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International Education Hubs as Competitive Advantage: Investigating the Role of the State as Power Connector in the Global Education Industry

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Introduction

Public education systems developed in close relationship with modern nation states. Over the past three centuries, education for the masses has been predominantly state-sponsored and became a crucial tool in the nation-building efforts of states competing and collaborating in the international system. Education researchers have long studied different explanations for these developments, the varying shapes national education systems have taken (cf. Archer, 1979; Benavot, Resnik, & Corrales, 2006; Green, 1997; Ramirez & Boli, 1987), as well as their role in bringing about national identity and citizenship (Zajda, 2009; see also Anderson, 1991; Heller, Sosna, & Wellbery, 1986). Today, traveling policy ideas stimulate a global circulation of similar concepts across geographical

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regions so that a small number (such as the knowledge-based economy) increasingly undergird education policies in most national education systems (cf. Dale, 2015). This change in the practice of education policy is accompanied by a growing strand of study more recently coined Global Education Policy (GEP) research (cf. Mundy, Green, Lingard, & Verger, 2016). This research focuses on globalizing discourses, agendas, and actors in the study of education policy to investigate the various implications of the changing contextual conditions in which education policy evolves, such as the influence of intricate relationships between domestic and foreign actors on national education policy (cf. Marginson, 2016; Verger, 2016; see also Ball, Junemann, & Santori, 2017).

Amidst the changing contextual conditions for education policy, in which policies are increasingly authored by diverse actors in multiple locales at the same time, particularly business-driven environments for providing mass education seem to prevail. In these environments, the state often only provides seed funding to establish a school or university, but institutions must become self-sustaining to stay in business. The state as a sponsor of mass education slowly but steadily vanishes in some parts of the developed world, having potentially profound implications for education provision and research. In those regions, the historically established monopolies of states providing education for the masses through different varieties of subsidizing, are, for better or worse, slowly disappearing, potentially leading to—and being the result of—an arguably changing role of the state in education.

Instigated by the dominance of concepts informed by economic thinking in education policy circulating in globalizing discourses, GEP research contemporarily shifts attention to the role of education in the world economy. What comes more and more to the fore through *Global Education Industry* (GEI) research as a dedicated perspective within GEP is not only a growing global business in education, but more intriguingly a booming business *with* education. In globalizing policy discourses, education's role in the global economy is constantly portrayed as existential. Indeed, several colleagues have pointed out the relation of this invocation to (selective interpretations of) the knowledge-based economy concept, in which education is often seen as a panacea for pressing issues. At least discursively, education has become a crucial component of the global

economy—or, as some scholars would put it, an extra-economic factor, a factor that determines economic competitiveness (cf. Sum & Jessop, 2013, pp. 261–295). Evidence for perceiving education as a direct component of the global economy may be found in the growing use of financial instruments and processes of abstraction for generating profits *with* education and the development of a "globalized economic sector" in education (cf. Verger, Lubienski, & Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). While the state remains the main authority for the governance and regulation of education, these changing policy contexts and a growing business *with* education contest the historical role of the state and its rationales for sponsoring mass education.

Inspired by the increasing number of emerging, undertheorized, and empirically understudied education policy developments in the new millennium, GEP scholars advocate for a re-reading of education policy as a research object (cf. Simons, Olssen, & Peters, 2009a, 2009b). One prominent approach to such a re-reading as part of GEP research examines complex global relations of state and non-state actors in network-like formations, and the effects of those formations on domestic education policy (cf. Ball et al., 2017). Conclusions drawn from applications of this approach for researching GEP often stress the increasing agency inscribed in such networks themselves, hypothetically leveling out power differences between state and non-state actors, with the state potentially losing its historical position as a primus inter pares for governing education. In this chapter, I challenge the belief that the state is becoming less relevant to the dynamics and effects of GEP by arguing that the state is rather changing its roles while remaining central, which makes it imperative to understand the shifting role of the state in new, emerging policy settings.

From this analytical perspective, the processes emphasized in GEI research highlighted in the introduction and conclusion of this volume as, for instance, *economization*, *commodification*, and *financialization* of education as outcomes of a growing business *with* education do not occur in dissociation, but are rather prompted by state finance- and competitiveness-driven reforms (see also: Jessop, 2017; Peters & Besley, 2015; Schwartzman, 2013; Spring, 2015; van der Zwan, 2014). I depart from the observation that the formation of a "globalized economic sector"

in education in which corporations, foundations, and networks merge and interact is premised on the changing role of the state as "a key institution in the making, maintenance and modification of industry sectors" (Verger et al., 2016, p. 13). Studying the changing role of the state in education commands more attention to the potentially global dynamics and processes enabling the GEI to flourish, and of which the state may be the genuine enabler/driver.

I will discuss the emergence of International Education Hubs (IEHs) as an example of the changing role of the state in education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and deliberate on some of its potentially far-reaching implications for higher education policy. To do so I examine a key policy document for comprehending the UAE as an IEH, *Vision 2021*. As part of a large-scale politico-economic project, the organization of higher education in the UAE contemporarily becomes part of global interconnections of competition, cooperation, and conflict. From the perspective of International and Comparative Education, this phenomenon illustrates the increasing complexity of education policy, which may produce unforeseen, disruptive effects through the interplay between the "global" and "local." In the context of GEP research, IEHs provide an opportunity to study the intricate relations that constitute global discursive policy spaces. Arguably, changing relationships of higher education to society, state, and the (knowledge-based) economy generate far-reaching consequences, with profound implications for higher education policy and governance.

Against this backdrop, I will first elaborate on conceptual considerations for researching the changing role of the state in education by discussing the interplay of ideational and material aspects for analyzing education policy. I will then describe *Vision 2021* and review this policy by applying the conceptual considerations elaborated, illuminating a conception of the role of the state as a power connector for achieving a competitive advantage as an IEH. I conclude with some thoughts for further investigation as part of a continuing research project intended for contributing to ongoing dialogues for researching the GEI.

Researching the Role of the State in the Global Education Industry: Conceptual Considerations

Changing contextual conditions for policy making in education have recently led to the emergence of GEP research as an analytical tool for understanding education policy in these new settings. In this section, I discuss GEP as an analytical lens for analyzing education policy in connection with changing contextual conditions, and elaborate the conceptual lenses for a sharpening of the categories used to explore it.

GEP sets out to address three different but intertwined analytical dimensions in investigating education policy as a practice in times of global interconnection: (1) contents and agendas; (2) institutional frameworks; (3) processes of coordinating national education systems with their institutions, practices, and effects.[1]

By extending the analytical perspective to account for global interconnections within local spaces, intricate social, economic, and cultural interdependencies can be discussed concerning their relevance to education systems through gradually differently formalized interactions between state and supranational levels. In particular, as an emerging research approach, current analyses in GEP research focus predominantly on discourses, agendas, and not least actors (inter-, trans-, and supranational) with global reach (cf. Mundy et al., 2016).

This particular analytical lens for examining education policy has merit because it addresses the object of study as being increasingly "shaped by social actors in disparate locations who exert incongruent amounts of influence over the design, implementation, and evaluation of policy" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, pp. 1–2). Contemporary social science has more recently focused on topological rather than geographical conceptions and understandings of space to deal with the relationships of processes and developments in "disparate locations" that exert influence on local phenomena. For instance, just as a subway map ignores actual distances to create a schematic map of linked locations on a network, the increasing datafication of the social world provides the necessary information and data that can be linked to present the image of a reality that exists only in terms of the transmission of knowledge and information—

the creation of a rather topological instead of geographical mapping of the world. *In relation*, seemingly every aspect of our social world can be made "comparable," which, in education, has perhaps become most prominent in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results relating student performance across the world. An analytical understanding of policy as a sociocultural practice is premised on relational conceptions of space, scale, and time (cf. Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008; or more recently Robertson, 2018), wherein states act in a particular mode—or take on a changing role—by governing through relating.

States may arguably always have defined their purpose and justified their existence by achieving success in their territory in relation to other locales or groups, but now increasingly so by reforming education, which is comprehended as an extra-economic factor to achieve competitiveness in the global economy (cf. Jessop, Fairclough, & Wodak, 2008). Debates in the 1990s about the withering of the nation state in light of dichotomous theoretical frameworks such as "the national vs. the international" (Rhodes, 1994; Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992) conceptualized the state as a once vital "power container" whose influence was diminishing, and in particular was limited by its territorial reach (Bekke, Kickert, & Kooiman, 1995). However, more recent state-theoretical research shed new light on contemporary state formations that (analytically) function as the so-called power connectors—social entities managing global relations to provide optimal conditions for businesses and other entities to succeed in the global economy. As connectors rather than containers, states skip the lengthy process of developing entities locally, and may, for instance, instead attract outsiders whose skills and talent are currently valued in relentlessly changing environments (cf. Jessop, 2016). Through such ingenious interplays of public and private spheres, governments relativize their geographical position and developmental stage in the world by extending their opportunity structures (cf. Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015) throughout different combinations of territories, places, scales, and networks in strategically relational conceptions of space (cf. Jessop, 2016; Jessop et al., 2008; Jones & Jessop, 2010). Viewing contemporary state formations in these terms analytically enables us to see them as power connectors competing to combine their opportunity structures to achieve global reach and competitiveness, increasingly often pursuing

economic growth and competitive advantages by reforming education. In the next section, I will discuss one example of this.

International Education Hubs as a Social Phenomenon

A paradigmatic example of the effects of states as power connectors in education may be seen in policies pursuing the creation of the so-called IEHs. Several states, predominantly located in East Asia and the Middle East, currently use this label to market themselves as international destinations for learning. Analytically, IEHs are arguably a particular power-connector formation of states pursuing structural competitiveness in connection to their always-individual understandings of what knowledge-based economies are. In the growing body of literature about IEHs as a still relatively new social phenomenon, the vast amount of scientific inquiries too often takes the phenomenon as face value presented in strategy papers and mission statements. Often void of analytical lenses for critically engaging with existing policies, most research on the topic misses to study the phenomenon's potential implications. IEHs are to date mainly categorized in several different ways (for instance, as student, talent, or knowledge/innovation hubs, or also "acropolises" and "archipelagos"; cf. Knight, 2014; Lane & Kinser, 2011), distinguishing what is and what is not a hub, and is investigated as a new best practice model for governing and internationalizing higher education. The implications of the eminent growing business in and *with* education in IEHs, or the changing role of the state in education, are, however, only seldom addressed, and even less researched.

I argue that IEHs as a social phenomenon surfacing in diverse parts of the world provide vital opportunities for investigating the indicated changing role of the state in relation to emerging GEI research, in which states aim to connect global networks of, for instance, finance, manufacturing, research, and education within their territory as a hub. The term hub implies an understanding of the world as being composed of networks. Again, this view is premised on a topological understanding of relationships in the social world elucidated above. Unlike mere nodes on a network, hubs occupy a central position enabling them to be part of

several networks simultaneously which they connect, making them more resilient and somewhat more competitive (on this topic, see, for instance, Barabási, 2003, 2014). Prominent education hub strategies position the state as a regional or global magnet for talent, academic excellence, and high-skilled labor, by balancing supply and demand of human capital. In this chapter, I regard IEHs as governmental politico-economic projects aiming at the transformation of selected territories into economically competitive and socially progressive areas by means of reforming education, in particular higher education. Here, the state paradigmatically acts as "a key institution in the making, maintenance and modification of industry sectors" (Verger et al., 2016, p. 13) through collaboration with global players offering expertise, experience, and other diverse factors for success that position such players as valuable, powerfully networked collaborators for the state, thus promising an invaluable competitive advantage.

The transformation of selected territories into economically competitive and socially progressive areas by means of reforming (higher) education involves material aspects, such as finance for the construction of schools and universities, as well as the creation of metrics, league tables, and rankings. However, what often remains disregarded in scholarly work on such reform processes are those practices of power accompanying and conditioning such material aspects. Ideational aspects are therefore co-constitutive to material ones. In her book about the intricate, often veiled relationships between infrastructure and power by investigating economic zones, broadband networks, and quality standards that Keller Easterling (2016) coins as *Extrastatecraft*, she emphasizes that:

> active forms [of infrastructure and power] are also social or narrative forms, and the designer can enhance the spatial consequences […] with the non-spatial stories that accompany it. Just as the US suburban house was popularized in part through narratives about family and patriotism, a persuasion or ideology attached to a technology may deliver it to a ready audience or a powerful political machine. (ibid., p. 217)

Researching a changing role of the state in IEHs therefore involves exploring how the social phenomena coined IEHs are produced through, for

instance, stories being told, generating processes of sense- and meaning-making for interpreting as well as shaping the world.

For such an analytical approach to researching education policy as a sociocultural practice in which material and ideational aspects are comprehended co-constitutively, the theoretical approach *Cultural Political Economy* (CPE) offers some unique features. From a CPE perspective, education policy is an activity that is culturally produced by political actors, market participants, and society at large, although governments usually take on the role of coordination. The so-called cultural turn in political economy is particularly relevant here as it opens the possibility to account for the powerful effects of ideas and concepts (as ideational aspects) in addition to material aspects (such as laws, trade agreements, or money). Sum and Jessop (2013) call the attribution of active power to ideational aspects of sense and meaning "semiosis," while they term their reflection about different forms of material-causality "structuration." Both semiosis and structuration are co-constitutive and equally relevant for analysis when acknowledging that people need to reduce the complexity of their environment to understand it. This process is accomplished through selective attributions of meaning that structure suitable, complexity-reduced environments through different "selectivities." These selectivities, which Sum and Jessop regard as discursive, agential, strategic, and technological, are mutually interdependent with semiosis and structuration. While semiosis and structuration condition selectivities, the selectivities, in turn, also condition semiosis and structuration in an ongoing, circular, emergent, and always dynamic process. The subjectivity of this process gives special recognition to the integration of ideational aspects into politico-economic analyses by conceiving them as co-constitutive with material aspects. Sum and Jessop address these mental processes as ubiquitous in our thinking, pointing to the relevance of dealing with complexity and cultural aspects in analyses of education policy.

Together semiosis, structuration, and selectivities create social, economic, and political imaginaries which reciprocally influence the aspects above (cf. Sum & Jessop, 2013). Social imaginaries are discursive-semiotic spaces of complexity reduction created in discourses, which consciously attribute particular importance to specific social, material, and temporal-geographical scopes for action. For instance, a political imaginary guiding

organization might frame a "global education sector," just as new ideas about the way science influences business in a knowledge-based economy might create an economic imaginary impacting the organization of higher education. Although social imaginaries are mainly produced in discourses, they constitute theoretical and political frameworks for objectives, which thus become action-guiding outside such discourses as they are translated into somewhat formalized social structures such as policies. If a social imaginary is retained as a mechanism of "selection," "variation," and "retention" in CPE, it usually guides future political decisions; its retention, in turn, is also already influenced by prior decisions. Therefore, imaginaries are both path-dependent and path-shaping: though they are discursive-semiotic spaces created in discourses, their retention impacts physical spaces. Against this background, a CPE perspective provides a kind of circulatory lens for researching processes of understanding and shaping the world as inter-related, for which the co-constitutiveness of material and ideational aspects is key.

Envisioning the United Arab Emirates as a Global Hub for Business Through Knowledge and Innovation: The Making of an International Education Hub

The elaborated conceptual framework provides one possibility for exploring the changing role of the state related to GEI research and may arguably be a contribution to the field for theorizing (global) education policy. From a CPE perspective, an increasing body of work focuses on the above explained material aspects of education hubs (cf. Fox & Al Shamisi, 2014; Mok & Bodycott, 2014; Sidhu, Ho, & Yeoh, 2014), and only a smaller portion on the narratives and relevance of ideational aspects. Due to the focus and scope of this chapter, I will only focus on the UAE as one prominent education hub by engaging with Vision 2021, launched in 2010, a central policy in its creation as a hub on which the elaborated framework will be applied in the next section. While some scholars would argue there is no underlying strategy for transforming the UAE into an

IEH, I will review the publicly available policy with a focus on laying this intention open. By using a discursive approach for investigating the policy (cf. Fairclough, 1992; Wodak, 2004; Wodak & Fairclough, 1997), it will provide insight into selective understandings of the world through sense- and meaning-making ("semiosis" and "selectivities"), revealing the changing role of the state in governing education as a power connector in the GEI.

Vision 2021 has a traditional structure of reform strategies. The policy identifies certain developments as problematic and constructs specific aspects as issues before offering modifications to existing programs and the launch of additional initiatives for improvement of the current situation, as well as the achievement of overall goals (cf. Jungmann & Besio, 2018). The policy is divided into four themes beginning with a preface recounting the UAE's remarkable progress in recent decades, and the historical roots of this success. Its purpose is to unfold a vision for the UAE's Golden Jubilee in 2021, the achievement of which is described as potentially difficult due to challenges regarding the fabric of society, economic competitiveness, national identity, as well as "health, education, environment and well being." The policy's relevance is emphasized by stating that an "ambitious nation like ours cannot achieve its goals by relying on its past achievements. We must work harder, be more innovative, more organised, and more vigilant in examining the trends and challenges that will face us." Hence, the preface promises a problem analysis, but only provides this in one of the four themes—United in Knowledge—which I will cover in more detail later. As an overall goal of the policy, the preface describes the method of the policy as proactive for "bequeath[ing] to future generations a legacy worthy of the pioneers who founded our great nation, a legacy defined by prosperity, security, stability, and a life filled with dignity and respect." The overall slogan of the policy reflects this goal by stating "United in Ambition and Determination."

The following four themes of the policy share the same structure: First, a vision summary composed of a slogan and a short description. Second, a subdivision of leitmotifs with short descriptions, followed by vision statements elaborating the original hopes for the year 2021. The first theme is "United in Ambition and Responsibility," accompanied by the slogan, "An ambitious and confident nation grounded in its heritage."

Here, the focus is on the state and the society, while its leitmotifs cover the individual (confident and socially responsible Emiratis), the family (cohesive and prosperous families), the community (strong and active communities), and culture (vibrant culture) as a sort of fabric uniting individuals and families as a nation. Although a problem analysis is promised in the preface, it is interesting that this aspect is missing—not only in the first, but also in the following themes. What the themes do is describe in detail how the future is envisioned, such as "Ambitious and responsible Emiratis will successfully carve out their future, actively engaging in an evolving socio-economic environment, and drawing on their strong families and communities, moderate Islamic values, and deep-rooted heritage to build a vibrant and well-knit society" in theme one. In this aspect, the structure of the policy deviates from how it is outlined in its preface.

The second theme is "United in Destiny," whose slogan is "A strong union bonded by a common destiny." This theme focuses on the relationship between the seven Emirates and the national government, aiming for success through unity and cooperation. The leitmotifs address the centrality of the seven Emirates to the federation (upholding the legacy of the nation's Founding Fathers), the role of the national government (safe and secure nation), as well as their interrelationships for achieving unity while remaining open to the world (enhanced international standing). The third leitmotif emphasizes that the "UAE will enhance its pivotal role as a regional business hub whose essential infrastructure and institutions provide a gateway linking our neighbourhood to the world, serving as a role model for the region." It promises to "not slow the pace of its improvement. In the economic and government sphere, our nation will build on sectors of excellence to export its model abroad, while constantly evolving to create new competitive advantages." What comes to the fore is a competition-state as a connecting entity—a gateway to the world and regional business hub—that is being envisioned as one united nation composed of seven Emirates achieving this goal through cooperation.

The third theme, "United in Knowledge" with the slogan "A Competitive Economy Driven by Knowledgeable and Innovative Emiratis" is one that commands some deviation when describing it. The reason for this is that

the accompanying website for *Vision 2021* presents a basic form of problem analysis for this theme, although the website as such resembles the actual policy. As a sort of added problem definition to the policy, one is informed that the "global economy will witness significant economic changes in the coming years and the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda aims for the UAE to be at its heart."[2] This selective understanding of the world through sense- and meaning-making, leading to the perception of significant economic changes needing to be anticipated, explains better the slogan of this third theme as the modification/initiative of the policy for existing programs to achieve the overall vision. Hence, the theme is summarized by envisioning a "diversified and flexible knowledge-based economy [that] will be powered by skilled Emiratis and strengthened by world-class talent to ensure long-term prosperity for the UAE."

The focus of this theme complements the second one, outlining how the economy of the global business hub is envisioned for the year 2021. Its three leitmotifs emphasize the economy's different facets. The first leitmotif entitled "Harness the full potential of National human capital" states that "Knowledgeable and Innovative Emiratis" provide indispensable "human capital" as a somewhat solid foundation for a "knowledge-based economy" by "attracting and retaining the best talent." The next leitmotif, "Sustainable and Diversified Economy," describes a "knowledge-based economy" as diversified and expanded to "new strategic sectors to channel our energies into industries and services where we can build a long-term competitive advantage." As a connecting entity and business hub, the UAE "will forge ever stronger international partnerships and capitalize on them to boost trade and commerce." Leitmotif three, "Knowledge-Based and Highly Productive Economy," complements the previous by stating that "[i]nnovation, research, science and technology will form the pillars of a knowledge-based, highly productive and competitive economy, driven by entrepreneurs in a business-friendly environment where public and private sectors form effective partnerships." The discussed third theme can be seen as the cornerstone of *Vision 2021*, indicating that its achievement will be accomplished by investing in "science, technology, research and development throughout the fabric of the UAE economy." This is particularly interesting from the analytical perspective of GEI research because the policy here, as in other passages,

reiterates the necessity of entrepreneurial and business-driven environments in partnership with private sectors. Although higher education is not directly addressed, it is implied as a guarantor for achieving *Vision 2021* when speaking of innovative and knowledgeable Emiratis, research, and science.

The slogan of theme four, "United in Prosperity," is "A nurturing and sustainable environment for quality living." The focus of this theme is divided into four dimensions of living that interdependently bring about the "knowledgeable and innovative Emiratis" envisioned in theme three. The leitmotifs address medical care ("long and healthy lives"), education ("first-rate"), access through infrastructure ("well-rounded lifestyles"), and the environment ("well-preserved natural"). The leitmotifs covering first-rate education and well-rounded lifestyles are particularly important with regard to the focus of this chapter: The first presents a vision of "well-rounded individuals [who] enhance their educational attainment, and achieve their true potential, contributing positively to society." The implied focus is again human capital: "The UAE will successfully encourage Emiratis to maximise their potential by remaining in school and reaching higher levels of education. […] [U]niversity enrolment will rise, and more Emiratis will climb higher up the ladder of learning into post-graduate education." The latter of the two leitmotifs outlines the policy's conception of the UAE as a global hub:

> An excellent standard of infrastructure and utilities will satisfy the fundamental needs of citizens and businesses while also boosting our nation's economic competitiveness as a leading global hub. As a symbol of mobility and interconnectivity, the UAE will reap the benefits of truly nationwide, user-friendly business and technical systems including transport and communication networks. High-quality utilities will deliver the reliable supplies of energy and water that we require.

The policy ends by stating "[a]nticipating the problems of tomorrow is the only reasonable way to preserve and enhance our way of life, acting with initiative in full awareness of our collective responsibility."

The Discursive Construction of an International Education Hub as a Competitive Advantage

This section will adopt the elaborated conceptual framework for reviewing the presented policy by using a discursive research approach. From the analytical lens of GEP research, a first insight when engaging with the policy is the particular composition of the visions and their leitmotifs presented. Though expressed with the aim of transforming the UAE locally, they are influenced by concepts circulating in globalizing policy discourses, such as the knowledge-based economy. Although the exact workings of the UAE's understanding of the knowledge-based economy are not described further, the solution to future economic change is. This involves increasing higher education attainment and provision and attracting global talent—key aspects of any of the many IEH definitions. Furthermore, investment in research on subject areas directly contributing to defined goals and visions is seen as crucial. Among these are improvement of physical infrastructure—such as transport and communication—throughout the UAE, as well as fostering business and innovation. This to some extent also explains the multiplication and dominance of such programs in UAE university portfolios.

The policy's preface presents a particular understanding of the world, the complexity of which—from a CPE perspective—has been reduced through semiosis and structuration. The world is understood as posing specific challenges to the development of society, the economy, and national identity in the UAE. As for the individual, the challenges are to health, education, environment, and well-being. Derived from such challenges is the need for proactive change to secure the future success of the nation. The policy unfolds a social imaginary rooted in this selective understanding, creating a simplified version of the world with a central role for science, learning, and research, some core aspects of higher education, and their close coordination with the economy for a prosperous future. This is described as the knowledge-based economy, necessitating, as presented in theme three (United in Knowledge), leitmotif one, that more "Emiratis will enter higher education, where they will enrich their

minds with the skills that their nation needs to fuel its knowledge economy. Universities will listen closely to the needs of Emiratis and of their future employers, and will balance their teaching to the demands of the workplace."

The solution to the identified social and economic challenges is selectively assessed in connection with a selective understanding of the knowledge-based economy and its requirements. The question of how "to solve the diagnosed problems and to realize socially constructed objectives" is answered by the creation of a global hub (as a so-called *knowledge brand* in CPE research; cf. Sum & Jessop, 2013, p. 6). This social imaginary functions as the fabric binding and uniting the society and its government in their efforts to create the conditions necessary for success in the knowledge-based economy through the transformation of the UAE into a global hub. Although the hub is described as one for business and innovation, higher education implicitly appears in several sections of the policy, such as, for instance, theme three, leitmotifs one and three. Higher education is also implied as an extra-economic factor determining competitiveness by providing science, research, and opportunities for learning. The stunning growth in the number of higher education institutions in the UAE may serve as a material causality constituted by those ideational aspects, facilitated by the model of free zones to attract foreign institutions and improve national universities.

The semiotic-discursive space created by *Vision 2021* is, on the one hand, dependent on the UAE's legacy regarding trade and business. On the other hand—and perhaps of greater interest for researching the changing role of the state in education in relation to GEI research—is how the policy also shapes the path for future development. The changing role of the state—or, arguably, its changing mode for governing higher education—is perhaps best described by quoting directly from *Vision 2021* where it states that the "UAE will enhance its pivotal role as a regional business hub whose essential infrastructure and institutions provide a gateway linking our neighbourhood to the world, serving as a role model for the region." The state functions as a guarantor of success, a guardian in a time of complex change, and—as the themes "United in…" induce—a uniting and "power connecting" entity to link "the economic and government sphere, […] build[ing] on sectors of excellence to

export its model abroad, while constantly evolving to create new competitive advantages." Furthermore, as stated in theme three, leitmotif two, this IEH connects economic advantages by relating research and education to the economy, "forg[ing] ever stronger international partnerships," in order to "capitalize on them to boost trade and commerce." The powerful narrative, which unfolds throughout the policy relating it to globalizing discourses about economic and social challenges, presents the transformation of the UAE into a hub as the solution to those pressures and for achieving competitive advantages.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the changing role of the state by example of reviewing *Vision 2021* as a key policy for comprehending the UAE as an IEH. IEHs as governmental projects aiming at the transformation of selected territories into economically competitive and socially progressive areas by means of reforming education, in particular higher education, are regarded as paradigmatic examples of competition-states, analytically viewed as power connectors in connection to theorizing space as strategically relational. While IEHs have been illuminated as a social phenomenon in relation to the growing body of literature, conceptual considerations for one possible approach to researching a changing role of the state were elaborated and applied to *Vision 2021*. By reviewing this policy with a discursive research approach and the presented conceptual framework, the discursive construction of the state as a global hub for achieving competitive advantages in the knowledge-based economy has been discussed, and the role of higher education for achieving those visions has been stressed. The scope and focus of this chapter, however, only allow for a brief discussion of a changing role of the state in education, for the further study of which the method of comparison and the conception of GEP as a sociocultural practice may be particularly insightful.

In connection to the topic of this edited volume, the deliberations above contribute to GEI research by elucidating IEHs as large-scale politico-economic projects through which the organization of higher education becomes part of global competition, cooperation, and conflict.

In those new policy settings, it is the state that creates business-driven environments in higher education enabling a "global economic sector" in education to flourish. Attempts to research those changes in GEP research often abstain from theory for guiding scientific inquiry within policy studies in education. However, the expressed need of re-reading education policies due to ongoing, complex change (cf. Simons et al., 2009a, 2009b) may highly profit from this, for the reason of which CPE has been discussed as a vital theoretical approach that may open up new vistas for the study of GEP. Using this approach, I was able to highlight that—although often approached as diminishing in power in relation to global players—at least discursively, the state in the investigated IEH contrarily envisions its role as a primus inter pares that foresees and directs change processes. In education, this changing role of the state arguably challenges the state's monopoly on sponsoring/providing mass education, while the state in turn seeks to strengthen the monopoly on its regulation as a power connector. The implications of this changing mode of governing (higher) education, however, remain a seldom studied but imperative area to the study of contemporary challenges in education.

The discussion above aims at contributing to international and comparative education by highlighting the growing complexity of researching education policy, and also by discussing some disruptive effects through interplays of global influences and local visions. While I provide evidence for the changing relationship between society, the state, and the economy in the context of higher education policy in the UAE, further research is necessary to better understand the role of the state and the implications of its change in relation to GEI research. Here, the gray literature often disregarded by researchers may provide interesting insights into the business-driven environments of IEHs. For instance, the impact of market research produced by local players should be taken seriously due to the expertise that the growing number of specialists in higher education as a business has, and the weight their assessments play in the strategies of universities setting up shop. With regard to emergent comparative research designs, capturing their views might be crucial for tapping research potential when researching IEHs.

In concluding, researching the implications of IEHs for higher education policy and governance will benefit highly from comparison as a

method of knowledge generation, which in turn also entails epistemological, ontological, and conceptual realignments of our analytical tools. In any case, this will surely offer new ways of seeing both challenges and achievements, enabling us to appraise IEHs as an analytical concept for analysis *of* instead of just *for* policy.

Notes

1. For instance, find an informative discussion about those three traditional analytical dimensions of policy (*policy*, *polity*, and *politics*) in Jessop, 2016, p. 17.
2. The website is publicly accessible via http://www.vision2021.ae, while the indicated problem analysis can be found via https://www.vision2021.ae/national-agenda-2021/list/economy-circle

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