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PART I

Themes, Concepts and Methods

Comparison and Theories

Ivar Bleiklie and Maurice Kogan

Introduction

Between the years of 1965 and the late 1990s higher education in a number of West European countries, including England, Norway and Sweden, went through a period of unprecedented growth, both in terms of its scope and its comprehensiveness. The purpose of this book is to render a social science analysis of this period. Our aim is to develop an understanding of the changes that the higher education system has undergone in the last 30 years, what these changes mean in terms of the relationship between knowledge and political power, and the perspectives the observed developments raise for the future 'education society'. In our analysis we shall do this by trying to identify and explain commonalities and variation of the change processes in the three countries. This will prevent us from committing the obvious fallacy of implicitly assuming that policy changes are generated exclusively within the confines of nation states and help us identify the interaction between national processes and international development trends. Empirically, the main emphasis is put on the role of the universities within higher education, and the present book gives a political science analysis of higher education politics, administration and organisation of educational institutions. It gives a sociological analysis of educational institutions, research disciplines, processes of social differentiation and the formation of academic status hierarchies and identities. It gives a comprehensive depiction of the reform policies and changes that have affected the higher education system in the three countries in recent years. Finally, it analyses the impact of changes in policy formation, policies on academic values and working, and changes in conceptions of knowledge.

The task of providing a social science analysis of changes within higher education policies and educational institutions is an exciting one. Working with this book and the collaboration between the three research teams have provided the authors with an opportunity to

develop insights into a social institution that will have a central position in discussions about the development of our societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The university represents forceful traditions through the 800-year history of the institution. Yet it also represents the future to the extent that higher education and research will be a central driving force in the ongoing formation of society. This being said, it is important to bear in mind that most universities in the world are young institutions which have been established since World War II. However, the idea of being part of a century-old tradition is also frequently cultivated by these younger institutions.

The fact that this analysis is exciting prevents it neither from being difficult nor from raising a number of specific methodological problems. One such problem is represented by the fact that the researchers are studying a policy field and a type of institution in which they themselves are active participants. The present study is also characterised by the fact that we venture into an area of higher education reform that has been dominated by polemics and easily predictable views, whereas thoughtful analyses have been harder to come by. The risks notwithstanding, it is therefore our ambition to develop an empirically-based conceptual understanding of higher education as a social, political, organisational and educational phenomenon.

The topic

From the perspective of educational policy the topic of our analysis is historically delimited by two important reform periods in higher education – one in the late 1960s and early 1970s and a second during the late 1980s and 1990s. In between we find a third period. Although it may not have been characterised by high-profile national reform efforts to the same extent, it nevertheless brought with it important changes within higher education.

Seen from the perspective of organisational sociology and organisation theory, our topic turns on how the higher education system, primarily university education, has changed during the course of a long period of expansion. The expansion has been characterised by two periods of rapid growth during the years before and after 1970 and shortly before and after 1990, alternating with a relative standstill in the intermediate period in the case of the universities. The reform periods have coincided with the growth periods but, as will be demonstrated below, they have been related in different ways. The two growth periods represent simultaneously two important stages of the transition process in which the role of higher education in society is

about to change from 'elite education' via 'mass education' and possibly to 'universal education' (Trow 1970, 1974).

There is an important ideological similarity between the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s and those of the 1980s and 1990s. They were both based on the recognition that higher education was of great socio-economic importance and ought to be exploited as a means in order to reach major political goals. However, whereas higher education in the 1960s and 1970s was considered a welfare benefit and emphasised issues related to its distribution, the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s regarded higher education as a necessary tool and a resource in international economic competition. Accordingly, production efficiency (student flow and publication frequency) and product quality (students' achievements, academically good and socially useful research) were the focus of attention.

Although similar trends seem to have affected all three countries, there are important differences between them and their reforms that need to be further explored. In the chapters that follow we shall address a number of questions about change over time and across national boundaries related to the purpose, national policy and system characteristics of higher education, the management and organisation of academic institutions, and the characteristics of academic identity and work. Before we embark on this analysis, however, we need to clarify our comparative methodology and our conceptual approach. These two issues will be addressed in the following two sections.

Perspective on comparative policy studies

Within the relatively small world of academic studies of higher education there are contending assumptions about methods which spill over into perspectives on comparative studies. The comparative study of public policy and administration to which the analysis of higher education policies belongs is, as Heady (1990) argues, struggling to accommodate two seemingly inconsistent tendencies. One tendency is to try to 'generalise by making comparisons that are as inclusive as possible and by searching for administrative knowledge that transcends national regional boundaries' (p.3). The other tendency is towards case-specific or idiosyncratic analyses 'with only scant attention, or none at all, to foreign experience' (ibid.).

Page (1995) divides comparative studies under four headings: single country studies; juxtapositions; thematic comparisons; and causal explanations. The comparative studies of all kinds account for nearly three-quarters of empirically-based articles published in leading English language public administration journals. They can be

classed as comparative inasmuch as they add to knowledge in specifying what it is that marks off one set of administrative arrangements from another. Those offering a particular study need not undertake the comparison. The fact that one-offs are available in the literature, however, makes it possible for comparisons to be made somewhere within the universe of scholars. The many edited collections of essays on a range of countries that are published are obvious examples of these. Moreover, the analysis can be based on comparisons between different periods of change, rather than comparisons between countries.

Juxtapositions bring together single country studies and, at minimum, allow a relatively rapid impression of the range of experiences to be secured.

It is with thematic comparisons that we have our best hope of finding a systematic presentation of evidence that allows common questions about different political systems to be asked. At the most ambitious level, facts can be used reiteratively as explanatory factors when the institutions are examined one by one (Finer 1956). Thematic comparisons might include specified objectives of the comparison and gather common data in order to generalise on the basis of those data. They attempt to establish regularities in different patterns of administration and deviation from these patterns. Finer hoped that the process might lead to causes, although such a quest often leads to banality rather than illumination. But even if one might be able to determine causal relationships, data collection does not of itself produce fruitful theorising. Some daring assumptions of a priors based on the wider literature of other cases seem a necessary prerequisite.

The notion of thematic comparisons may be made more precise if specified in terms of what Alexander George (1979) calls the method of 'structured, focused comparison' of cases. This approach relies on a common set of questions to examine a small number of cases for comparability and similarity. In their award-winning book on deterrence theory, George and Smoke (1974, p.98) justify the strategy of constructing a set of common questions when neither the empirical nor the theoretical literature provides the investigator with hypotheses or questions 'which are precise, operationally significant, and adequate'. They continue by arguing that in the absence of a clear set of testable hypotheses, the investigator's research design becomes:

at least informally and for practical purposes, an iterative one. Tentative questions and ideas are tried out against two or three case studies in a preliminary way, and are then refined and expanded upon on the basis of the tentative results. A new trial is

made, and the process of question-asking and -answering iterates back and forth, until a satisfactorily full menu of hypotheses or questions can be arrived at for more formal application to all one's case study material. (George and Smoke 1974, p.98)

However, this approach implies that the researcher takes a stand on two closely related issues, that of causality and that of generalisability. In order to identify our position we shall borrow Theda Skocpol's (1980) distinction between research strategies in historical sociology where she defines three major strategies (pp.356-391). Our ambition is similar to what she calls analysing causal regularities. It positions itself between the ambitious quest for grand theories to find general causal models, based on concepts of common properties of phenomena that are supposed to be valid irrespective of time and place, and comparisons where concepts are used to arrive at meaningful interpretations of each distinctive case. We share the ambition to look for explanations, but believe that such explanations need to be socially and historically grounded, i.e. that they have to be specified in time and space. In practice we realise that our ability to arrive at an analysis of causal regularities is limited and that realistically we should start out with a set of concepts in terms of which we may arrive at meaningful interpretations by identifying similarities and differences between our cases. The next step in the analysis is then to try to identify factors that can explain patterns or regularities in the reform processes.

Our position is different from the more ambitious attempts at arriving at more general causal explanations taken by Leo Goedegebuure and Frans van Vught (Goedegebuure *et al.* 1994; Goedegebuure and van Vught 1994). They offer a helpful framework of themes within an international perspective. They are, however, somewhat critical of what they regard as 'individual hobbyhorses' which they think will be 'curbed' by providing an overarching framework to 'maximise comparability of outcomes of the constituent parts'. They offer thematic blocks against which they organise national characteristics. In their position we thus find both the ambition of developing general explanations and a top-down perspective on higher education policy.

Limitations of top-down macro analysis

Goedegebuure and van Vught follow Ragin (1987) in his claim that comparative method in the social sciences is distinguished by its use of attributes of macro-social units in explanatory statements. An example from van Vught and Goedegebuure is the hypothesis that the extent to which steering mechanisms are facilitatory or controlling

affects the propensity of curriculum reforms to go through. Our criticism would be that the macro analysis is not too meaningful without linked fine-grained analyses of curriculum and institutional changes, some of them unique.

There is a tendency to regard the internal logic of governmental systems as sufficient to explain policy. Without the detailed knowledge of social processes that requires micro analysis, however, untidy and difficult to generalise though it is, generalisation at the macro level will not be true for one country, let alone in comparison across countries. As Teichler (1993) rightly points out: 'Higher education research does not seem to move to any balance regarding theories, disciplines and themes, but rather research-linked management and policy issues seem to take over the scene.' In our view, policy and management issues not only take over the scene but their pursuit fails to have much force if they do not take account of the true criteria variables, namely changes in research, scholarship, teaching and learning in which particularity rather than commonality is likely to be the rule.

Limitations of general hypothesising

Page, quoting Sartori (1970), notes that the whole of political science is a trade-off between configurative or detailed discussion of one case or a few cases and broader and more abstract theoretically-based generalisations which 'are best seen as a continuum rather than as categories of comparison'.

Archer (1979) has noted that it has proved virtually impossible to make an adequate match between micro analysis, in which the verities of close-grained empirical studies can be demonstrated, and macro analysis, in which more generally applicable propositions can be announced and interrogated.¹ The world of knowledge has increasingly accepted that more than one incommensurate or apparently inconsistent proposition can be advanced simultaneously. In the social domain, in particular, reality does not pile up in well-connected hierarchies of paradigm and theorems.

If stating hypotheses from previous accumulated knowledge and testing, verifying and adding to them were to be our dominant intellectual and research procedure, we would be subscribing to a major hypothesis which is dubious in its own right. The presumption would be that there are sufficient regularities in social experience for them to be capable of being incorporated into overarching frameworks and hypotheses. Such an intellectual procedure is based on the presumption that the phenomenon under study is both objectively and unequivocally given and subject to some form of rigid regularity. However, phenomena such as public 'higher education policy', 'the

higher education system', 'academic disciplines', 'the academic profession', 'teaching', 'learning' and 'research' are social constructions. Their contents vary according to time and place. It would be odd to presume that phenomena, the actual content of which may vary under different circumstances, can be conceptualised as objective variables arranged in clear causal chains of cause and effect. Thus the data may emerge in topological rather than progressive arrangements and one of the necessary tasks in a comparative study like ours is to identify the precise content of the phenomenon we study. While we can certainly look for juxtapositions and thematic comparisons, and attempt to find causal explanations, we will be tying ourselves into an unnecessary bed of nails if we try to direct our research on the basis of pre-structured hypotheses. Where there are usable hypotheses we prefer to use them as assumptions that we may explore for the purpose of thematic comparisons.

Comparative approach

Our own approach, as elaborated by Susan Marton (1994), follows that of Castles (1989) who, by using methods of comparison, attempts 'to comprehend the purposes for which and the strategies by which policy is elaborated' (p.8). One method he suggests is the use of comparative case studies of two or more countries, the distinctiveness or similarity of whose policy outcomes is highlighted by the similarities or differences in other respects. The substantive method employed is that of thematic comparisons. The issues which we pursue thematically over the three countries are:

1. Changes in the ideologies of the state.
2. Changes in the mechanisms of government and the salience of central government.
3. Policy formation and the place of government agencies, educational institutions, elites, interest groups and actor networks of various kinds.
4. The nature of the reforms created by government.
5. The impacts of the reforms in terms of the academic profession, epistemic identities and working practices of academics in a range of disciplines, and in a range of institutions in the three countries.
6. The generation, application and impacts of quality assurance policies in the three countries.

Comparisons can be made across the three countries by working strongly from inductive methodologies which are essentially bottom-up and starting from the analysed experiences and not the other way around. But this does not mean that we start with atheoretical perceptions. This will become clear in our discussion of the actor-context model later in this chapter and in the conceptual analyses of the data presented in the chapters that follow. In these analyses we shall draw on a wide range of theories such as the theory of elites, interest groups and pressure groups in order to see how differences in their presence, position and operation reflect differences in the national political culture or expectations of the higher education systems. Furthermore we want to clarify to what extent these differences affect policies in the three countries. Finally, we shall use theories about the nature of knowledge generation and transmission, the academic profession and academic identity which can be played against the three country examples.

Why the three systems?

Our choice of three systems for comparisons was initially opportunistic: that is, we took advantage of opportunities presented to us for funding and access and for work with colleagues known and respected by each other. Given the intention to work intensively in the qualitative mode, we accepted in any case that we could not hope to work with a full representative sample of national systems. But familiarity with each system reassured us that there were significant differences that would make the comparisons worthwhile.

In all three countries throughout the 1970s the traditional assumptions about the welfare state – of which higher education formed one element – remained firm, if somewhat battered by economic hazards and growing lack of confidence in the capacity of public systems to deliver services with sufficient responsiveness and economy. But the first casualty within assumptions about the welfare state was less its distributive policies than its assumptions about the state's duty to support public professions largely on their own recognisance.

The differences between countries were, however, significant. The Scandinavian countries had been centralist in their public policies while the British were highly devolutionary. At the same time there were substantial differences between the Norwegian and Swedish approaches to centralised planning – Sweden was the *locus classicus* of social engineering (Åasen 1993) while Norway offered a mixture of rule-governed administration and fierce localism (Eide 1993). The advent of that ambiguous confection known as New Public Management (Pollitt 1993) had quite different implications for the three

countries because they started from quite different assumptions about the modes through which policy could be generated and implemented. The structures of influence and the nature and working of elites, too, were different, as were the nature of state-university relations and the assumptions about the inner government of institutions. Finally, the nature of teaching and learning displayed significant differences.

Our methods

We give a full account of the methods adopted in our projects in the four books which report them, and have also summarised them in the appendix to this chapter. For the most part, our methods were qualitative and based on documentary and interview material.

Conceptual framework

The object of our study is straightforward and may be outlined in terms of a simple explanatory model. We aim at explaining the dependent variable, change in higher education, over a specified time period from about 1960 till 1995. Change within higher education systems is a complicated affair, as indicated above. In public higher education systems it is often regarded as an outcome of public policy and is usually conceptualised as follows. New policies are initially formulated in a top-down process by national policy-making bodies. They are subsequently translated into laws and resources and are implemented within educational institutions. Finally they affect the behaviour of individual faculties and the way in which they conduct their research, teaching and administrative tasks. This process is usually understood as a hierarchical process that spans what is usually considered different 'levels' of analysis: the macro level of national politics, the meso level of institutional behaviour and the micro level of individual behaviour. The process normally runs like this: decisions made at a higher level become structural conditions that affect behaviour at lower levels. Alternatively, the process may be 'reversed', so that influence moves the other way, from the bottom up. In the study of public policy and particularly in the field of policy implementation, there is an extensive literature on such processes (Berman 1978; Bleikie 1997; Elmore 1979; Lester and Goggin 1999; Sabatier 1986; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Schneider and Ingram 1997).

When the problem is conceptualised like this, the question of how the levels are related to one another presents itself. Examples of general sociological discussions on the topic are found in, for

example, Alexander *et al.* (1987). Because the discussion is framed in terms of a hierarchical model, the range of possible answers is given. The levels are related through chains of events as reflected in the discussion about top-down versus bottom-up perspectives on public policy making. In addition to the methodological problems pointed out above, there are additional reasons why this conceptual separation of levels often does not facilitate analysis of real world change processes. Quite to the contrary, the analyst is presented with a world that is conceptually divided into segments to which he or she must relate. In practice it is our experience that decisions in the different contexts of higher education are highly interwoven in a number of different ways that make a separate levels model unsuitable. Indeed it may even obscure rather than illuminate analysis. We shall therefore prefer the concept of 'fields of social action', where a field is an institutionalised area of activity in which actors struggle about something that is of importance to them.

We thus combine two definitions. The first part about social activity is derived from Powell and DiMaggio's (1991) definition of 'organisational field' as a 'recognised area of institutional life' (p.64f), and the second part from Bourdieu's (1988) concept of 'social field'. However, we shall still use the concept of 'levels' where it is appropriate for heuristic reasons. The point is not, therefore, to conceal the obvious fact that so many policy initiatives come from the political centre and are implemented in bodies and institutions at formally lower levels in a governmental hierarchy. The theoretical point we make here is that while admitting the obvious existence of a formal hierarchy, we seek to retain an analytical openness that is particularly important in a field of social life where multiple forces so clearly work together in forming the system. The significance of the autonomy of academic institutions, the role of academic disciplines and academic professional interests, testify to this. One of the advantages of this definition is that it is easier to incorporate in the theoretical framework the fact that certain influential individuals may affect simultaneously processes in many different contexts, their department, university and national policies. Reform ideas may furthermore move around and take effect in very complicated patterns, as the following example from Norway may illustrate. Reform ideas on graduate education were originally imported from the USA by Norwegian scientists in the 1950s. They managed to get their universities to introduce new graduate education degrees during the 1960s. In the 1980s the same reform ideas came back as national graduate education reforms in the humanities and social sciences. These reforms were not the product of top-down or bottom-up processes within a formal hierarchy, but of

multiple interlocking processes within international academic disciplines, academic institutions and central authorities that finally resulted in national reform.

Although there are important characteristics particular to each nation, we can say that higher education in practice is regulated by more than one system: the governmental and the academic. Governmental regulation takes place through the central policy-making bodies and bureaucracies, the allocative bodies and the quality assurance bodies. These provide the frame for the policies for the universities, which then seek to find their particular identities and niches within them. At the same time, a different set of policies is formed through the invisible colleges of academics. They decide the award of the more prestigious academic posts and honours, reputational statuses and, interlocking with the allocative systems, the awards and differential allocation of funds. There are thus two policy- and decision-making systems, that have no formal connection, but which affect and generate energy between each other. Their action can be likened to that of tectonic plates² which shifting under the surface of the earth generate energy between them.

This tension and energy is created through the allocative functions that academics exercise on behalf of government within institutions or on decision-making bodies like research councils. In these functions the academic not only has to balance the needs of the government against those of academia, but also operates within a field of social action that requires him or her to reconcile social systems which are subject to different mod operandi and driven by forces of bureaucracy and politics opposed to the development of knowledge within academic disciplines and institutions. These points indicate the exceptionalism of policy making within higher education.

The reach of decisions made by groups or individuals defines the different fields within higher education politics. This reach may vary from decisions that concern national policy choices, via those affecting individual higher education institutions, academic disciplines or individual departments to those that concern only the individual academics themselves. Our dependent variable, accordingly, is change within three different fields of social action: national policy, educational institutions and academic work within different disciplinary settings.

We shall explain the changes in terms of a simple explanatory model where we assume that change is affected by two sets of independent variables. On the one hand we assume that the actors are bounded rational actors. We assume accordingly that they seek some kind of satisfying outcome defined in terms of specific goals, rather

than trying to maximise some exogenously given utility function. Since preferences are not exogenously given they must be identified empirically.

In order to understand the nature of the choices actors make we need to see how their attempts to reach specific goals interact with the second set of independent variables which is the institutional context in which they act. Among approaches to 'the New Institutionalism' we find considerable variation both as to what extent human agency plays a role and how it interacts with the institutional context (Peters 1999, pp. 142ff). Regarding the latter aspect we can identify two kinds of ideas that we may consider opposites. There is institutional rational choice, as formulated by authors such as Ostrom (1990) and Scharpf (1997). Here institutions, defined as a set of rules, act as constraints on goal-seeking behaviour. There is also normative institutionalism as presented by March and Olsen (1984, 1989). In their rendition institutions do not constrain behaviour. They shape it. Institutions are defined as a collection of values, rules and routines that are developed in order to implement and enforce those values (Peters 1999, p. 29). It follows from their concept of a logic of appropriateness that institutions and human agency are inseparable, because the latter is a product of the former.

If we return to the question of the extent to which actors play an important independent part in these models, neither the rational nor the normative version of institutionalism per se offers unambiguous and clear-cut answers. In the case of institutional rational choice the answer turns on how severely actors are constrained in the pursuit of their goals by institutional rules. This is partly an empirical question and partly a question of analytical focus. We may thus focus on how choices and choice opportunities are limited by the rules, or we may focus on how the actors try to use, bend or circumvent rules in order to achieve their goals. However, the rational choice approach is, in the words of Fritz Sharpf (1997), 'an actor-centred' institutionalism, and the analytical focus is on the actors and their choices, whereas rules are secondary limitations or constraints. Correspondingly, in the case of normative institutionalism we may choose between a focus on how institutions shape preferences in order to be effective or on how actors themselves are carriers of normative expectations. By expressing and communicating these expectations they develop, reinforce or shape institutions (cf. Peters 1999, p. 57f, 107f). However, the main focus is on individuals, not as atomistic utility maximisers, but as actors embedded within a normative order. The analytical emphasis is on routines rather than rules. As rules are internalised rather than external, actors embody and represent institutions by normally doing

the appropriate thing. Thus in trying to explain the resistance of academics to merging university departments (Chapter 7), the rational institutionalist is likely to assume that the reform threatened academic privileges and interests. The normative institutionalist would be more likely to assume that the reforms clashed with the established norm that a proper academic discipline has its own department. The academic would furthermore defend this view regardless of how it might affect his or her immediate interests.

In order to understand change in higher education we believe that it is fruitful to combine these perspectives. Historical institutionalism may be helpful in this connection because it seeks to find a middle ground between the extreme positions outlined above (Thelen and Steinmo 1995). Researchers within this tradition find the opposition between interest driven and normative behaviour that is posited explicitly by rational choice and normative institutionalism to be artificial. In practice human agency is guided by and drawn between these two driving forces. The interesting question is therefore usually not whether we ought to focus on one or the other, but how the tension between the two principles plays out in specific settings. We agree with their view and will accommodate this position by introducing more explicitly the temporal dimension in the analysis.

Although both institutions and human agency are constantly shaping and affecting the outcome of political processes, their role and significance vary according to characteristics of the situation at hand as well as to the theoretical perspective applied. We emphasise, therefore, the tension between what Becher and Kogan (1992, p. 176) call organic growth and radical change. The implication for how we regard policy change is that the notion of consciously designed reforms and radical change needs to be supplemented. We propose therefore to add the idea of gradual change where new structures and values imposed by reforms are grafted onto established arrangements in a process of meandering and sedimentation that gives policies and institutions their character of complexity and ambiguity (Bleiklie and Marton 1998). These two explanatory foci may also supplement one another, *ceteris paribus*, in the following sense. The more macroscopic the scope and the longer the time frame of the analysis, the more relevant are the relatively stable structural arrangements for explaining patterns of behaviour. The more microscopic the scope and the shorter the time frame, the more relevant will choices and strategies made by individual actors be for explaining the outcome of a given policy process.

We expect that the implications of these perspectives as to how higher education may be shaped by processes of change are pretty

straightforward. The reform period of about thirty years on which we focus is fairly short in a historic perspective. This means that we should be able to close in on the actors and that their environment is relatively stable. The analysis should therefore focus on the actors, and the problem of to what extent they manage to realise their goals and within given constraints. However, given our premise that we cannot assume what the goals and choices of the actors really are, we need to identify them by focusing on the setting in which they find themselves.

The main model is therefore applied like this (Figure 1.1). First we shall describe the situation at T^1 , which is the starting point for the reform period in question, with a particular view to the structural, normative and material setting, i.e. the constellation of actors, their objectives, resources and values. However, we shall also venture into occasional historical analyses over longer time spans in order to understand the original context better. Second, we want to analyse the reform process itself, focusing on actor behaviour, the choices they make and how successful they are. Finally we shall describe the situation at T^2 and compare with the situation at T^1 , in order to spell out the changes that have taken place and explain the outcome in terms of the two sets of independent variables: human agency and institutional characteristics.³

The question of change in higher education is not, however, a simple one of either/or. Whereas some aspects of higher education such as ideologies or formal organisational structures may change drastically in a relatively short time period, other aspects such as faculty or student behaviour and identities may change more slowly and gradually. The same may be true of certain basic technologies such as academic lectures or study techniques. This indicates that in an analysis of developments over shorter periods of time we should also be open to the tension between organic growth and radical change. Finally, we may find that actors' ability to induce change and the degree of structural constraints they face may vary over time and from place to place. We expect this to be clear from the cross-national comparison of our three countries. We shall demonstrate that the capacity of the British government to induce drastic change in the

$T^1 \rightarrow$ Process shaped by actors and institutions $\rightarrow T^2$

Figure 1.1. The actor-context model of higher education change

higher education system seems to be greater than that of the Swedish government and much more so than the Norwegian central government. In the latter case the impression of continuity and gradual change is comparatively strong.

Research issues

When we try to define and explain these policy changes we shall focus on a number of aspects of change such as the values that characterise the policies and processes of change, the actors that formulate the policies, the policy content and the outcome and implications of the policies that are adopted and how they interact with other ongoing processes of change. We aim at binding together analyses of political reforms and of processes of social change as they manifest themselves at different levels of analysis: the national, the institutional, the disciplinary and the individual. We shall focus on the tension between the practical tasks that actors seek to solve through goal-oriented action and the cognitive maps and social norms that direct them (Becher and Kogan 1992; March and Olsen 1995). These ideas form a general conceptual framework around the work, although in the different chapters we will make use of specific conceptual approaches in the analyses of national policy formation, the implementation of reforms, the policy impacts and processes of change at educational institutions and within disciplinary groups. The 'synoptic model' of higher education may illustrate the complexity of the higher education system and the way in which it is affected by policy initiatives. This model emphasises how the multilevel character of the system, in combination with normative and instrumental or operational modes which are generated both within and outside the system, creates a multifaceted system that is formed by a multiplicity of social forces (Becher and Kogan 1992, pp. 7–21).

These forces play themselves out within different contexts. We shall follow Burton Clark's argument (Clark 1983) that higher education institutions find themselves within a triangular field of co-ordinating forces constituted by state authority, academic oligarchy and the market (see also Chapter 4). By co-ordinating forces is meant those forces that represent sufficient power and authority to pull higher education systems together in the face of a complex and disparate array of tasks, beliefs and forms of authority that pull in different directions (Clark 1983, pp. 137–145) (see Chapter 4). Becher and Kogan (1992), adapting Premfors, (1983) added a welfare state force. The co-ordinating forces, furthermore, manifest themselves in different ways at the level of national policies, educational institutions and individual academics within their disciplinary departments.

Within the field of national politics three sets of considerations apply in this connection. One consideration concerns the understanding of political change. Here we are concerned with the tension and interplay between the strategic and institutional aspect, i.e. between the conscious attempts at creating change in order to achieve instrumental goals and the habitual and rule-bound processes where change takes place gradually and less noticeably. On this basis two interpretations of reform processes are at hand. We may regard them as conscious clearly distinguishable attempts at achieving specific goals, or we may see them as embedded processes that form parts of more comprehensive social and political processes of change. In this latter perspective reforms may be regarded as expressions of how public authorities react to such phenomena as rising student numbers, changed conceptions of the significance of higher education, research and the different disciplines or changes in philosophies about higher education governance. These questions are addressed in particular in Chapter 2.

The second consideration concerns the understanding of the field of higher education as a public policy domain. In this connection we have developed an analysis of policy regimes along two dimensions. One is the influence dimension where we apply a typology of influence according to the actors or constellations of actors who dominate policy formation: central authorities, higher education institutions, higher education elites or interest organisation. The other dimension concerns the relationship between the actors that may range from relatively tightly knit, stable and cohesive policy communities to transient and loosely coupled issue networks. A dynamic regime approach has been developed in order to analyse the political processes within higher education policy regimes. This analysis is found in Chapter 3.

The third consideration relates to the way in which we seek to understand policy content. We emphasise three aspects of higher education policy:

1. The ideological aspect appears through the values that are promoted, the actors' understanding of reality and the justifications they provide for the policies.
2. The organisational aspect manifest itself through the way in which procedures by which influence and authority are sought and distributed.
3. The educational and research policy aspects appear through the way in which education and research activities are designed and through the resources that are invested. (These two aspects are analysed in Chapters 4 and 5.)

In the analysis of the fields of institutional and individual practices we shall focus on the interplay between institution, discipline and the individual academic. Two questions will be at the centre of our attention.

The first question turns on the position of the academic profession which we shall address in Chapter 6. In this connection we shall consider important questions relating to university policy and how it interacts with dominant conceptions of knowledge and the position of various academic disciplines.

The second question turns on how reforms had an impact on academic identity and how characteristics of academic disciplines and academic identity contribute to the formation of university policy and local practices. This is the topic of Chapter 7.

In analysis of the institutional field in these two chapters we shall mainly make use of two kinds of theoretical approaches. First, the underlying theme is the struggle for social recognition within hierarchical social institutions (Bourdieu 1988). In this analysis we focus on status hierarchies within disciplines, hierarchies of disciplines and hierarchies of disciplines and other social groups at the universities as well as their position within wider social structures. The second approach is based on Tony Becher's (1989) concepts of research modes and disciplinary cultures. In this connection we shall emphasise how different disciplines form the basis of different types of communities based on specific modes of work, organisational patterns and common values.

In the analyses we shall focus on the dynamics of the various social forces which these perspectives are aiming to capture. Central among them are the dynamics between the struggles for social status, disciplinary and professional values, organisational patterns and forms of practice, political reform efforts and other external events of significance to the actors involved. In the final analysis we are concerned with how the processes that are brought together within academic institutions affect the basic conceptual understanding and the epistemic structures on which the activity of each individual academic is based.

Taking the different aspects of change we mentioned at the beginning of this section as a point of departure, we shall argue in this book that: Changes in formal structures (such as higher education reform) and size (increased student enrolment) do not necessarily change behaviour or all aspects of social relationships as, for example, power and autonomy. The thrust of this argument is that social behaviour and social relationships are far too complex and ambiguous to be fruitfully analysed in terms of a mechanistic model that assumes simple causation as the

in review!

engine of social change. We support the view that social causes and effects, in order to be meaningfully identified, must be located in time and space. One implication of this view is that social causation cannot be assumed, but must be discovered. The assumptions of grand theories or generalised models of society must therefore be tested. One cannot presume that changes in social relationships and behaviour within higher education follow from reforms that change social structures. Neither can the causes of actual behavioural changes be read back into structural causes. These ideas about the nature of change in higher education systems will be developed further in Chapters 2 and 3 on the higher education policy process. An important subset of these assumptions is that academics have a dual accountability to their invisible colleges of fellow academics and to their institution. On this hypothesis it is indeed possible to compare systems and, at any one time, to denote the extent to which one force, e.g. managerial as against collegial or civil society as opposed to market criteria, is driving the system.

The nature and pace of change in higher education systems are affected by national socio-political peculiarities. Most major theoretical perspectives on higher education development and change, such as idealism, functionalism and rationalism, assume that the co-ordinating forces within higher education have changed fundamentally. They tend to assume, furthermore, that the autonomy of academic institutions and individual academics has been reduced, and that the influence of the market and/or public authorities has increased. This is usually considered to be a consequence of the development of higher education from elite via mass to universal higher education. We argue that there is a considerable variation depending on national political and educational and research traditions. However, in trying to identify commonalities across national boundaries, we may develop alternative assumptions from the functionalist theory of organisations based on the concept of socio-technology. Joan Woodward (1965) developed the theme that social relationships develop in response to the underlying technology which an institution performs. Thus the traditional view of collegial academic governance followed the assumption that the process was based on diverse and individualistic work. The main production unit was the free academic who required freedom to generate good research and teaching. It followed from this that the structures of higher education would be collegial rather than managerial. By contrast, if the civil society functions of higher education pre-dominate, academic freedom is tempered by social concern, which requires a somewhat more hierarchical channel of authority to secure it.

Events outside the realm of national politics such as changes in student preferences may affect the higher education system at least as much as national policies. Much of the rhetoric about higher education policy is based on the notion that higher education systems are shaped by political decisions and preferences. We seek to demonstrate how a number of events and processes, such as educational choices made by young people, the dynamics of academic labour markets and academic prestige hierarchies, have exerted equally important influences on higher education.

Social practices at the organisational and individual levels have changed less than formal structural changes may indicate. The argument rests on a number of premises. Reform policies are often based on the assumption that target groups can be counted on to act as if they are subject to no other influences than the policy itself. However, policy reforms and organisational changes represent but two of several factors that affect the behaviour of individuals and organisations. In this connection it is important to bear in mind the set of three co-ordinating forces pointed out by Clark (1983). In addition to the public authorities or bureaucracy in Clark's model, there are the forces of the market and the academic oligarchy that potentially at least may shape higher education, and possibly compete with or prevent the efforts of public authorities to reach their goals through higher education policies. The way in which reform policies affect behaviour thus depends on at least the following factors: the extent to which a policy is clearly identifiable in terms of operational goals and tangible policy instruments; the extent to which a policy is welcome in terms of compatibility with the values and interests of target groups; the extent to which a policy is relevant in terms of how likely it is to affect core activities of target groups. One assumption we shall explore is that this process is likely to be affected by the relationships between the types of knowledge being generated and disseminated and the higher education organisation required to sustain them. This point taken from work by Basil Bernstein (1963) relates to the extent to which forms of knowledge, hard and soft, the collected and integrated curriculum, affect and are affected by its social or organisational forms. It follows that higher education organisation, such as decentralisation, binary systems, more power to rectors, are/should be determined in part by the extent to which they are applicable to the component knowledge structures in teaching and research. We may assume furthermore with Geertz (1964) and Archer (1981) that forms of knowledge, feeling or value become shaped and structured into procedures, processes and structures. Both these assumptions thus refer to a basic generative

process in higher education development where policy movements from above interact with disciplinary processes from below.

Processes of change at the level of national policy, within academic institutions and disciplinary groups, are only partially co-ordinated. The implication of this argument is that changes within these fields of social action are, like tectonic plates, driven by different forces. It is thus an open question how and to what extent academic institutions and practices are affected by major policy changes. This depends on the extent to which the changes are welcomed by, relevant to, and moulded and absorbed by academic institutions and practices. Conversely, academic disciplines and their development may, for instance, be formed by processes such as academic drift that may go unheeded by national political actors.

Contents of the book

In the following chapters we shall flesh out the actor-context model and its institutionalist argument. In doing so we shall deal with changes within the three tightly interwoven fields of national policy and politics (Chapters 2-4), educational institutions (Chapter 5), academic identity and work (Chapters 6-7).

In Chapter 2 Maurice Kogan and Marianne Bauer provide an outline of the recent higher education policy history of the three countries. Chapter 3 by Ivar Bleiklie analyses the relationship between policies and the actors and patterns of influence in the policy process. Chapter 4 by Maurice Kogan and Susan Gerard Marton deals with the relationship between the state and higher education and theories of the state and of academic autonomy relevant to that relationship. Chapter 5 by Berit Askling and Mary Henkel analyses the relationship between academic institutions, national political authorities and the framing of academic authority. Chapter 6 by Roar Høstaker focuses on the academic profession and how it has been affected by policy changes. Chapter 7, by Mary Henkel and Agnete Vabø, deals with the impact of higher education reforms on academic identity. Chapter 8 sums up and draws conclusions from the analyses in the preceding chapters.

Appendix

Procedures and data

More detailed accounts of methods are given in the four national studies published separately. The common procedures for the whole project were, however, as follows:

1. Joint identification by the three teams of the substantive content and methods of the national studies and hence of the comparative study. This process was conducted through workshops and the exchange of drafts.
2. Study of policy documentation to tabulate changes in the governing structures of higher education. Intensive documentary study was undertaken in all three projects, but most intensively in Norway and Sweden where more detailed current policy documentation was more readily available, which to some extent balanced the amount of data available to the three projects.

In Norway, secondary material included statistics and reports from the following sources: (a) Norwegian Institute for Studies in Research and Higher Education; (b) Central Bureau of Statistics; (c) the online Ministry Database on Higher Education (DBH) provided by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

Swedish material and data were derived from documents, including parliamentary and government reform documents and material from central agencies. Reports and descriptions of organisation and the distribution of authority and responsibility, as well as accounts of their systems for quality assurance and development, were collected from the institutions in the study. When relevant, documented information from other Swedish higher education institutions was employed. The statistics were obtained from Statistics Sweden, the National Higher Education Agency and individual institutions and departments.

3. Selected interviews with policy formers and other past and present key informants on changes in the policies and structures of central government in relation to higher education. The total number of those interviewed specifically for the English study of policy formation was 90 ministers and former ministers, senior civil servants, and other key informants, e.g. journalists. The project also benefited from

interviews with both policy makers or observers and academics conducted for our contemporaneous evaluation of the Foresight Initiative, funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The Norwegian study included interviews with 12 national level actors including a minister, three senior civil servants, the Secretary-General of the Council of Norwegian Universities and the Director of the Norway Network Council. Eight interviews were undertaken with institutional leaders.

In Sweden, at the macro level, the purpose of conducting the interviews was to shed light on and confirm the information obtained from official government documents. This was quite different from the micro and meso levels where the interviews comprised a large part of the primary empirical material. A total of 12 interviews were conducted (approximately two and a half hours in length) during the time period of February 1996 to March 1998 with the majority taking place during 1996.

4. Interviews with academics of different levels in a range of institutions and subject areas. All of the studies concentrate on the more academic fields of knowledge and excluded, for example, the more professionally oriented faculties of law, medicine and engineering. This limitation was applied in all three countries on the assumption that change or non-change in values and attitudes among academic staff would be better observed within more traditional disciplinary fields. These would be the *a fortiori* examples, because change would be least expected in them.

Within the English project, studies were made through documentation and over 300 semi-structured interviews within the following subject areas: biochemistry, chemistry, economics, English, history, physics and sociology. This part of the project also comprised two case studies of quality assurance. Work on the enterprise in higher education initiative also incorporated interviews with those involved at national level in the two specific policy areas, as well as with members of senior academic management teams and administrators in seven universities and academics in seven disciplines. The more general study was based

largely on interviews with individual academics from six disciplines in four more universities.

The Norwegian case focused on change and reform within the three different fields of action: national policy, educational institutions and the individual academic. The analysis tried to overcome the uniqueness of the single case by describing it in terms of general theoretical variables and located the case as a particular value on each variable for the more detailed investigation in the various empirical chapters. They selected the two largest of Norway's four universities, the universities in Bergen and Oslo. Within the two universities the humanities and social sciences faculties were selected, which together employ 70 per cent of all Norwegian academics within these types of university faculty. Thus the selection of disciplines at the institutional level was somewhat different from the two other country studies. Forty-six semi-structured interviews were made with actors or respondents operating at different levels. At the disciplinary level 32 academics at the two faculties of the humanities and social sciences in Bergen and Oslo were interviewed.

In addition, there were two surveys of the whole faculty at the faculty of the humanities and faculty of social sciences, the University of Bergen ($N = 334$, 85 per cent response rate) and the faculty of the humanities and faculty of social sciences, the University of Oslo ($N = 425$, 81 per cent response rate).

In Sweden, four universities were selected as study objects – two large and two smaller ones of varying age. However, in order to cover the institutional variance of the Swedish comprehensive higher education system, one large and one smaller college were included.

Six disciplines were selected to cover the range from the humanistic and social sciences to the natural sciences: history, modern languages, sociology, economics, physics and biochemistry. In both the English and Swedish studies, the interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and are therefore not identified. Such an undertaking was not considered realistic in the smaller and more specific Norwegian project.