Chapter 8

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY: SOME CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we summarise the main points made in the book, discuss the main change outcomes that were discernible at T2 and consider the sources of change and continuity, As an example of major change, we seek to interpret changes in overall structure. Finally, we note how our studies reflect on some modes of generalisation to be found in current higher education studies.

WHAT THE BOOK SAID

In this book we have, through social science perspectives, compared changes in the higher education field, the change processes and their effects, in three Western European countries of different histories, polities and cultures.

In Chapter 1, we laid out the arguments for making these comparisons, which are based on the more substantive analyses of the changes contained in our national studies, and described the explicitly qualitative methods used in pursuing these lines of enquiry.

We also presented an explanatory model where we assume that change is affected by bounded rational actors interacting within different institutional contexts. We noted the different stages of change since roughly the beginning of the 1970s (T1) until 2005 (T2).

In fleshing out the actor-context model and its institutionalist argument we have dealt with changes within the three tightly interwoven fields of national policy and politics (Chapters 2-4), educational institutions (Chapter 5), academic work and identity (Chapters 6-7). Our conceptualisation allows for treating change as a product of public policy and at the same time as the outcome of the actions and values of the prime actors, the academics, at the base of the system, as well as resulting from deeper structural changes affecting the university system.

Yet the countries started from different points, in their modes of and assumptions about forms of government, the structures of influence and power, and the very core of academic life, academic identities and preferences for different forms of knowledge.

In Chapter 2 we provided an outline of the recent higher education policy history of the three countries. A number of similar challenges that faced the systems were identified, such as sharply growing student numbers, a higher ratio of students to teachers and new forms of regulation of higher education. One set of structural changes that characterised the three systems is the movement into some sort of binary structure during the seventies that was replaced during the 1990s by a movement towards system integration and academic drift.

M. Kogan, M. Bauer, I. Bleiklie and M. Henkel (eds.), Transforming Higher Education: A Comparative Study (Second Edition), 163–176.

We noted how all three governments urged universities to adopt explicit quality assurance practices, market behaviour, stronger vocational missions, and public accountability, but the policies came out differently. In the UK and Sweden they were practically opposite. In Sweden the central regulation of study lines and courses gave way to placing the responsibility for quality on the institutions themselves. In the UK, self-regulation was overtaken by the highly prescriptive activities of first the funding agencies and later the Quality Assurance Agency. In Norway, the state was far more hesitant to insinuate nationally devised practices. The UK differed again in the assertion of selectivity in research funding which was far stronger than in Norway and Sweden. In the UK, too, policy was sharpened in the 1980s by ideology based on overt distrust of public service professionals and providers. The impacts of EU policies will obviously be considerable, although not as yet easy to assess.

Thus it is possible to note parallel periods of change, largely driven by the same forces. But because they took place in different political and cultural settings, and had different starting points, they produced different sets of outcomes. Common goals, different means and different contexts meant different outcomes.

Chapter 3 dealt with the policy process through a dynamic regime approach. Variations in policy can be explained in terms of policy design. Policy design has moved in all three countries from a concentration on authority tools towards the use of a wider array of policy instruments including more emphasis on incentives and learning tools. The policy field was originally characterised by participation of a few main actors within stable structural arrangements, elites in England, corporatist arrangements in Sweden and tight relations between ministry officials and academic institutions in Norway. This changed to varying degrees of wider participation within somewhat looser networks of actors. The relationship between policy regime and policy design manifested itself as different policy styles. The English policy style can be characterised as heroic, the Norwegian as incremental and the Swedish as adversarial.

Chapter 4 explored the relationship between the state and higher education. It focuses initially on how the perception of higher education has changed, as it has become larger, more complex and costly. As the system has grown and the economy has changed, the perceived importance of higher education and research to the 'knowledge' economy has put a stronger utilitarian pressure on higher education. The way in which the countries dealt with the change varied according to the point of departure when the reforms were conceived and according to national traditions. England has moved from a state-higher education relationship characterised by a devolutionary form of central planning and a comparatively high degree of autonomy. Sweden seems to have moved in the opposite direction, from a point of departure in the late 1970s characterised by extraordinarily strong state control to a more decentralised system in the 1990s. In Norway the development has been characterised by a set of seemingly contradictory moves comprising formalisation and more state influence over a wider array of higher education affairs combined with the introduction of more decentralised management procedures particularly in the area of economic planning and budgeting.

Universities can be mapped alongside a spectrum of normative accounts of the nature of the state, from the minimalist in which it does no more than

protect the natural rights of individuals, through more traditional liberal and conservative thinking, to the maximalist communitarian or absolutist views both of which grant maximum authority to the collectivity. Alongside these are the normative accounts of the government of higher education, from the classic to the dependent model of the institution. It is possible to strip down these models by contrasting their dominant values, knowledge styles and client groups and from there educe internal and external governmental structures.

The relationship between academic institutions and national political authorities, the framing of academic authority was the topic of Chapter 5. The increased authority of the higher education institutions, the various forms of pressure upon them to become more autonomous – although in different ways – the elements of accountability and external control of efficiency and quality seem to give the institutions quite new roles and functions in the higher education systems of today. This also raised the expectations placed on a more pronounced institutional leadership and management.

Changing assumptions about higher education systems are internalised by institutions within the framing of their space for action by government and intermediary bodies. We noted the role of institutions as key change mediators. In recent years they have taken on a more central role in transmitting political intentions to academic processes and outcomes than previously.

There are examples of efforts to find a proper balance between centralisation and decentralisation, between internal (academic) influences and external (corporate and/or market-dominated) influences, between organisational stability and flexibility, all in order to maximise the capacity for institutional development within a frame of state control.

The national contexts differed and so did the effects on institutions. In Norway, they included internal reorganisation of the departmental structure by mergers of departments, the introduction of activity planning and evaluations, and the decentralisation and strengthening of leadership at all levels of the university organisation. In Sweden, a focus on evaluation and control (of quality and efficiency) as an essential component of increased self-regulation, and competition among the institutions generated demands for strong institutional leadership. In the UK, the power of the vice-chancellor was strengthened as planning and managerial practices were more firmly installed.

In Chapter 6, we noted the uncertainties surrounding the existence of the academic profession and the impact of integrating relations as well as of disintegrating forces, such as hierarchisation and divides between the disciplines. The differences between the three countries and how the position of academics has changed over the period that we cover were analysed.

The British academic living within traditional self-governing institutions contrasted with the higher civil service status of Scandinavian professors whose educational ideals were not those of producing a generally educated elite but helping the young to learn a trade. With expansion, assumptions changed in all three countries as did those concerning the teacher-researcher divide and participation in governance of institutions by junior academic and non-teaching staff and students. With these changes, different patterns of academic leadership at the disciplinary level also emerged.

From power and authority within institutional structures our analysis in Chapter 7 turned to the ultimate criterion variables of the effects of policy changes on academic working and values. Within academia, identity is seen as a key social as well as individual concept. Identities are developed and validated within a social context, through a dynamic between individuals and significant collectives, disciplines, departments and institutions, located in national cultures and higher education histories. They provide the tangible structures and processes, and the myths and traditions that make for stability in the academic values, conceptions of knowledge and practices at the centre of academic identities.

Although the impact may vary between disciplines, institutions and countries, the analysis seems to underpin one general interpretation of the reform impact. Academics may face altered circumstances with considerable resilience, they adapt to and exploit conditions they favour, and avoid or modify reforms they resent. In a short-term perspective, counter strategies may thus modify reforms and their impact considerably and represent an apparent conservative force in the higher education system. However, in a longer time perspective there might also be some transformation of attitudes towards knowledge and of academic values. Academic staff under given circumstances act as innovators themselves.

In tracing some of the complexities of the policies and their implications for academic values and conceptions of practice, we used two case studies of contrasting policies: merging departments in Norway and quality assurance in England, Norway and Sweden. The case studies represented different challenges to different constituencies. The first shows the power of disciplinary myths to unite an elite discipline and to co-opt key powerful interests in its support. It also shows the importance of the department to members of academic disciplines. The second case study examines the patterns of similarity and difference in quality assurance policies themselves and in their implications for academics in the three countries. It notes some shifts of emphasis from individual to collective identities, the bureaucratisation of academic work and the as yet uncertainly developing influence upon academics of market values and mechanisms. It suggests that the UK policies, based on more coercive change strategies, did penetrate academic work and values more thoroughly than those in Norway and Sweden, although the implications for the longer term remain uncertain. The case studies taken together identify a range of conservation strategies used by academics, the most robust of which was probably accommodation. We note some circumstances in which new demands and academic responses to them might have led to transformation of academic practices in which internalist and externalist values were brought together, and resulted in a reaffirmation of academic identities.

CHANGE OUTCOMES AT T2

In considering change outcomes as they emerged in our period of study, we follow two dimensions that have been our principal concerns in this book: *authority* and power relationships between higher education, the state and the

market; and the *purposes* of higher education. Purposes are to be understood in terms of the forms of knowledge to be advanced in higher education and the values underlying them.

All the detailed outcomes, identified in Table 8.1 below, can be categorised along these two dimensions. The model of four types of institutional autonomy, presented in Figure 4.2, can facilitate analysis of change and continuity at all levels or in all fields of action. It makes it possible to locate the three systems at the beginning and end of our study period. It thus enables us to go beyond Clark's triangle, creative and seminal formulation though it was, which is concerned only with power or authority.

Using this diagram to illustrate various governance models, it is possible to depict the changes in the three countries from T1 to T2 in the following way (see Figure 8.1 below). As evident from the figure, all three nations can be characterised as moving towards a market model of governance, with more emphasis on managerialism, market needs and structures, and research which is seen as 'useful'.

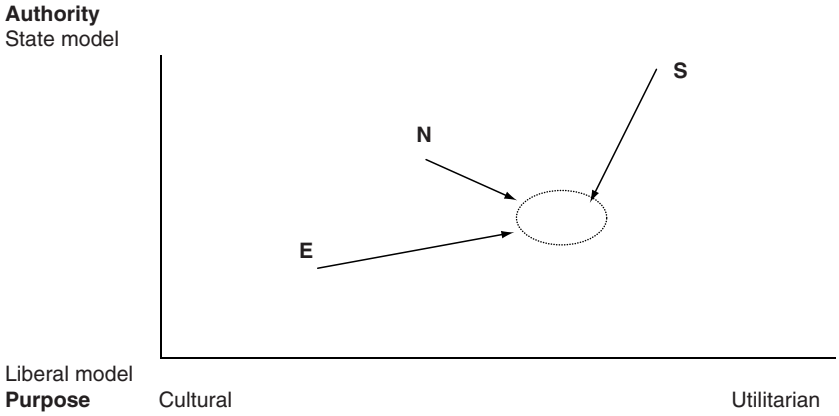

Figure 8.1. Three Nations' Movement towards a New Governance Model.

At T1, the Swedish governments held a strongly utilitarian concept of higher education – the movement to T2 partly entails a return to more cultural values. For Sweden, and arguably for Norway in certain respects, the movement reflects increased decentralisation from state authority. However, in the British case, the movement from a liberal model entails an increased degree of centralisation. It is not possible to depict such a transformation by a single point, and each nation moving towards the same point in the model does not end up with exactly the same characteristics and policies Hence an ellipse is preferred to illustrate the variety between nations in their changed governance models.

We do not have enough empirical data to illustrate the corresponding movements of purposes and authority distribution in attitudes and behaviour of academic staff and leadership. However, in our interviews with academic representatives we found several expressions of adherence to the values of the Humboldtian and Newmanian models. Even if they had to adapt to new conditions, many academics continued to embrace traditional academic values.

Table 8.1. Outcomes at T2

Government level	
Between the facilitatory and the interventionist	Differed considerably between countries. UK more interventionist.
Between the providing and the regulative	Scandinavian countries less regulative UK more regulative
Between the welfare, deficiency funding and the market driven	All in direction of market
Between the decentralised and the centralised	Norway and Sweden less, UK more centralised
Between the professionally and the managerially led system	Moves towards managerial power
Between control by the political and administrative laity and the academic professionals.	More political and lay control. But academic control over content still strong in all countries
Between sponsoring free enquiry and instrumental knowledge	Free enquiry strong but more deference to instrumental purposes in some areas
Between individual development and economic and social policy values	Economic and social policy values more strongly embedded in missions
Between peer and self-evaluation and systematic quality assurance	All stronger evaluation, but UK, though incorporating peer judgement, more external, linked to allocations
Institutional level	
Between collegium and strong rectorate	Rectorates strengthened in all countries
Between faculty organisation and central control and development mechanisms	Central mechanisms strengthened
Between traditional academic and innovative styles and modes (eg entrepreneurial, adaptive and learning institutional models)	New models in all national rhetorics Institutional adoption variable
Between weak and strong accountability mechanisms	All stronger
Between independent and dependent institution	More policy dependency, but more institutional earning of resources
Between free grants and market acquired resources	More dependency on markets
Individual academics	
Between individual to team and sponsored knowledge	Individuality strong, but more team and sponsored organisation of research and curriculum development
Between individualistic and curiosity driven to instrumental and 'relevant' knowledge	Curiosity driven research remained most esteemed, but more responsive, in some areas, to 'relevance'. Similar tendencies in some education.
Between individualistic and systemic and policy driven values	Policy driven values more salient, but individualistic remain strong

Table 8.1. Continued

Government level	
Between scientific, progressive and humanistic, recursive models of knowledge production	Scientific model more widely imposed
Between knowledge-led and bureaucratic or market models of quality	Knowledge-led models remained dominant but bureaucratic and market models had some impacts
Between individual and collective identities	Collective identities became more important but not at the expense of individual identities

The tabulation above shows some of the detailed dimensions of higher education which might have changed between T1 and T2.

The table lists the broad categories of change that took place in the three countries between T1 and T2. Two reservations apply in making and using such a list, particularly one drawn up, for the sake of simplicity, in dichotomous terms. First, not all of the changes took place in the same direction. For example, in the Scandinavian countries, government became more facilitatory and less interventionist, whereas the opposite was true in the United Kingdom. All were more market driven. The UK unlike Norway and Sweden became more centralised. The system became more managerial. Professional academic control was weakened, especially in the UK, but to a lesser degree too in the other two countries.

Secondly, not all of the changes can be attributed to 'reform' policies. Not only, as we have shown, did contextual forces of social, economic and demographic origin help propel policies, but some, particularly those nearest academic activity, derived from changes in the configurations and developments of knowledge.

SOURCES OF CHANGE

If it is possible to discern outcomes, it is more difficult to specify the sources of change and the processes of change. Did change evolve or was it imposed? These issues are different from but linked to the structure and actor perspectives elaborated in Chapter 1.

If we take imposition first, different concepts of change, different combinations of actors and the use of different tools did produce different outcomes in the three countries. However, it is important not to exaggerate the effects of radical policies, considerable though they were. Academic excellence still remained the leading criterion, against all the claims of competing ideology, as represented by the allocation of funds and the award of quality assurance gradings through the research assessment exercise and the quality assurance systems. If in Norway and Sweden, expansion and the regionalisation of the universities were accompanied by equalisation of statuses, UK hierarchies of esteem, already so steep, were reinforced rather than reduced by these changes,

although expansion and the implosion of the binary system certainly allowed for some readjustment, particularly in the middle of the pecking order, of statuses as between institutions. So far from enforcing single ideologies upon higher education, government, perhaps through avoidance of fundamental reappraisal, seemed content to allow several ideologies, policies and practices to run in parallel with each other.

Some changes, or at least the rhetoric surrounding them, may have come about from imitation. Thus the fashion of planning seems to have emerged strongly in the 1960s, perhaps under the advocacy of the OECD and its country reviews. The current emphases on quality review and market style arrangements almost certainly spread from country to country. But the deeper changes – massification, changing state-university relations, the stratification of systems, the new emphasis on curriculum and its delivery -might all be described as the natural evolution of systems once certain contextual factors were in place.

The three studies showed that whilst the countries shared many features, and particularly much of the whole vocabulary and rhetoric of reform that was common to OECD countries, the effects were varied. The changes had to operate against multiple perspectives viewed from multiple standpoints. They had to contend with different national political cultures (affecting for example, the degree of centralisation tolerated), different institutional histories and expectations, and strong differences at the base deriving from disciplinary and other academic perspectives. And within institutions perspectives were quite different at individual, departmental, faculty and university level.

One generalisation that holds across the three countries is that the universities have emerged as actors with a new role and level of influence, particularly in regard to academic staff, in the policy process. However, like national systems, they were at different starting points at the beginning of our period. They reflect different national and local histories, different cultures, different mixes of expertise and multiple intellectual traditions. To try to encompass their actions or development in our period in terms of a few simple models is, we suggest, to oversimplify. For that reason we experience doubts about identifications such as 'the entrepreneurial university' (Clark 1998). That might indeed be an aspiration at the top, but is it shared by the main working parts?

Institutions' attitudes to and power to manage imposed change depend partly on various forms of capital that they inherit, but also access to assets which is entrenched in academic appointment. Universities have changed over time, but we have shown how they and the changes they have undergone are multi-modal. They are multi-modal because they embody many things at once. Current writing often assumes that there is an old traditional set of values and practices which are shifting under the impress of new forms of knowledge, new government university relations, new public policies. In fact, status and esteem still remain with traditional academic values and their attainment. Shifts in policy have affected practice, but we can make no presumptions about them affecting all academic working in the same ways. In particular, it was clear from the English study that the more esteemed institutions still housed academics who if also feeling under external pressures, remained free to go their own ways. Former largely teaching institutions would be more ready to follow new policy indications.

Whether changes evolve or are imposed by deliberate action, they evoke strategies of various kinds at the institutional, departmental and individual levels. They may be individual or collective but in the current environments there has probably been movement from the individual to the collective level. Strategies might be broadly categorised as conservation, accommodation (perhaps the most robust form of conservation) and transformation. All of these might result in the maintenance or even reassertion of existing values. They do, however, have different potentials for generating longer-term as opposed to short-term change and for maintaining long-term stability or continuity. Those that take account of the changes surrounding them rather than denying their force are more likely to sustain the values that are most important to them.

There are, however, strong propensities for stability and continuity in academic communities and institutions, not least in the processes through which academic identities, collective and individual, are formed and pursued. Academic values, inherited knowledge and the agendas that drive from them are not easily disturbed and are, on the evidence of this study, slower to shift than structural changes or stronger external framing of academic work might suggest, although in the longer term these could solidify into institutions embodying new values.

The findings quoted above illustrate the interaction of structure-value driven and actor-preference driven processes of change that were conceptualised by an actor-context model of change.

The historical analysis in Chapter 2 emphasised the evolutionary aspects of change and emphasised the gradual development of structures and basic values. However, when we looked closer at the field of national policy and its development in the last 15 years in Chapter 3, we saw how policy structures and processes interacted, so that the same ideas came to be implemented within and adapted to systems that were clearly different. This shaped the preferences of the actors and the way in which they interpreted the new policies that emerged in the 1980s. Yet these conditions also seem to have provided varying degrees of leeway for actors, because actor-preference driven processes to varying degrees contributed to shaping the outcomes at T2. This conclusion is corroborated when we look at the implications of policy changes for the state-higher education relationship in Chapters 4 and 5.

Although the relationship seemed to be affected by underlying forces that led to more convergence, they started from different points of departure and were moved by policy processes that to varying extents were driven by actor-preferences and by structural change. Moving our focus to the academic profession we found that it went through considerable structural changes in terms of growth, differentiation and standardisation between T1 and T2 in all three countries. However, the profession as such did not play the role of an actor in any of them. To the extent that we find actors within the policy processes at this level they were representatives of academic disciplines and co-opted elites rather than of the profession as such.

In Chapter 7 we get a full impression of how broader policy and systems changes fare when faced with identities and the reactions of academics to these changes. At this level we are dealing with structures and actors that interact with national policies in particularly interesting ways since identity is closely

related to academic disciplines. The disciplines constitute fields of action that to varying degrees are international and only partially sensitive to national policies or the policies of particular academic institutions.

Academic identity turned out to play an important role for the process of change in several ways. First, academic identities and modes of work constitute contextual sources of stability that seem to modify and reduce the impact of apparently radical change in policies and structural arrangements. Secondly, discipline is the most important source of academic identity. Third, academic identity affects attitudes towards, conceptions of and strategies of academics in relation to reforms.

REASONS FOR DIFFERENCES IN NATIONAL MODELS AND SYSTEMS

We are left with the issue of reasons for differences in the three systems as they responded to broadly similar forces. Ultimately there is no answer to such questions as why did the Norwegians opt initially for a binary system and the Swedes for a unitary pattern (they both seem likely to converge in differentiated unitary systems), or why have the Scandinavian countries opted for more decentralisation whilst the UK has gone the other way. If we find reasons in national political cultures or patterns of regional politics, we are still left with the fact that countries have changed their policies and structures in the period of reforms; such terms as culture may simply push the need for explanation one stage back.

However, to some extent, differences in strategies and models of state governance can be explained by the fact that the three countries started from different political cultures lending support to different overall models of government. We have noted some convergence, but underlying assumptions subsist. Thus although both the Norwegian and the Swedish higher education systems developed in the continental tradition with strong governments and strong faculties, they differed in two main respects. Like England, Norway had a diversified higher education system in which the differences between institutions were not concealed but were considered an important issue in regional policy. In Sweden, the national equivalence of all higher education institutions had been a core characteristic ever since the first universities were established.

Differences in outcomes between the countries in an actor-structure perspective can also be illuminated through differences in processes (not only in different points of departure and cultures), since processes of change are also dependent on the direction of structural change and the resulting space for actors to utilise. For example, in England, governments distrusting the universities' quality assurance mechanisms enforced central systems for both research and education, thereby reducing the space of action for the academics leading to considerable short-term effects. In Sweden, the devolution of the responsibility for quality assurance to the institutions involved a widened space of action for institutions, faculties and departments to form their own models and quality assurance activities. Because the institutions were not accustomed to these tasks, however, the space of action was ineffectively used.

We take as a particular example which illustrates the difficulty of explaining national differences the different histories of the three systems in respect to system integration. The differences cannot be interpreted in terms of the size of the systems – Norway and Sweden differed in system arrangements as much from each other as from England.

Yet there may be a logic of institutional development that applies to systems. A first step undertaken by many has been to consolidate and enhance those parts of post-school education which whilst depending for their intellectual substance on disciplined enquiry yet look towards the world of application. For a while they remain the less 'noble' part of higher education. Increasingly, as concepts of what constitutes advanced learning and enquiry become broader, and the non-university institutions seek to emulate universities in undertaking research, a natural process of convergence sets in. Only where the most determined efforts are made to sustain a viable non-university sector, as in the Californian system, or in German *Fachhochschulen*, supported as it is by the specific requirements of professional entry to employment, is the division ultimately sustained. Hence the trends in the creation of single but differentiated patterns in the US, Australasia and Sweden. The existing binary systems such as in Finland, Norway and Greece can be predicted to go the same way within 30 years. The British system was amongst the strongest cases for unification for it accommodated a smaller proportion of each school-leaving age group than other countries, and assumed from the beginning that most of the higher education student body was capable of reaching degree standard. But once a system becomes unitary a hierarchy of esteem and resource is likely to assert itself. With massification, in the largest of the three systems (the UK) came unification but also informal stratification, and in all systems diversification.

Thus although a similar logic of system development can be traced, differences in outcome are to be expected.

CONCLUSIONS

We believe that our studies have thrown light on many areas of scholarship within political science and the theory of knowledge and its development. We have also extended such important usages as those celebrated in Clark's triangle, by adding categories from knowledge to his analysis of competing power blocks. We have linked issues concerning academic identity, already well treated by previous authors, more closely with policy processes and policy change.

Our projects have also taught us to be chary of using current depictions of universities which all contain important truths but not the whole truth. To us the traditional assumptions about universities remain secure. Research and scholarship create new truths and test old ones, and status and power within the systems rest on these primary production functions. Some writing, particularly that emanating from consultancy work undertaken for international organisations and national governments, almost assumes that the traditional qualities of higher education have or should be overtaken and replaced by such

concepts as the entrepreneurial, adaptive or learning university. Indeed some universities whose primary claims to eminence are the pursuit of their traditional functions have been recruited to the lists of those defined as advancing the new styles.

In arguing that universities are multi-modal we, of course, include the entrepreneurial, adaptive and learning modes in their multi-modality. But that does not entail acceptance of those particular dimensions as being the fundamental characteristics of the many universities which our projects has caused us to know.

In conclusion, we bring the reader back to the assumptions for testing with which we ended our first chapter.

Throughout the book we have noted 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 e.g. power and autonomy.* Our study shows that whilst changes at the central and institutional levels did occur, particularly as we get deeper into the system, we cannot presume that changes in social relationships and behaviour within higher education follow from structural reforms. We have shown how aspects of academic identity, values and the more important ways of working remain stable under policy pressures.These are more likely to bend under straitened resources than structural changes.

Social practices at the organisational and individual levels have changed less than formal structural changes may indicate. The formal changes have affected the space for action at the institutional and individual levels but as our discussions of both (Chapters 5 and 7) have amply shown they represent only one factor that affects the behaviour of individuals and organisations. Change 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.

The nature and pace of change in higher education systems are affected by national socio-political peculiarities. As we noted, some 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. But we have shown that there is a considerable variation depending on national political and educational and research traditions even though we can note commonalities across national boundaries which derive from the essential characteristics of higher education.

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. Political decisions and preferences have played a key role in change, but a number of events and processes, such as educational choices made by young people, the dynamics of academic labour markets and academic prestige hierarchies exerted equally important influences on higher education. In particular, the growth of student numbers and reduction in units of resource have affected the working styles of higher education institutions.

Processes of change at the level of national policy, within academic institutions and disciplinary groups, are only partially co-ordinated. Changes within the fields of social action are driven by different social 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, 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.

We complete our joint project all the more conscious of the large agenda in both national and comparative studies that higher education presents.