What is happening with universities? From 'organised anarchies' to 'penetrated hierarchies'

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The Theses

The organisational transformation of universities

Overview

- **Universities as special organisations?**

- **Universities as foci in the coordination of the field**

- **Organisational hierarchy, rationality and identity**

- **Organisational control**

- **The myth of autonomy**

Universities as special organisations?

- **Organised anarchies**

- **Collegial organisation**

- **Loosely coupled systems**

- **Garbage can decision-making**

→ **An arena rather than actor**

Universities as foci in the coordination of the field

- **Re-definition of role of state**

- **Embedded in wider (public sector) reforms**

- **Transfer of responsibility and risk**

- **The 'marketisation' of higher education**

- **The comensuration of organisational performance**

→   **Universities as corporate actors**

Constructing hierarchy, rationality and identity

Hierarchy

to stimulate and enhance cooperation that is guided by organizational policies and authoritative leadership and management as a means of co-ordination of a collective entity that is engaged in a common project and aiming at shared priorities

Rationality

a rational goal model of organizational effectiveness, to be 'intentional', to forecast goals, objectives and preferences, action alternatives and their consequences, to allocate responsibility, and to measure results and performances.

Identity

understood as a socially constructed concept of what the organization is or would like to be, emphasizes the symbolic and cognitive side of organizations and their role in stimulating new ideas, changing attitudes, and new frames for action

Constructing hierarchy, rationality and identity

Hierarchy

- Central coordination and control

- Allocating responsibility

- Constructing management

Rationality

- Setting objectives

- Measuring results

Identity

- Constructing boundaries

- Controlling resources

- Being special as an organisation

Empirical findings among European universities

- **Low level of 'identity'**

- **Level of 'hierarchy' and 'rationality' strongly associated with each other**

- **Level of 'hierarchy and 'rationality' strongly correlated with strength of NPM-type modernisation policies**

Three groups of universities

- A group characterized by lower levels of 'hierarchy' and 'rationality'
  includes universities in weak modernisation countries like Italy and France, as well as most of the German and Swiss universities.

- One technical German and one Swiss university, and all the Norwegian and Portuguese universities are managerial universities.

- The most hierarchical and rationalized universities are located in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, countries strongly affected by 'modernisation' policies.

Organisational control in universities

- **Organizational control –** the means through which the leadership steers the behavior of organizational members in order to achieve coordination and alignment with organizational goals

- **Research questions:**

  1) *Do we observe differences in how organisational control is achieved?*
  (hierarchical vs. negotiated, rule-based vs. informal)

  2) *Are patterns of intra-organisational control associated with environmental characteristics?*
  (institutional / resource environment, networked relationships)

Three stories of control

- Leadership / management control is common

- Overt use of power and top-down command is rare

- Central: *De-personalized managerialism*

- Northwest: *Formal control moderated by co-decision practices*

- South: *Tight control through informal instruments*

Penetrated hierarchies: Coupling between environment and control
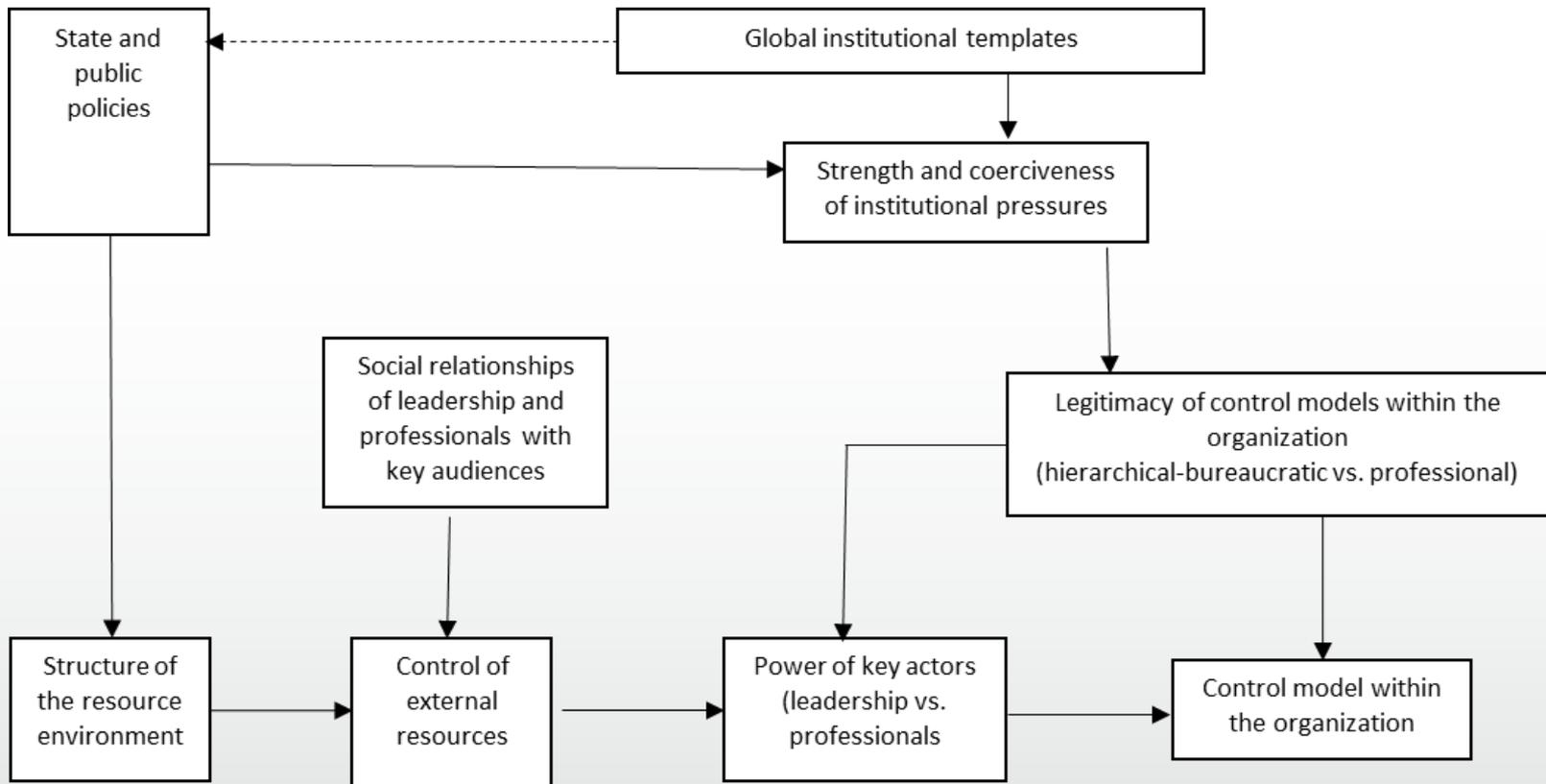
Organisational autonomy

Autonomy refers to both the actor's self (having ability or capacity) and the actor's relationship to its environment (independence or freedom from external control)

- Dominant narrative of political reform moved away from traditional beliefs in university autonomy that are built on institutional trust and linked to professional autonomy.

- In the narrative of political change, autonomy becomes re-defined as the 'new organizational autonomy' of universities as both strategic actors and as an addressee of governmental control.

The myth of autonomy

The concept of 'regulatory autonomy' captures the use of organizational autonomy of universities as a tool of a new regime of governmental control

- Working in the shadow of hierarchy

- Organisational accountability

- Stress on procedural autonomy and managerial capabilities

- Steering organisational choices by (dis)incentives

- Bonding in performance contracts

Postcript: The de-institutionalisation of the University?

The rise of the university as an organisation
is accompanied by a decline in the values traditionally
attached to them and the beliefs vested into them

- Rationalisation

- Corporatisation

- De-mystification

- Trivialisation

Many thanks!