, a very precise definition of quality reform to be used in the research is called for. That is, quality reform in the current proposal as well as in the desecration research to be undertaken implies real change in classrooms: improvement in content of studies, teaching and evaluation methods.

QUALITY

Quality ... you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things **are** better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes **poof!** There's nothing to talk about. But if you can't say what quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it does not exist at all. But for all practical purposes it really **does** exist (Pirsig in Tomusk 226).

One of the most difficult things about education is measuring quality. The scholarship has by now been able to establish some short-term causal relationships, but the long-term consequences remain largely a mystery. Taking this into account, quality shall be operationalized as contextual yet possible to compare against best practice. To make the point more explicit, a brief literature overview on quality assessment is to follow.

Quality of education can be measured by evaluating the performance of students, teachers or material resources on their disposal. Although possible theoretically, in practice it has been very common among international organizations and individual researchers to limit the quality assessment to student test scores and to some extent also to the earnings of graduates. Such a development is probably an influence of economics of education, which treats teachers as inputs and students and their knowledge as outputs. This, although, not wrong in itself, has led to misrepresentation and misperception of the quality of many national education systems.

More particularly, UNESCO, Young, Barro & Lee compare the length of schooling, and OECD as well as Education and Testing Service conduct international assessments of educational progress. Based on these, it has become well known that ECE/FSU countries (used to) demonstrate impressive enrollment rates and together with Asian countries outperform in international science and mathematics tests their counterparts from the West. A lot less known are the specific outcomes of the international assessments. Namely, that the ECE/FSU outperforms others in fact awareness, the students scores are, however, approximately equal when it comes to applying the fact, and the situation turns to the advantage of West over East if students are asked to use the knowledge in an unanticipated circumstances (Kavalova in World Bank 1996: 125).

By the same token, other scholars have indicated that the problem with highly homogeneous education systems which produce high

international test scores is that they destroy student creativity. More specifically, *the Economist* points to the misunderstanding that the superficial representation of these international studies leads to. The published comparisons are simply based on national averages, which does not allow to observe many underlying tendencies. For instance, although some countries such as the US score low on average, they are still able to keep the high innovation because of the tremendous fluctuation between the highest and the lowest scoring students. Other countries such as ECE/FSU as well as Japan many score high, reflecting a very homogeneous school system that in addition to eliminating the extremely low scoring students, eliminates also the top. In other words, it has become evident that high international test scores often do not reflect much more than teaching methodology that kills student creativity (see also Amano, and Dore).

Thus, what the critique shows is that quality has far more dimensions to be limited just to the comparison of test scores. Although, it may look appealing to use quantitative methods for the purposes of evaluating the educational quality or making generalizations, it comes at the expense of familiarity with the cases and the real conditions, educational system specialties and social causes behind them¹⁰. Needless to add that it may lead to misreporting and misrepresenting of real situation.

Other commonly used quality assessment tools in education are reviewed by Julian Betts. Her comprehensive and the most up-to-date literature review does not limit to the discussion of successful performance indicators used by the economics of school quality. In fact, her review draws attention to both successful as well as unsuccessful economic (and even to some sociological) tools used in assessing educational quality. As positive examples she reports well established findings supported by numerous studies that homework is positively related to gains in student learning¹¹, that most important student performance determinants are family origin and the student's peer group¹², as well as that schools and individual teachers vary in quality. (In fact, there are studies that show how quickly students learn is systematically linked to teacher quality, even after controlling for student traits)¹³.

As examples of less successful attempts to assess the quality of education, Betts draws attention to research that studies school quality's long-term consequences on graduate earnings. That is, she cites a number of studies, including herself, which regard students' earnings later in life as more important indicator of school quality than the students and teachers' academic performance. Unfortunately, these attempts to link the school resources to graduates' earnings have only had mixed success. Betts sums up the research by stating that the impact of school resources may be positive, but it is rather weak and does not appear to be systematic (Betts 6).

¹⁰ See Ragin for extensive elaboration on relative advantages and disadvantages of using either qualitative or quantitative method.

¹¹ See Cooper for literature overview on homeworks effect on student performance.

¹² For details see the James Coledman 1966 timeliness report.

¹³ For details see studies conducted by Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin as well as Murnane.

These failures seems to reflect the complexity of socio-economic relations and our limited ability to grasp them. That is, the methodology used by economist, which equates educational quality with efficiency, allows them to measure it against spending per pupil, teacher-pupil (or its reciprocal, the pupil-teacher) ratio or teacher salaries. Unfortunately such an approach overlooks the fact that the educational enterprise is complex and the outcome is the mixture of many inputs among which facilities, class size, textbooks, institutional arrangements (governance, academic freedom, legislation), intellectual climate, length of the school year, quality of students (their talent and family origin) and teachers (their education, devotedness, engagement in research and other activities) all have smaller or bigger impact on the quality of education. One can only imagine that the complexity and difficulties to control for possible impacts should increase exponentially ones you try to extend the discussion on education quality to graduates' earning abilities. Therefore, there should be no wonders that the economists' attempts to build a deterministic theory that would connect the quality of education and earnings, has not been very successful.

This literature overview on the quality of education clearly demonstrates how little we know about the impact of most of the inputs. In fact, there have been only initial studies trying to link the length of the school year, teacher education and experience, books per student, higher standards on student and teacher performance; and no studies that would give some light about the impact of curriculum on student performance (Betts 11). The current dissertation design tries to learn from the past, not to commit the same mistakes of limiting the evaluation of the quality of education to comparative study of test scores. By the same token the research tries to avoid the economists' tendency to equate quality with efficiency, which in their studies have lead to measuring how much (if at all) money matters. Last but not least, the research shall assume that higher quality education is desirable per se, even if the scholarship up to now has limited success establishing it.

For all theoretical and practical purposes¹⁴, I shall therefore agree with the dominant view among higher education quality experts that quality is highly contextual (Brennan in Tomusk 2000a: 225) and dependent on study discipline (Austin 1615). But contrarily to many of them¹⁵, I do think that even if not possible to measure by quantitative means, it nevertheless can qualitatively be compared against the best practice at home and abroad¹⁶. How exactly this

¹⁴ The *World Bank Development Report 1996: From Plan to Market* for instance clearly indicates the ECE/FSU higher education challenges and policy priorities for catching up with the liberal market economies. It says that ECE/FSU countries have to start transmitting through educational system personal responsibility, intellectual freedom, and problemsolving skills. This qualitative change is to be brought by reforming curricula, examinations, introducing new textbooks, and last but not least training new and retraining the old teaching staff (World Bank 1996: 124-25).

¹⁵ Tomusk argues that this rhetoric allows controllers to operate at an abstract level, without studying the substance of educational experience delivered and revised (Tomusk 2000a: 225).

¹⁶ In fact, it seems that very many ECE/FSU higher education reformers must have had something similar in mind as they have written into their legislation that the quality of their institutions should meet some kind of mysterious and undefined set

will be done, is explained under the section of *Data and Methodology*.

of "international standars". See *Education for the Transition* Part II (by Civic Education Project and Institute for Human Sciences) page 19 for the overview of the legislation.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW AND SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE
LITERATURE ON THE POST-1989 ECE HIGHER EDUCATION

[F]irst reading of the manuscripts, I was taken aback by the small number of references to the literature. As I read more, I realized that this was a reflection of the fact that there is very little written on universities in the transition nations (Sabloff xx).

Indeed, as Sabloff's opening quote hints, there is not an extensive literature on post-communist higher education transformation to be found. Moreover, the vast majority of the writings can be classified as atheoretical, single country/case studies¹⁷. As typical to descriptive studies, they "move in a theoretical vacuum: they are neither guided by established or hypothesized generations nor motivated by a desire to formulate general hypothesis" (Lijphart 691). One can put into this category the whole collections of works such as the ones edited by Green, *Dokumente Zur Hochschulreform*, Mauch & Sabloff, Sabloff, Tjeldvoll, as well as individual publications by Marga, Estonian Ministry of Education, and Aher & Heinaru. All of the works include a considerable number of descriptions of what has happened in specific ECE higher education systems or their individual institutions. One could expect that the observers are aware of the transition processes in other countries and therefore, at least to some extent, follow a comparative method. One may be attempted to describe them as theory-confirming or -infirmiting case studies. Yet, this argument is very difficult to back up as none of the authors makes the theoretical framework explicit. Moreover, there can be only very limited theory testing for two reasons. First, there are no recognized classics in the post-communist higher education transformation studies, whose generalizations could be taken as a basis of testing. Second, there exists a great extent of isolation in which the ECE higher education transformation researchers work. Indeed, contrary to the previous wishful thinking that the works follow comparative method, not knowing what others have done has lead to continuous wheel invention. The great number of previously listed descriptive works, out of which none really gives an overview of existing literature, is clear demonstration of that fact.

The few attempts to make generalizations about ECE/FSU higher education reforms do deserve closer attention. As one could expect, some of the attempts are more successful than others. That is, one could classify Tomusk's and Sabloff's as relatively good and successful, whereas, Koucky's, Ferge's, and Decon's as relatively unsuccessful attempts to generalize the developments in region's higher education systems¹⁸.

But even the most insightful generalizations such as the mentioned Tomusk's and Sabloff's are methodologically vulnerable. That is, they rely on personal experience and insights rather than methodologically sound research. The very short lists of documented material, no reference to informers/interviews or, in the case of

¹⁷ There are, however, few exceptions. Janos Kornai, for instance, has put forward—a normative approach (see Kornai 1997a).

¹⁸ One could argue that both Ferge and Decon had a broader research agenda, which, however, should not be enough to justify the superficial level of their analysis on educational sector.

Tomusk, limited and nonsystematic use of cases give ground for suspicion of the reliability of their conclusions.

Even, Sabloff, who could be said to take better methodological care (she does make explicit the methodology and cases used), fails to go beyond hypothesis generalization. That is, she does draw from eight insightful anthropological case studies that allows her to make generalizations about the changes that have taken place in the ECE institutions of higher learning. Just as Tomusk, she sums up the trends in governance, financing, curriculum, student and faculty development. The ideas were perhaps pioneering when the actual studies were conducted (1994-95) but by the time the collection got published (1999), the findings disclosed little new that could not have been collected from the small amount of literature already existing by that time. In other words, the eight anthropological case studies that were conducted under her guidance, contribute only indirectly as data-gatherers to the theory development.

RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ECE/FSU

At this point in our slowly developing understanding of change, nearly all practitioners and many policy makers have come to recognize that changing schools truly is complex. There are no simple answers or instantaneous cures. Further, every time a new initiative is launched there are unanticipated side effects and consequences that are forcing even the most optimistic to accept the systematic nature and time consuming costs of attempting change in organizations.

The complexity of change and the inter-connectedness of all that occurs around change attempts makes the idea of identifying keys for unlocking the mystery appealing. Just as with the infamous enigma machine, when one is attempting to study, understand or facilitate the change process one can use all the hints and clues that can be found, thus the ideas of keys. Keys that can unlock some of the mystery of the change process. Keys that offer suggestions for choosing direction. Keys that can open doors and provide more insight about the nature of how to facilitate change and how to be more successful with it (Hall 95).

As pointed out previously, ECE/FSU is not alone in its efforts to reform higher education. Among others the developed countries are reforming their education systems, which, contrary to the region, has given birth to vast empirical as well as theoretical literature. One group of the literature tries to be parsimonious: concentrating or explaining the change by studying one of the key aspects of reform such as legislation, governance, curriculum or, to some extent, also academics as professionals. As a reaction to such segmentation and an explanation of little or no change, there have emerged scholars who, at the expense of parsimony, have put forward a theory of complex educational change. Fundamentally different, but equally comprehensive and not that parsimonious approach to the latter, has been taken by the researchers who use implementation analysis for the study of education reform. Brief discussion of major contributions, is called for.

The reasons for educational reform failures and the weaknesses of the underlying theory that concentrates only on one of the key aspects of the reform were first pointed out by Seymour Sarson in his 1990 book *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform*. In

this pioneering work he argues that in terms of the impact on the classroom, most educational reforms fail because of two basic reasons. First, they do not address the school power relationships¹⁹. Second, the different components of educational reform have not taken into account the inter-relationships and the complex nature of the system (Hargreaves 340).

To overcome the shortcomings, Gene Hall and more recently also Joan Nelson have tried to construct a theory of complex change in education²⁰. That is, as concentration on one aspect of the reform has not allowed the scholars to construct a meaningful theory, attempts have been made to give up on parsimony and add variables. For instance, Hall in his 1992 publication identifies seven keys to understand and influence the success of educational reform implementation. In short, his thesis is that change is a process, not an event: equally to policy development, implementation needs time (three to five years), personnel (internal and external change facilitators) and resources. Similarly, Nelson in her 1999 publication *Reforming Health and Education: The World Bank, The IDB, and Complex Institutional Change* says that

Social sector reforms are a different ball game, with far more actors, less leverage, different fields of play, a much longer playing period (with unpredictable time-outs), and uncertain scoring (Nelson 1999: 36)

IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS

It must be pointed out that the people advocating "complex educational change" were actually not the first ones to realize the schools' resistance to institutional change. In fact, anthropologists (see Calhoun & Ianni 2) and the founding father of implementation analysis Aaron Wildavsky (see Wildavsky 320) were drawing attention to the phenomena as early as mid 1970s. While anthropologists draw their conclusions from their interest towards understanding social change²¹; implementation analysts came to the same conclusion based on all kinds of policy studies, ranging from cost-benefit analysis to educational achievement.

At the expense of giving up parsimony, implementation approach claims to be truly interdisciplinary and comprehensive, almost without any methodological boundaries²². It is claimed to allow to

¹⁹ A more radical version of the same argument has lately been put forward by neo-Marxist Dennis Beach. In addition to the need to change power relationships within the school organization (Sarson's argument), Beach believes that a meaningful change in education cannot take place without deep and fundamental changes in socio-cultural, political, economic, and ideological structures. According to the Beach it is the external environment that controls the existing and determines the attempted curriculum change (Beach 237). In short, without a change in superstructure there is no change in culture and value transmission institutions.

²⁰ To avoid misunderstanding, it is perhaps justified to point out that neither none of them seems to be familiar with the critique of Sarson and have arrived to the conclusions of theory of complex change independently.

²¹ There is an evergreen topic of disputes in anthropological studies: are changing traditions a course or an effect of changing patterns and styles of education?

²² Wildavsky for instance asks "What tools does the policy analyst use?" and immediately answers: "Qualitative political theory, for refining our picture of where we want to go; quantitative modeling, for systematizing guesswork on how to get there; microeconomics, for disciplining desire with limited resources, and maro-organization theory, for instilling the will to correct errors: each has its place. Policy analysis, however, is one activity for which there can be no fixed

understand or evaluate almost anything, such as to "determine the degree of achievement, non-achievement, or distortion of particular reforms or policy goals, whether related to a higher education system as a whole ..., to a part (segment) of the system ..., or to individual institutions ..." (Sabatier & Ceuych 1003). Not surprisingly, the approach has become the major tool to understand the education reform within few decades. Chronologically speaking, the first generation of implementation studies focused primarily on whether results were consistent with intentions. The second generation of the studies attracted attention to variations in the response of individuals and institutions as well as on the conditions of successful implementation. The latest methodological development, the third generation of implementation research, tries to combine the two previous ones (see McDonnell and Elmore for the pioneering work in this area).

Moreover, implementation analysts have argued that any policy goes through three basic stages: formulation, implementation, and reformulation. As the link between policy formulation and implementation has, in practice, turned out to be very close, another division within the policy implementation analysis has emerged: the top-down versus the bottom-up approach (Sabatier & Ceuych 1004).

In fact, the top-down perspective and reform efforts in areas such as legislation and governance were popular tools in the early days of education reform and its analysis. It was believed that "if the top of the system advocated (and mandated) change, the bottom would follow along" (Hall 108). It took quite some time before the flaws of this perspective got heavily criticized by the principal-agency theoretical viewpoint (see Moe for closer theoretical understanding). By now even experts of public law agree that the legislation promoting or referring to that top-down concept is obsolete (see Veld, Füssel & Neave 82).

The bottom-up perspective on policy implementation has become popular only more recently. It identifies the (network of) actors involved, their motivations and beliefs, the resources at their disposal, actors' effectiveness at using the resources as well as sites where the decisions will be made, by whom and when. (For closer look of theoretical and methodological tools see Geva-May & Wildavsky 13-14 and Hjern & Hull 110-111). Based on the generalizations made using this theoretical perspective, two interconnected arguments have been put forward. First, it is argued that the policy-makers can manipulate only what they control: the macro policy such as funding and teacher certification. Second argument that directly follows from the first, says that government has very little control over what actually takes place in classrooms, that is, at the bottom (Timar and Kirp 87).

The bottom-up perspective has got its fair amount of criticism (Hall, for instance, making explicit that the bottom needs the top as much as the top needs the bottom to facilitate any change at

program, for policy analysis is synonymous with creativity, which may be stimulated by theory and sharpened by practice, which can be learned but not taught" (Wildavsky 3).

school). However, it has been made clear that at university level, where academic freedom allows academics to teach how and what they see fit or important about the subject²³, the bottom-up perspective is the correct theoretical point of view to take²⁴. Thus, policy-makers hope to change what actually takes place at auditoriums by top-down administrative means such as reforming university governance are, weak, if existent at all. An excellent argumentation for all the underlying reasons (the nature of academics and academic work, the power of academic as professional oligarchy, the centrality of disciplines and departments) of why reforming governance has failed was first put forward by Clark (1983) and later advanced and clarified among others by Dearlove and Austin.

ELITE STUDIES

To get it right, we have to get serious and put the teacher at the center of any equation to reform education (Arthur E. Levine)²⁵.

Since the education reform, as well as scholarly literature dealing with it, have only had limited success a new approach is needed. More particularly, the failures to comprehend the essence of quality-oriented higher education reform have led to disappointing practical results and attempts to complicate the theory. To construct a simple, elegant and parsimonious theory of understanding education reforms and their failures, I propose to import the tools of elite studies to the research.

Although political and economic elite changes have attracted a considerable academic interest, extremely little attention has been paid to academic elite turnover and its effects on education reform. The existing literature on elite transformation in ECE falls under one of the four major traditions of elite studies: the classical power tradition²⁶, the pluralist tradition²⁷, theory of elite settlement²⁸, and the new class theories²⁹.

²³ See Matthews and especially De George for extensive reasoning and justification of academic tenure and freedom.

²⁴ Dearlove argues that "efficient management and good governance are important but the nature of academic work and the professional sentiments of academic workers mean that management, bureaucracy and governance can only take universities so far ... that call for change ..." (Dearlove 59).

²⁵ Arthur E. Levine is the President of Teachers College at Columbia University.

²⁶ The classical power tradition represented by Karl Marx, Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto and Mills argues that elite rule is the consequence of the economic change in within a society.

²⁷ The pluralist tradition—rejected the unitary elite theory and argued consequently that democratic political system is in its essence a polyarchy system of competing interests and minorities. Outstanding establishers and developers of this tradition are Robert Dahl and John Higley.

²⁸ Theory of elite change developed by Adenyl and Schitters emphasis the role elites play in the transformation of totalitarian systems to democracy. According to this tradition transactions between incoming and outgoing elites by negotiated pacts is a precondition of peaceful and successful reform change.

²⁹ The early new class theories claim that intelligentsia will form the basis of new dominant class (critics of Marx such as Bakurin). The second wave of this school emphasizes that the new social agents—managers and technocrats would take the control over from owners. The latest version of this intellectual tradition emphasizes the knowledge: humanistic intellectuals together with technical intelligentsia will take the power (Konrad and Szelenyi based on Bourdieu).

Especially large number of scholars have come to conclusion similar to the basic argument of the new class theory, which explains how and why elite has been able to keep their dominant role in post-communist societies. Szelenyi & Szelenyi have termed the phenomena the reproduction of elite theory. They say that it takes place when the system change does not effect the personnel of the elite: people who were privileged in the past are privileged now. One can even distinguish between simple elite reproduction and elite reproduction by conversion. Simple elite reproduction takes place when people who were in command positions stayed where they were, i.e. those who occupy high positions currently were there already before breakdown. Elite reproduction by conversion can said to be have taken place when those who had a high social/political/cultural positions before the breakdown belong to a different fraction of the elite. It is the intra elite circulation (Szelenyi & Szelenyi 25).

Of course, there is also a reaction (which however, has found a lot less empirical support) claiming that a considerable elite circulation has taken place. According to this theory, post-communism represents a revolutionary change and as a result, at least at the very top of the social hierarchy, new people, recruited on the basis of new principles occupy the most important socioeconomic positions. The new elite can have three sources: (1) the former counter elite, i.e. organized opposition of previous system; (2) the fresh blood - snow whites, without any elitist past; and (3) members of former bourgeois or aristocratic families or home returning exile members (Szelenyi & Szelenyi 25).

But before jumping the bullet and trying to apply the elite study techniques, it must be made clear why the elite change is important for any (systematic) transition. David Lane, for instance argues that "a circulation of elites does not necessarily entail changes in the political, social or economic structure of society..." (Lane 860). Although, Lane's claim is quite plausible as a theoretical argument, studies conducted by Steven Fish and Valerie Bunce tell quite a different story. Their research indicates that there seems to be enough cross-country evidence that elite change does lead to socio-political as well as economic changes - almost determining the success of post-communist transition. More particularly, Fish, based on cross-country study of 26 ECE/FSU countries, shows that elite replacement in the initial elections is a good economic success parameter. Bunce takes this idea even further, arguing that, in addition to the success of economic reforms, elite change in ECE/FSU determines their political success as well. Based on this logic I hypothese and intend to do show with the empirical research to be undertaken that the same is true for higher education. That is, academic elite change determines the extent of quality improvement in university education. How exactly this will be done, shall be explained in the following sections.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

As stated previously, the study to be undertaken concentrates on higher education quality reform. More particularly, the research tries to understand what facilitates the actual change in classrooms, not the superficial "westernization"--renaming of programs and subject titles. I hypothesize that academic elite change determines the extent of quality improvement in university education. In more technical language, the model which connects the academic elite turnover with quality improvement, has:

- the academic elite turnover as independent variable;
- the teaching style, examination techniques, curriculum change, course content and knowledge of foreign languages as intervening variables; and
- the quality improvement in higher education as dependent variable.

Hence, I theorize that academic elite change causes quality improvements, which can be tested by what actually happens in classrooms: change in teaching style, curriculum, course content and evaluation techniques. To document the changes, a survey, follow-up interviews and participant observation techniques will be used.

Based on the survey, I expect to find considerable academic elite reproduction. With the help of participant observation and follow-up interviews with students, little or no change in instruction style and examination techniques are expected to be observed. Although, the course titles have been changed, the actual material taught at classes has not changed much. However, in cases where the faculty circulation has taken place my expectation is to observe quality changes in curriculum (e.g. new courses added); course content (faculty's better knowledge of foreign languages that has an effect on study materials used); teaching style (e.g. active rather than passive study methods, more independent work and less lecturing) and evaluation techniques (e.g. essays and research papers rather than just a final examination are used to evaluate student performance).

The proposed hypothesis would be proven wrong, should it turn out that academic elite turnover has nothing to do, or is negatively connected to the quality improvements in education. That is, should it turn out that the faculty members of older generations, rather than the new additions to the teaching staff, have introduced greater changes in their teaching and examination style as well as course materials (e.g. updating of required readings) my hypothesis would be proven false. The research would come to the same conclusions, should it be observed that even though there has been a considerable academic elite turnover, it has not lead to quality changes (measured again in terms of improvements in course content teaching and examination methods).

Case selection (which is elaborated more in the next section) allows me to control for labor market and legal constraints. That is,

hypothesis-generating case study which is based on just one country, enables me to control for (i) socio-economic motivations -- the payment and social prestige resived for teaching at university level, (ii) time - ECE/FSU academic elite has often many offers and attractions to take part-time and poject based jobs outside the university, which has both positive and negative effects, (iii) legal constreints - the maximum working hours and other legal regulations are equally applicable to everybody.³⁰ Futhermore, it is assumed that all institutions of higher learnnging face a similar need for natural generation change.

³⁰ For instance, the Government of Estonia approved a new system of advanced scientific degrees on July 31, 1990, which states that "the scientific degree itself must not grant any material privileges" as well as that "the scientist's salary must not depend directly on his scientific degree" (Martinson 16).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

As indicated in the literature review, current research dealing with ECE/FSU higher education reforms does not go much beyond describing the situation based on personal experience. It is probably correct to argue that one of the reasons for this is the difficulty in data collection. Indeed, collecting the data necessary for proving the above described theory of academic elite turnover effects on education quality is time consuming (large number of institutions to be visited, interviews to be contacted, documents to be collected and analyzed). Furthermore, the importance of local context and language make the cross-country comparative study almost impossible for a single researcher, and I do not expect to be an exception. Therefore, I have to limit the empirical study to a single country, which limits the generalization possibilities but, nevertheless, is justified for theory development purposes. That is, hypothesis-generating case study, even if initially based on just one country and only later to be tested among larger number of cases, is desirable in an area where no theory exists yet. Academic elite turnover effects on quality-oriented higher education reform, definitely is one of those areas.

I selected Estonia for three reasons: (i) its typical post-communist legacies, (ii) smallness, and (iii) the contextual familiarity. More particularly, Estonia fits very well to represent ECE/FSU because, like most other countries in the region, she inherited all the socialist legacies: separation of research from teaching, lack of institutional autonomy, highly centralized curriculum design, hope to escape from the narrow vocationalism and ideologically driven academic programs and (re)create the missing departments and lacking disciplines. However, the major reason for selecting Estonia for the pioneering study was her smallness that allows to conduct a complete sample survey--to cover all the university level institutions and academics teaching there, without discriminating against ownership form or professional rank. Last but not least, Estonia was selected because I have a competitive advantage--language and context familiarity as well as personal contacts. In principle, it should improve the quality of research. Yet, it may also be a source of bias(es) that I hope to avoid with the help of non-Estonian advisers and reviewers.

Based on the Statistical Office of Estonia there are 14 universities and according to the teachers union Universitas, some 2700 academics teaching there. I expect to be able to cover with the survey the vast majority of the academic elite. Likewise, it should not be very difficult to get permission to visit classes or make follow-up interviews with students. My own experience as well as that observed by other researchers (see Burges and Vidovich) confirm that academics are quite easily accessible -- many of them have made surveys or interviews themselves and therefore easily meet such types of requests. The only difficulties I might encounter is to collect old documents like syllabi and course evaluations which, for various reasons, may have not been systematically archived by schools. However, I do not expect this part of data collection to be a principal requirement for the success of the research. Syllabus updating should be observable to a great extent also from current course descriptions.

Moreover, to overcome the possible difficulty of document collection as well as to enhance reliability, methodological tool known as triangulation will be used. This technique involves cross-referring and cross-checking data with the aim of producing a more robust or holistic picture. It will be done by employing several instruments: standardized, yet, anonymous questionnaire; interviews; on-site observations and documentation analysis. In other words, reliability and validity will be increased by double checking the data collected from course evaluations, syllabi and questionnaires by making lecture and examination visit, interviews with current and, if necessary, former students as well. "Enrolling" into local academic environment will not only increase the accessibility of teaching personnel for the survey conducting purposes, it will also allow to get to know students and collect old and new syllabi. The course descriptions, however, shall serve as a valuable source of information per se, as well as data for preparing student interviews.

The core of the questionnaire shall indicate academic elites' personal and occupational history, as well as teaching and examination methodology used³¹. As mentioned, some parts of this collected data will then be double-checked during class and examination visits, as well as through interviews with students. To increase the flow of information and to get better insight, I do not intend these interviews to be very formal. Rather, than following a highly structured format, they should take place as unstructured conversations, making sure that the answers to questionnaires as well as impressions collected from class and examination visits are correctly understood. In methodological language these interviews will ask experience-behavior questions "eliciting descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities that would have been observable had the observer been present" (Patton in Vidovich 97).

RESOURCE BUDGET

Year	Description of activities	Financial needs
2 nd	First half of the year - library work at CEU	\$1800
	Second half of the year - library work abroad	\$4000
3 rd	Field work--collecting data in Estonia	\$15000
	Printing 2700 questionnaires	\$1000
	Conducting the survey	\$10000
	Other expensis (commuting, tapes, typing the interviews)	\$4000
4 th	Actual report writing at CEU	\$3600
5 th	Additional year if needed	\$3600
Total	Ph.D. dissertation	\$28000

³¹ To take an advantage of the situation, the survey additionally intends to ask questions about grants received, research published as well as academics' consumption habits.

FORMAL OUTLINE

- I. INTRODUCTION
 - A. Significance of the topic
 - B. Short discription of the privious research conducted (pointing out the caps and mistakes)
 - C. Short summary of my research and findings

- II. LITERATURE OVERVIEW
 - A. ECE/FSU Experience of Reforming University Education
 - a. The organization of soviet higher education: orientation for forsed industralization
 - (1). Lack of institutional autonomy
 - (i). centralized approval of curricula
 - (ii). requirements for academic appointments
 - (iii). requirements for students
 - (2). Narrow vocationalism
 - (3). Separation of reasearch from teaching
 - b. Return to Europe: changes that were expected
 - c. Summary of the ECE/FSU reform literature
 - d. Return to Latin America and Japan: Literature analysis of the changes that seem to have taken place
 - B. International Experience of Reforming University Education
 - a. International organizations, their aims and ideology
 - b. Top-down, non-comprihensive reforms: Their aims and reasons for failure
 - (1). Reforming legislation
 - (2). Reforming financing
 - (3). Reforming governance
 - (4). Reforming curriculum
 - c. Comprihensive reform: Theory of complex institutional change

- III. REVIEW OF RESEARCH: THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS
 - A. General argument
 - B. Connection between causes and effects
 - C. Hypothesis based on theorised connection

- IV. METHODOLOGY: DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES
 - A. How the hypothesis was tested
 - B. Why the case of Estonia was used
 - C. What data was collected (how long did it take and where did it come form)
 - D. Why was the data collected (how the questionnaire, interviews, on-site observations and documentation analysis confirm the hypothesis)

- V. FINDINGS: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA
 - A. The limitations of the case and data collected
 - B. What was found
 - C. Analysis and discussion of data

- VI. CONCLUSION: CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

- VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

CONCLUSIONS AND EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

A decision to undertake doctoral research is not to be taken lightly. By definition the Ph.D. means a unique contribution to knowledge, which over the course of the history of the modern university has meant more and more specialized research topics. Taking into account the small amount of research conducted about ECE/FSU higher education reform, its methodological shortcomings, and global education reform difficulties, two types of contributions are likely. First, it may well turn out that the research I intend to undertake as a Ph.D. candidate can contribute to the scholarly literature generally -- by supplying a comprehensive literature review on higher education reform in ECE/FSU countries and outlining the post-communist academic elite identity. More importantly, I expect to contribute with a theory claiming that faculty change is the major source of quality improvement in university education. While, the former should attract the interest of the scholars and policy-makers interested in ECE/FSU higher education reform, the latter, intends to attract wider interest among the scholars interested in elite change, academics (as professionals) and quality oriented education reform.

More specifically, the research to be undertaken aims at supplying a simple, elegant and parsimonious theory for understanding the education reform. Rather than adding variables and making the understanding of education reform more complicated, my theory intends to simplify. It aims to show that, as it is often the case in economics and politics, elite change (rather than the change in legislation or governance) is also the fundamental source of real change at universities.

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