CHAPTER 17

The Footballisation of European Higher Education: Different Fields, Similar Games?

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1 Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that at least since the 1980s, higher education around the world has been influenced by global economic and cultural

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forces. Consequently, higher education institutions themselves (and their constituent units) are increasingly global actors which extend their influence around the world (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). Marginson and Rhoades (2002) contend that globalisation processes in higher education are both under-studied and under-theorised, despite their pivotal role in setting national policy agendas (Cloete et al., 2006), shaping institutional strategies (Beerkens, 2008), and influencing the academic profession (Goastellec & Pekari, 2013).

Most studies of higher education systems are anchored in cross-national comparative studies, and explore the effects of global pressures on higher education systems (for example, de Boer et al., 2011; Fumasoli et al., 2014; Pinheiro & Antonowicz, 2015) rather than aiming to understand the logics of global processes per se. Furthermore, studies on global changes in higher education also seem slightly hermetic, and seldom make reference to developments in other organisational fields (Berg & Pinheiro, 2016; Carvalho & Santiago, 2016).

In this chapter, we draw upon the institutional field perspective (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008) which aims to understand organisations and policies within a field as being embedded in complex networks of power relations, and also in hierarchical positions competing for legitimacy and resources (Naidoo, 2004). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1991), an organisational field relates to the "sets of organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life; key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar services or products" (pp. 64–65).

Globalisation, pertaining to "a multi-dimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges, while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant" (Steger, 2003, as cited in Maringe & Foskett, 2012, p. 24), entails the influence of similar hegemonic concepts and ideas on geographically distant and distinct organisational fields (Drori et al., 2006). This is clearly the case with football (soccer in the United States) and higher education in the European context. In the past two decades or so, both fields have been shaped by prevalent economic

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forces of global competition, with football clubs and universities operating in fiercer competitive (market-based and market-like) environments. As organisations, football clubs and universities are deeply embedded in the nation-state, although their linkages are transnational in nature. Stated differently, the organisational fields of European football and higher education emerged within deeply embedded local/national contexts, with weak links to the transnational environment (Clark, 1983). With globalising processes gradually coming to the fore (Robertson, 1992), however, both fields have become subject to growing isomorphic or convergence pressures. In turn, these pressures have helped rewrite the rules of the game. In this chapter, we explore a rather simple question: What can be learned by comparing the current dynamics of the fields of European football and European higher education? In so doing, our aims are to contribute to ongoing debates on the future nature of European higher education systems, and to provide new critical insights by resorting to a comparative cross-sectoral analysis of key developments in these fields.

The chapter begins by presenting the key features of a phenomenon which we coin 'footballisation'. It then describes the nature and evolution of football and higher education as organisational fields. The chapter continues by discussing whether or not the observed patterns will necessarily result in convergence between the two fields. Finally, it revisits the key field-level outcomes which result from the footballisation of higher education.

2 Footballisation

Studies focusing on comparative developments in the organisational fields of football and higher education are scarce (See Tight [2000] as an exception.). This is not surprising, because the two sectors and their respective players or organisational actors are rather distinct and historically different. European universities first emerged in the Middle Ages, and their shape and form have evolved over the years in light of political, cultural, and economic developments (de Ridder-Symoens & Rüegg, 2003). Despite this evolution, their structures, functions, and characteristics have remained relatively stable (Rüegg, 2004), attesting to their overall resilience as social institutions (Pinheiro & Young, 2017) which serve the public good, and in close relation to the church and the nation-state. It was not until quite recently that the neoliberal ideas of competition, and then increased globalisation, emerged to deeply affect

the nature of universities, as described by Marginson (2016a, b). One way in which higher universities have responded to global forces and dynamics is by resorting to internationalisation strategies, by fostering the flows of students and staff, for example, and establishing strategic alliances, partnerships, and new business models which are centred on an entrepreneurial ethos (Maringe & Foskett, 2012). Although internationalisation has been a key feature of universities historically, the globalisation to which we refer here is essentially different, pertaining instead to the influence of hegemonic ideas, and to the establishment of a global market for higher education services, students, and staff. By contrast, football clubs and leagues first emerged during the latter half of the nineteenth century, when professional and semi-professional local and national leagues were created alongside national football associations. In the last decades, the marketisation and globalisation of football have both been taken to new levels, challenging local and national links, with some leading clubs now operating as international top brands available in the market.

In the context of this chapter, footballisation refers to the prevalence of global market forces in the governance and steering of systems, institutions, and actors across a given organisational field, with consequences on how the field is structured, and how organisations which are present in the field relate to one another. Regarding its outcomes, footballisation affects field-level dynamics in the following respects:

- Differentiation: This is the extent to which actors or players within the field adopt specific structures, functions, and values, to make them distinct from their direct competitors. In the case of higher education, this process is often manifested in institutional profiles, which are voluntarily adopted or prescribed by law, and which are reflected in distinct missions or functions (research intensive, vocational, or locally embedded, for example). This process is commonly associated with the notion of horizontal differentiation within national higher education systems (Van Vught, 2009).
- Structuration: This is the extent to which hierarchies among organisations within a given field emerge, reflecting their dominant market positions and enhanced statuses (command of resources, prestige, and other tangible and intangible aspects, for example, which engender competitive advantage). In higher education, this process is associated with vertical differentiation (Van Vught, 2009).

- Fragmentation: This is the degree to which the organisational field as a whole becomes structurally decoupled into multiple loosely tied sub-fields which are composed of smaller sets of organisations with similar goals and characteristics.

As for its empirical manifestations, footballisation encompasses four interrelated dimensions, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Dimensions of Footballisation

Dimension	*Primary aim*	*Football*	*Higher education*
Physical presence	Loyalty and recruitment of local/global talents	Main stadium vs. youth academies or satellite clubs	Main campuses vs. branched (domestic) or offshore campuses (international)
Accreditation mechanisms: formal and informal	Field legitimisation	Club rankings (financial, achievements, etc.)	Rankings and club memberships/alliances
Profiling and branding	Market recognition	Own TV channels, overseas fan clubs, merchandising, etc.	Sponsorships, merchandising, strategies, etc.
Managerialism (De-contextualisation/professionalisation of leadership)	Performance management	Star coaches (many of whom never played the game) and progressive entrepreneurial capitalists—the 'new directors' (King, 1997)	Decline of collegial structures and the rise of professional management

3 The Evolving Nature of Football as an Organisational Field

As an organisational field, football is a recognised area of institutional life (Wilkesmann & Blutner, 2002). Since the mid-1980s, it has undergone deep structural changes which were largely driven by rapid marketisation in the form of the freedoms of movement, trade, and communications, resulting in a massive global business (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2016). In 2017, the five major European football leagues alone generated annual revenues of around €15 billion (Statistica, 2017). Such globalising processes have exerted a growing influence on the structure of European football (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007).

The reconfiguration of the field started in the late 1980s, followed by a somewhat symbolic change triggered by the establishment of the UEFA Champions League in 1992. The Champions League continued a long history of European club football competition known as the European Champion Clubs' Cup, which was established in 1955/1956, and in which only the champions of the national leagues participated. Although the European Champion Clubs' Cup was prestigious, the competition had a limited impact on the way football as a field was organised. European football rested upon largely autonomous national leagues with their own long-standing traditions, structures, promotions, and relegation systems of (Heck et al., 2012).

Starting in the early 1990s, the structure of the competition began to move its locus from the national to the European level. The gradual de-nationalisation of club football created an opportunity for larger and more influential (richer) clubs to play more games (against other big clubs), regardless of their country of origin. Unlike in the past, European competition became important not only as a source of reputation, but also as a transnational business opportunity which could generate income from television rights, transnational advertisement, and global (offshore) merchandising. The de-nationalisation of European football provided a platform for the exponential expansion of its fan base, translated into massive financial revenues (Szymanski & Kuper, 2015). In 2014/2015 alone, the top 10 European clubs reported a total revenue of 1.16 trillion GBP, the equivalent of Australia's gross domestic product.

Football is one of the most globalised social phenomena (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007) and is often linked to the process of Europeanisation (Missiroli, 2002), referring to the increasing role of supra-national

regulations, and the power of European institutions in setting the rules of the game. However, global opportunities are only available to a few select clubs which promote themselves successfully at the transnational level. Predominant global contenders emanate from five major European leagues: the English Premier League, Spanish La Liga, Italian Serie A, German Bundesliga, and French Ligue 1. These clubs began to flourish by attracting a massive number of new overseas fans and followers, triggering the emergence of the so-called Big Five (Dima, 2015)—the most prestigious, most popular, and wealthiest national football leagues. Hobsbawm (2007) acknowledges that global forces disproportionally favour the Big Five by giving them endless opportunities to absorb resources worldwide. These global forces result in inevitable tensions, and identity conflicts among fans (Giulianotti, 2002), because the Big Five and their leading clubs colonise more peripheral parts of the football world (for example, Andrews, 2015; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2008).

The globalisation of European football has led to a radical restructuring of the field, with the Big Five becoming the field's epicentre, and consequently outplaying other national leagues (Kentrotis, 2016). Despite the fair play rhetoric of the UEFA, the establishment of the Champions League significantly increased the financial rewards for top clubs, thereby contributing to the institutionalisation of a new transnational league (Menary, 2016). A long pre-elimination structure was established, which narrowed the probability that clubs which maintain low levels of global popularity (emanating from provincial leagues) reach the group or final stage of competition. By doing so, the UEFA killed two birds with one stone: (1) maintaining the illusion of a competition of league champions, while (2) keeping unwelcome (unattractive to broadcasters) teams away from the real competition and the real money, which start at the group level. At the same time, the Champions League continues to strengthen its institutional identity on symbolic dimensions by establishing its own logo, flag, and anthem, which is ritualistically played before each game.

The global marketisation of football competition has transformed the traditional horizontal orientation of national leagues into a vertically oriented transnational and fragmented field of European football (Brand, Niemann, & Spitaler, 2013). Transnational competition opened almost endless business (advertising) opportunities in markets for global brands, which, in turn, fuelled top football clubs (from the central leagues) with massive cash flows. The resources which are available on the global scale

are being distributed highly asymmetrically, benefitting only the best football clubs, and resulting in growing inequalities (See Menary [2016], for example).

The method which is used to form the Champions League group stages is flawed because it lacks competitive balance. Consequently, the top-ranked teams remain in the highest seeding pool, which reinforces their status by providing these clubs with a better chance of qualifying for the knockout stages, and in turn more prize money and global exposure. For clubs from the Big Five, keeping the status quo in the Champions League is important because it mostly benefits them. This situation, however, strengthens existing inequalities, and widens the gap between élite clubs and the remaining clubs. In reality, and despite some occasional exceptions, only the biggest clubs win the Champions League, which helps extend their hegemonic power (field status and position) over the remaining clubs (Plumley & Flint, 2015).

This concentration of power and influence is clearly visible in the evolution of clubs' financial revenues over the last 20 years. In 1997, in the first edition of Deloitte's annual Money Football League report, which reviews the finances of most football clubs, Manchester United was ranked first with an annual income of £87.9 million. In the latest report (2019), RealMadrid reported an annual revenue of £644 million, followed by FC Barcelona with £592 million and Manchester United with £571 million. Over the given period, the top clubs increased their revenues, on average, eightfold, whereas the revenue of the entire Polish Ekstraklasa (18 clubs in total) was estimated to be £105 million. This demonstrates that leading European clubs are financially on a completely different level than the remaining clubs. Moreover, the current hierarchy which is composed of élite clubs, demonstrates a rather high-level stability. In the last two decades, the top 10 ranking saw the appearance of only two new names: Manchester City and Paris Saint Germain. Both clubs were able to join this rarefied group only because of takeovers by foreign billionaires who injected massive amounts of cash. As for their age, out of the top 20 clubs in 2019, all but two clubs—Paris Saint Germain which was founded in 1970, and AS Roma which was founded in 1927—were established in the period 1878–1905.

These developments have led to increased structuration and fragmentation along two interrelated dimensions. The first dimension refers to the prominent position of the Big Five. The prevailing, hegemonic position of the national leagues has been driven by their respective top football clubs

(those leading in the aforementioned Deloitte report) which reached a global status and outplayed their competitors. The clubs themselves, and the formation of an élite European group of teams, represent another tier of the field structuration and fragmentation (Antonowicz, Kossakowski, & Szlendak, 2015). In many respects, the rise in prominence and hegemony of the Champions League represents a restructuring of the field towards a transnational tier of élite clubs which compete in a league of their own. In short, marketisation resulted in both structuration and fragmentation at the levels of the national leagues and the clubs themselves. And given that the presence of, or access to, the Champions League is dependent on clubs' performance and positioning in the domestic leagues, the domestic and transnational fields are nested together (Hüther & Krücken, 2016), despite the fact that only the top performers at the domestic level have the opportunity to test their luck at the transnational level… in the millionaires' club.

4 Developments in the Higher Education Field

As an organisational field, higher education is currently deeply embedded both politically and structurally in local and national contexts (by funding systems and regulations, for example). Hazelkorn (2015, 2016) notes, however, that national higher education policy agendas try to adjust to geopolitical principles, such as globalisation and transnational competition, thereby resulting in local responses to global forces which affect the field as a whole (Pinheiro et al., 2015a, b). This has far-reaching implications, starting with the prevalence of world university rankings which reinforce convergence towards the research-intensive (world-class) university model (Ramirez et al., 2016). The effects of such global forces are mainly seen on the policy level and in the institutional environment which shape the higher education field (Huisman & Van Der Wende, 2004; Marginson & Van Der Wende, 2006). Although there is a policy process in which global values are translated or nationalised into policy agendas (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008), studies suggest that these agendas are increasingly converging in light of the discourses about excellence and the imperative to become world-class (Ramirez & Tiplic, 2014). And within the context of this discourse, a pivotal role is played by world university rankings.

Mainstream rankings normalise the Anglo-American science university model, forcing universities everywhere, regardless of their contexts,

to conform to that model, in order to fulfil its indicators, maximise competitive position, and secure the global status which they all desire (Marginson, 2016a, b). This leads to the emergence of a new ruling global caste of world-class universities whose superiority and global reputation are legitimised by global rankings, and are empowered by domestic policies which enact a reduction of diversity in organisational missions (horizontal differentiation) by focusing instead on vertical differentiation (See Pinheiro et al. [2016], for example.).

Enders (2015) points out that the emergence of world university rankings symbolises the entry of a new transnational actor which not only contributes with information, but also has a massive impact on the field through the definition of success and failure (Sauder, 2008). Rankings favour a particular entrepreneurial and research-intensive type of university, distributing symbolic capital in the field (Bourdieu, 1988) and leaving other competing organisational models in subordinate positions (Marginson & Van Der Wende, 2006). Rankings unintentionally make major contributions to the establishment and empowerment of a new, global organisational model of world-class universities which "travel widely and are easily inserted into new places and for new uses" (Espeland & Sauder, 2007, p. 36)… possibly rendering a new global university champions league. According to Mohrman et al. (2008), this emerging global model stands out because the mission of higher education transcends the boundaries of the nation-state—educating for a global perspective, and advancing the frontiers of knowledge worldwide.

These changes in the higher education field have triggered a strategic/political response in the European Union in the form of the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000), which signalled a rediscovery of higher education as a major driver of innovation and economic growth. Indeed, it articulated that "a new grand narrative of the role of education has emerged on a truly global level" (Enders, 2010, p. 209). Research, therefore, was legitimised as a utilitarian instrument of economic development, and it instigated a major shift in the European Union (Gornitzka, 2007), by locating higher education and research at the heart of Europe's economic growth and development plan. This policy shift to support higher education and research was not so much a political choice, but instead a response to the changing economic environment in which knowledge was used by the post-industrial economy as an instrument for

building a comparative advantage in the market. In doing so, the European Union joined a global university arms race (Enders, 2015; Pinheiro, 2015)

Grant competitions, for example, further translate into national policies which attempt to increase the ability that universities in a given country can compete in the transnational university arms race (Enders, 2015). Vertical stratification became one of the policy priorities (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010). And a wide range of political instruments was devised and deployed to attain this policy. But the end goal was the same—creating world-class universities (Hazelkorn, 2015; Salmi, 2009).

Such political measures which focused on select élite universities were undertaken first in the United Kingdom, and then later across continental Europe./Numerous 'excellence initiatives' were embedded within higher education policies in the Nordic countries (Geschwind & Pinheiro, 2017; Stensaker & Fumasoli, 2016), Central and Eastern Europe (Antonowicz et al., 2017), Germany (Kehm & Paasternack, 2009), France, and Austria (Resch, 2014). Many of these initiatives were built on the assumption that widely distributed funding, infrastructure, and staff would also benefit other universities, and would contribute to the sustainable development of the regions in which they were embedded. These initiatives, however, fail to create research capacity for the leading universities which require a high concentration of resources to create a critical mass and a strong research capacity, and in turn, compete in the global race for resources, talent, and prestige.

Another step which the European Commission undertook to address growing global challenges was to create the European Research Area. The central role of the European Research Area was given to the European Union's Research Framework Programmes (FP), which formally began in 1984 with only a small budget which is equivalent to €4 billion. Since 2006, however, the Framework Programmes have become serious policy instruments, with a budget of more than €50 billion. Taking into account the size of Europe, one might think that the funding amount is insignificantly disproportional to the needs to be addressed. But in addition to financial resources, the European Research Council also lends a significant level of prestige to host institutions, thereby contributing to their world-class university status.

The consequences of moving resources to the European level are revealed in distributive patterns of ERC grants, which are commonly

regarded as the most prestigious, lucrative, and, consequently, competitive sources of basic research funding in Europe. From a total of 4354 ERC grants, 2832 (or 65%) went to, or were hosted in, one of five major European countries (the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland). Two out of three ERC grants were hosted by universities in these five European countries. In short, for most European universities, ERC grants are nothing more than an illusion. Empirical data (ERC Executive Agency, 2015) show that the distribution of grants has created undisputed national winners. Not surprisingly, the winners are in rich and powerful countries of Western Europe. There is little doubt that introducing all-European competition under the EU Framework Programmes reinforces already existing inequalities among nation-states. It also contributes profoundly to further stratification, because those universities which are rich and academically excellent will continue to dominate. It would be expected that various political initiatives would lead to a concentration of resources in a few of the most economically advanced countries, and in flagship universities (or select research centres) within such countries (See Geschwind and Pinheiro [2017], for example.). And indeed, the more that resources are distributed on a transnational level through competitive mechanisms, the more asymmetrical their allocation.

Among the top fifty universities which signed grant agreements in the recent Framework Programmes 7, there is no single institution from the so-called 'new Europe', namely the countries which joined the EU in 2004 and later. Considering only the most prestigious ERC Advances Grants (2007–2013), from a total number of 1702 grants awarded, as many as 1145 (or 67%) went to universities in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. This process is likely to continue, as ERC Starting Grants follow roughly the same pattern—1473 from 2332 grants (or 63%) ended up in one of the aforementioned five European countries. Furthermore, a report published by the ERC Executive Agency (2015) found that 600 out of approximately 4000 universities have hosted ERC grantees, but as many as 1779 (or 41%) were awarded to the top thirty-one universities. This illustrates a great concentration of the most prestigious grants, which exacerbates the fragmentation of European higher education.

Even if this fragmentation is at odds with the long-established tradition of European higher education—equal but different national systems (Clark, 1983)—it is politically legitimised by the global university arms

race and the quest for world-class excellence. European universities are not only being overtaken by universities in the United States, but are also increasingly challenged by Asian universities, which, thanks to massive investments in select flagship universities, are climbing in the global university rankings (Mok, 2015). Universities in Singapore and Hong Kong might not have the long history and prestige of many European universities, but they are developing faster and have more financial resources. Advocates of the Framework Programmes, therefore, underline that the programme rewards the best European universities, by helping them become globally competitive. This was openly confirmed by Helga Nowotny, former president of the ERC, who stated that…

> [o]ne of the reasons for the research advantage of US universities is the concentration of research funding on less than one-tenth of degree-giving institutions […] In 2011, each week at least one ERC-supported project published an article in either Science or Nature. (Myklebust, 2012, paragraph 4, 10)

That being said, strategic research themes are widely acknowledged to be subject to negotiations, and to the lobbying efforts of countries/universities which have primarily benefited from the Framework Programmes (See House of Commons [2007], for example.). The Framework Programmes are not only major policy tools, but also political instruments; their shape, therefore, are negotiated between national governments, undoubtedly mostly those which are most powerful in the European Union. The European Research Area has evolved into a winner-take-all market which reflects much broader changes in modern society (Frank & Cook, 1996). It can also be observed, however, that some political measures are being taken in the opposite direction. The rules of the Framework Programmes are not entirely objective, but instead are instruments of political struggle between different countries. The five major European countries (and possibly more) in the Framework Programmes 7, for example, made the European Commission drastically reduce the maximum level of salaries to €8000 per year for full-time employees who work exclusively for a project. This is a major blow to universities from less-affluent and peripheral countries, because grant winners could previously 'top up' their low salaries through ERC grants (Kwiek & Antonowicz, 2013). This move undoubtedly favours rich countries in which scholars do not need to prioritise their activities with respect

to additional income. Offering low financial rewards for scholars not only drives them away from research to other activities, but also creates brain drain, because rich universities can offer much better working opportunities to potential grant winners.

Even if the amount of funding is not significant for big and affluent universities, and accounts only for a fraction of their budgets, other much more important benefits can be drawn from the Framework Programmes. First, the Mathew effect in science (Merton, 1968) works here by effectively producing a 'virtuous circle' (Kwiek, 2016). Grants provide an opportunity to conduct cutting-edge research, which leads to top publications which provide a massive comparative advantage in the global race for world-class university status. Second, international reputation provides many opportunities which cannot be obtained elsewhere. Because university rankings are based mainly on research performance (although measured in several ways), research-intensive universities become more attractive for overseas students who are seeking both a solid education and the credentials which are necessary to make their way through the rocky path of a professional career. A prominent position in rankings allows universities to develop a wide range of overseas business opportunities. Third, highflyers enjoy a privileged position in their own systems (Kwiek, 2018), which has far-reaching financial implications.

5 Is the Footballisation of Higher Education Inevitable?

As with modern football, the higher education field has been subject to turbo-capitalist rules (Luttwak, 1999) which result in deep structural fragmentation (Marginson, 2016a, b). Competition becomes both a ritualised myth and an ideological driving force for field developments, even though (as shown above) the outcome is highly predictable. Moreover, it envisages unleashed inequalities between nation-states/universities through competitive mechanisms which only reinforce historical differences in wealth, thereby leading to the emergence of the global caste of world-class/research-intensive universities (Mohrman et al., 2008).

The footballisation of higher education has several consequences for restructuring the field. The first and most profound consequence is the fragmentation of the field, which leads to the emancipation of a select élite group of universities which only extends its dominance. Global business opportunities for funding, status, and additional resources (both people

and infrastructure) through a variety of excellence initiatives significantly widen the gap between this chosen élite and the remaining universities. Transnational actors, such as the World Bank, the OECD, and the European Union, provide vital legitimacy for the new rules of the game, which concentrate the resources in flagship institutions, focus on specific types of research outcomes, and absorb third-party funding. The more the neoliberal principles become a dominant policy narrative in higher education, the more the so-called Matthew effect in science (Merton, 1968) turns into a more Darwinist form of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) which favours global leaders.

Traditional (ideal) competition, in Mertonian terms, refers to individual activities (competition among researchers). The new rules which are established in part by a global oligarchy which is composed of top universities, and in part by transnational and national policy-makers, encompass the establishment of dominant, globally competitive universities which are themselves active agents in carving out a new (niche-seeking) competitive landscape. This, in turn, creates a serious political challenge, as Szymanski (2006) notes, in which public authorities must decide…

> whether it is better to protect competition or competitors. Protection of competition means allowing firms to do what they see is in the best interests of their business, i.e. their customers, even if this causes their rivals to go bankrupt. Protection of competitors means ensuring that certain firms stay in business, regardless of whether the consumers would choose to buy the product in the absence of protection. (p. 207)

The question remains open on whether or not, and how far, higher education will follow the path of football. Convergent trends suggest further and stronger global fragmentation of the higher education field along multiple lines. First, an instrumental approach has become part and parcel of the governance and managerial regimes throughout manifold national systems across Europe (Maassen & Olsen, 2007). The 2000 Lisbon Strategy marked an important turning point, with universities becoming central to the European project (aimed at global competitiveness) and, as a result, an intrinsic part of the market economy (Pinheiro, 2015). The globalisation of policymaking (Moutsios, 2010) implies that the rather narrow economic perspective becomes a powerful hegemonic narrative, putting additional pressures on European and national politics

and policies. Such an approach fits the neoliberal agenda of powerful trans- and supra-national agents (the World Bank, the OECD, and the European Union, for example), which see the market as the only alternative to improving the efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability of higher education systems (Aghion et al., 2008).

Despite setbacks, the continuing Europeanisation of higher education policy (Amaral et al., 2010) will further legitimise the dominance of central countries, particularly in light of the strategic interest of their élite universities. Removing national borders from policymaking, and injecting competing mechanisms, will inevitably lead to the proliferation of the already mentioned Matthew effect in science (see Kwiek, 2016). For example, those awarded ERC junior grants will be in a privileged position to benefit from senior grants. Leading ERC grant host institutions will likely be able to attract top-performing researchers from less-affluent systems or less-prestigious universities, resulting in further structuration along the lines of vertical differentiation. In the global economy, we observe a growing concentration of capital which clearly resembles global football (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2016). But if current trends continue, we are likely to see a further concentration of human capital in a few leading European universities.

From the start, a competitive advantage was given to well-established research-intensive universities which are located in the most developed parts of the European Union and its associated countries. They have access to, and invest great resources in, flagship institutions/centres of excellence, in order to attract the best-performing researchers from around the globe, offering them attractive packages and future prospects. Realistically, there is neither a possibility that peripheral European countries (from Central and Eastern Europe, for example) will join the major European countries, nor is there a chance that universities from these countries will enter the top 100 in the major rankings. It is far more probable that, as is the case with football, the gap between winners and losers of transnational competition in higher education will continue to grow, further fragmenting the field both nationally and globally. The structuration of the field into self-selected clubs which are composed of like-minded universities (the Coimbra Group, the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, and the League of European Research Universities, for example) is a clear manifestation of this re-structuration along the lines of a co-opetition paradigm (Ritala, 2012)—cross-national strategic collaborations among universities in order to be able to compete

globally. Recent developments on the establishment of a network of European universities, initiated by French President Macron, have faced criticism by some Nordic countries because of the limited membership (Myklebust & O'Malley, 2018).

The footballisation of higher education is already having far-reaching consequences regarding the institutional landscape within national systems. The supranational pressures (by the European Union, for example) put on nation-states to join the global arms race, to select flagship universities, and/or to establish centres of excellence, are putting additional strains on the public purse. The implication is that governments ought to concentrate resources in select universities, which, in the long run, which is likely to contribute to further fragmentation of the field. Élite institutions are also increasing their pressure on national governments to participate in the global arms race. By doing so, they expect internal funding arrangements which are devised in ways which benefit the global players primarily. Élite universities will continue their support for a hierarchical order from which they clearly benefit.

The footballisation of higher education as a development scenario in the European higher education field would, in our view, seriously hamper the existing logic of a largely autonomous national system which operates according to national rules and regulations. It would stand at odds with the long-standing tradition of higher education in Europe by reflecting the growing political pressure to replace horizontal diversification with vertical diversification. Policy tensions are high and observable at both the national and the European levels. Unlike football, in which UEFA and FIFA are completely unaccountable organisations, and mainly driven by their own financial gains (Pielke, 2013), the European Union and national governments are democratic platforms with an ongoing political struggle among multiple actors. This means that if they so wish, they can effectively devise and implement mechanisms to mediate the effects which are brought about by market pressures to join the global arms race. There is little doubt that the footballisation of higher education is being legitimised by powerful agents of globalisation, among which a leading role is played by global rankings, and the transnational enterprises which facilitate the diffusion of rankings… and which, in turn, indirectly influence the rise of a global transnational hierarchy and field structuration.

The footballisation of higher education, however, has limitations or circumstances which might prevent further fragmentation and structuration in the higher education field. In Europe, most universities remain

publicly funded, so differences in personnel salaries are not that significant. Still, even this is changing under global entrepreneurial pressure. The continental model of the university with a national remuneration scheme is breaking down, and more universities in countries such as Finland and Portugal (Aarrevaara, 2012; Neave & Amaral, 2012) are operating as public entities under private law. Performance is becoming an element which significantly affects universities' funding structures, even in the case of Nordic countries where equity elements have been at the forefront of the policy agenda (Pinheiro et al., 2019).

There is little chance that such differences will appear in European higher education, which remains driven by the logic of the public good, despite the aforementioned changes. That being said, a slight misalignment exists between what is good for universities and what is good for society, as succinctly pointed out by Olsen (2007). World-class excellence does not always advance the agendas of social groups, at least not in the short term. The quest for a status of prestige among universities within the field is decoupled from social dynamics, such as the need to enhance equity and accessibility. Considerable differences in pay exist between various systems, universities, and/or academic and administrative positions (Goastellec & Pekari, 2013). But because of the public nature of higher education systems, they are unlikely to reach the gaps which are encountered in football. Top football players in the Big 5 earn around €10 million per year; players in the Polish league max out at around €400,000.

6 Concluding Remarks

The evidence in this chapter supports the notion that European higher education, as an organisational field, is currently experiencing what is termed here as 'footballisation'—namely the adoption of market-based structures and postures across the field. This process manifests itself at multiple levels of analysis, and results in three specific structural features or outcomes. First, with regard to (horizontal) differentiation, there has been a general isomorphic trend for convergence towards a unitary model of higher education centred on research-intensive universities at the expense of other models which cater to the needs of local students, labour markets, and other external stakeholders. Such contextualised models are no longer seen as competitive in the context of a global higher education landscape which is characterised by research excellence,

competitive external funding, and world-class rankings (Geschwind & Pinheiro, 2017). Recent studies suggest that horizontal differentiation within (rather than across) universities is on the rise (Antonowicz et al., 2018), partly as a result of the structural changes which emanate from forced or voluntary mergers which are aimed at creating larger and more competitive universities (Pinheiro et al., 2016).

Second, with regard to structuration, a new global hierarchy which reflects the hegemonic dominance, resources, and prestige of a small élite group of globally competitive universities have come to the fore, and have become instituted at the top of the pyramid (the global higher education field in the last two decades) (Hazelkorn, 2016). This tendency towards vertical differentiation at the global level has also led to increasing structuration at the domestic level, with a handful of players commanding the bulk of top publications and externally competitive research funding in their pursuit of excellence (Antonowicz et al., 2017; Ramirez & Tiplic, 2014).

Third, field fragmentation is now a distinctive feature of many European higher education systems. As is the case of football, élite domestic universities seem increasingly decoupled from domestic developments at the national level. Given their hegemonic dominance, their points of reference (benchmarking) are global rather than national, and consequently they compete for talented students and staff, and other scarce resources, on a global scale. That being said, as is the case with football clubs, their historical roots and regulatory arrangements remain determined domestically, most notably with regard to teaching and students, and less so with regard to research. Efforts towards establishing a European area for research and higher education, now with a new impetus with the European Universities Initiative, have exacerbated such convergence trends, resulting in further fragmentation at the domestic level. In this respect, processes such as European integration have accelerated fragmentation at the domestic level by, inter alia, allowing a new transnational sphere of reference (the European higher education field) to supersede that of the nation. Future studies in Europe and beyond ought to pay close attention to the structural effects (field level) which are brought about by the complex interplay between globalisation, internationalisation, marketisation, and professionalisation. Longitudinal studies are particularly relevant in this respect, because they would allow researchers to track change dynamics (or the lack thereof) over time.

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