Chapter 10
Policy Framing in Higher Education in Western Europe: (Some) Uses and (Many) Promises

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Abstract This chapter contributes to our understanding of the transformation sweeping the higher education sector in the last 50 years by examining how higher education policy has been framed and reframed since the 1970s in Western Europe. How policies are framed and reframed is important because it helps us make sense of higher education policy reforms around the world: the various models that drive it, the politics promoted, and the potential winners and losers resulting from framing and reframing. The literature review on framing and higher education policy in Western Europe shows that scholars examined three overlapping themes: the origin and evolution of European higher education policy cooperation (the 'European Story'), Europeanization ('When Europe Hits Home'), and the evolution of national higher education policy ('National Story'). To provide a more considered discussion of framing and higher education policies, we then examine the higher education policy frames, framing, and reframing at the European-level, in Germany, and in Norway. The conclusion reflects on the avenues in which the framing approach could be used to generate more interdisciplinary and comparative higher education research in the post-pandemic context.

Introduction

The higher education sector has been radically transformed in the last 50 years. From an area of concern for the select few who were privileged to access tertiary education, it is now at the heart of a global market that commands the attention of policy actors in states, international and regional organizations, universities,

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companies, as well as students and their families (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007; Teixeira et al., 2004). Many factors have contributed to this transformation, ranging from national and regional economic growth to familial and individual aspirations, and more. This chapter intends to contribute to our understanding of this transformation by examining how higher education policy has been framed and reframed since the 1970s in Western Europe. How policies are framed and reframed is important because it helps us make sense of higher education policy reforms around the world: the various models that drive it, the politics promoted, and the potential winners and losers resulting from framing and reframing.

To do so, this chapter proceeds as follows. We begin by presenting the analytical framework structuring the empirical analyses: identifying how we define frames, framing, and reframing in policymaking. This discussion enables us to show how the very act of framing or reframing activates a transversal consideration of possible policy action to take (see Chou, 2012 for a discussion of sectoral and lateral strategies). The emergence of this transversal consideration opens up new channels to achieve policy objectives (e.g., governance levels), which in turn may ultimately alter the fundamental power balance between policy actors involved. Next, we review how framing has featured in higher education studies on Western Europe. Specifically, we look at how 'framing' as an analytical device has been explicitly applied to investigating higher education policy reforms in Western Europe. The review shows that scholars apply the framing approach differently to examine three overlapping themes: the origin and evolution of European higher education cooperation ('European Story'), top-down Europeanization ('When Europe Hits Home'), and the evolution of national higher education policy ('National Story'). To provide a more considered discussion of framing and higher education policies, we then examine the higher education policy frames, framing, and reframing at the European-level, in Germany, and in Norway. We conclude by discussing the avenues in which the framing approach could be used to generate more interdisciplinary and comparative higher education research in the post-pandemic and new geopolitical contexts.

Frames, Framing, and Reframing

The framing literature is an established literature in multiple disciplines and research areas (see Benford & Snow, 2000; Cerna & Chou, 2014; van Hulst & Yanow, 2016). Scholars from diverse humanities and social science fields have all been fascinated by how this analytical approach could be used to describe, explain, and even predict individual and organizational behavior and outcomes (Benford & Snow, 2000; Daviter, 2007; Dudley & Richardson, 1999; Geddes & Guiraudon, 2004; van Hulst & Yanow, 2016; Morth, 2000). Indeed, what these studies have in common are their emphasis on the significance of 'framing dynamics in accounting for the final shape of policies, politics, and polities' (Cerna & Chou, 2014, p. 79). For our purposes, we focus on how the framing approach is used in the public policy field because it

directly offers insights into how and why policy reforms emerge and unfold. Following Rein and Schön (1991, p. 263), we define framing as 'a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality so as to provide guideposts for knowing, analysing, persuading, and adapting'.

Framing relies on 'an overriding evaluative or analytical criterion'—'frames'—that are informed by the institutional environment within which policy actors are based (Daviter, 2012, p. 1). The framing process 'does not take place in a political vacuum and venue selection is significant because it signals who has jurisdiction over access points to the agenda' (Cerna & Chou, 2014, p. 79). For Weiss (1989, p. 1170), 'frames are weapons of advocacy and consensus', as actors 'manipulate an issue's scope to better advance their positions' (Cerna & Chou, 2014, p. 79). For instance, Cerna and Chou (2014) showed how the different framing of two instruments for foreign talent recruitment affected the pace of policy adoption and substantive contents because negotiations took place in different venues and promoted distinct frames. For them, 'changes in venue affect frames and changes in frames facilitate changes in venues' (Cerna & Chou, 2014, p. 80; cf., Daviter, 2012; Guiraudon, 2000). Here, venue changes could be sectoral (from one policy sector to another) and between governance levels (e.g., from national to supranational, or national to local).

Frames are thus integral to the framing process, but what exactly are frames? Cerna and Chou (2014, p. 80) tell us that, in the main, scholars do not specify the general constitutive parts that make up a frame. Instead, scholars prefer to zoom in and focus on elaborating the frames specific to their cases (e.g., collective action frames, competition frames, market/defense frames, and so on). They argued that frames could be identified through 'an *associated discourse* conveying *problem-definition*, value-judgement or *vision*, and *policy solution*' (emphasis original, Cerna & Chou, 2014, p. 80). These elements invoke the four distinct functions that Entman (1993, p. 52) claims frames play: define the problems at hand, diagnose probable causes, put forth moral judgments, and recommend remedies to address problems identified. As an analytical approach, an emphasis on framing allows us to zoom in and out: from specific formulations employed to justify individual policies, to overarching historical justifications of a higher education governance system. While most studies applying the framing approach concentrate on the agenda-setting stage of the policy cycle, Cerna and Chou (2014, p. 80) argued for approaching framing as a sequential process of framing and reframing that can take place throughout the policy cycle. For them, 'it is in the *framing* and *reframing* of an issue that public policy outcomes are explained' (Cerna & Chou, 2014, p. 80). Framing and reframing are thus political processes that reveal power dynamics between the actors involved, as well as those excluded.

In the next section, we continue with a literature review of how studies of higher education policy in Western Europe have used framing as an analytical device to account for policy reforms, resistance, and failures. We concentrate on identifying the policy frames invoked in these processes, attending to the discourse behind problem definition, the vision promoted, and the policy solutions advanced.

A Literature Review of Framing Higher Education Policy in Western Europe

We used the Dimensions platform for the literature review and performed an 'abstract search' with the following keywords: higher education, policy, Europe, frame analysis. This initial search yielded 1462 publications (see Fig. 10.1). The main contributions came from the Education research category (610 publications), which included the research sub-categories Specialist Studies in Education, Education Systems, Curriculum and Pedagogy, and Other Education. The diverse contributions from different research categories tells us that scholars writing in

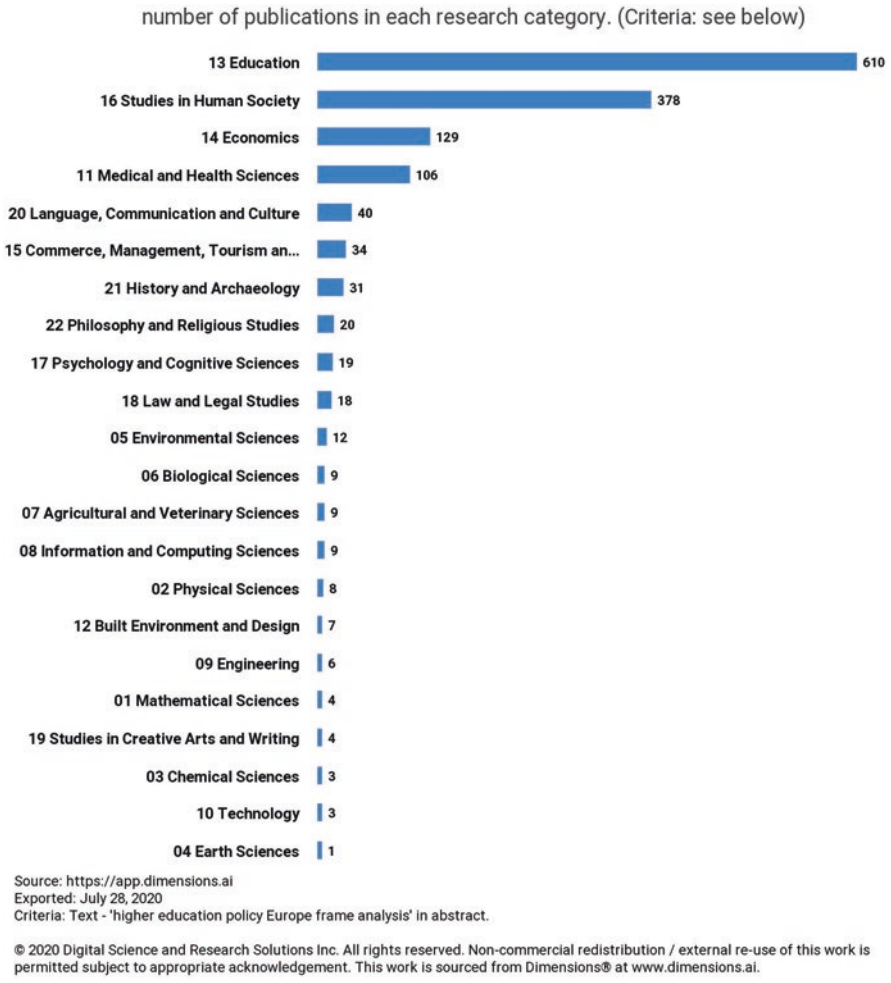

Fig. 10.1 Dimensions analysis – number of publications in each research category

other spaces—such as sociology, political science, and publication administration (all sub-categories under the research category Studies in Human Society)—are also interested in the framing of higher education policies in Western Europe. Applying the timeframe condition (1971–2019) to the 610 publications, we are left with 571 publications: 480 articles, 64 chapters, 13 conference proceedings, 8 monographs, 5 preprints, and 1 edited book. Looking at the distribution of publications over this timeframe (see Fig. 10.2), we find that the early 2000s marked the start of strong scholarly interests on framing and higher education policy in Western Europe—a period coinciding with the launch of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Next, we read through the titles and abstracts (where available) of 571 publications to identify publications that applied the framing approach to studying higher education policies in Western Europe. This step left us with less than 50 publications. An additional step of reading the publications reduced the total number to a handful, which we discuss in detail below. Before elaborating how the existing literature used the framing approach, it is equally important to explain which articles we excluded. Many publications were excluded because their usage of 'framing' or 'frames' were more colloquial than analytical; we also excluded duplicates. Another group of publications we excluded were book reviews and essays (e.g., Neumann, 2012) because we were interested in original research using the framing approach. We did not include articles that exclusively examined other regions or countries. For example, we excluded Eastern Europe and the significance of 'geographical' and 'political' frames (Kozma & Polonyi, 2004), reframing Australian higher education

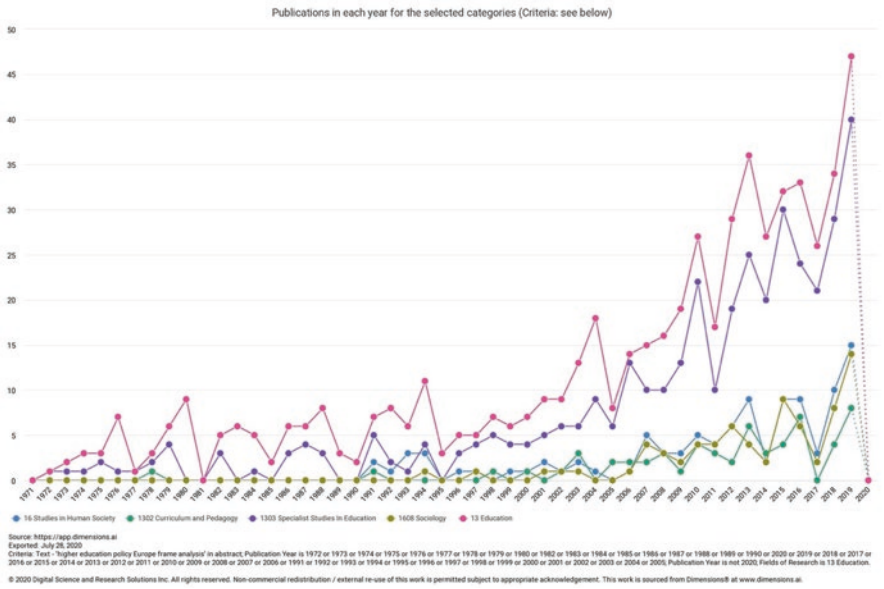

Fig. 10.2 Dimensions analysis – publications in each year for selected categories

policy (from social/cultural to marketization) (Pick, 2006), and framing Chilean teacher education (Fernández, 2018). Our literature review delineates the main attributes that higher education studies identify and how these attributes echo mainstream studies of European higher education policy cooperation.

We found that existing research could be organized as addressing three overlapping themes. We call the first theme the **'European Story'**. Under this theme, we find studies that are interested in the emergence and evolution of European higher education cooperation, and the external and internal factors steering developments from a framing viewpoint. For instance, elevating the framing approach to the level of ideational models, Zgaga (2009) examined how two visions of Europe—'Europe of the euro' and 'Europe of knowledge'—play out against four "archetypal models" of higher education: Napoleonic, Humboldtian, Newmanian, and Deweyan. The two policy frames that emerged in Zgaga's (2009) analysis emphasized distinct approaches towards a policy solution: a more utilitarian market-driven frame ('Europe of the euro'), and a more culturally-grounded and non-market frame ('Europe of knowledge') where knowledge generation and circulation is proposed as the way forward to strengthening modern Europe. Embedded within these two visions of Europe is the consistent problem European policymakers have been tasked to address for decades: How to sustain and improve Europe? While he noted that we 'are witness to the progressive instrumentalization of higher education' towards a neoliberal agenda, Zgaga (2009, p. 175) urged us to consider the full range of higher education's likely contribution to citizenship. His analysis reminds us that policy frames are rooted in interpretations of (grand) visions that steer actor behavior and thus a more comprehensive frame analysis should include these ideational models as reference points. In an analysis of academic research on higher education in Europe, Ramirez and Tiplic (2014, p. 439) found that the academic discourse mirrored this policy shift Zgaga identified: there is a 'growing emphasis on management, organization, and quality and less emphasis on student access to higher education, an earlier equity concern'.

Looking at the interaction between European-level and global developments, Erkkilä (2014) conceptualized global university rankings as a transnational policy discourse, and showed how it framed and reframed higher education in Europe as a 'European problem' needing to be solved. The overall problem definition is one that emphasized the lack of competitiveness of European higher education systems vis-à-vis those elsewhere, prominently the U.S. and the rising stars in Asia. The image promoted is one in which 'Europe' would be increasingly edged towards the very periphery of the global higher education landscape and hierarchy. In so doing, he analytically and empirically revealed the power of rankings familiar to many scholars working in higher education institutions around the world: as the policy frame through which problems within higher education institutions are identified, as well as the provider of 'ideational input for policy measures tackling the perceived problems' (Erkkilä, 2014, p. 91). How higher education institutions fared and responded to the power of rankings, Erkkilä (2014, p. 92) argued, depended on their institutional size and position along the center-periphery axis. Similarly, in their research on the effects of globalization and global competition on the higher education

sector, Bagley and Portnoi (2016, p. 23) also found that the 'pervasive rhetoric about excellence, rankings, and world-class status' did not have uniform effects.

Under the 'European Story' theme, we find research focused on mobility and new institutions created for the Europe of Knowledge. Examining the 'principles and standards of mobility evolving in the Bologna process' through discourse analysis, Powell and Finger (2013, p. 271) found that mobility benefits and effects have been embraced and taken for granted among policymakers. At the same time, issues of selectivity are understated in the policy discourse even though only a small minority of students were able to attain the ideal of spatial mobility espoused by the Bologna Process. They argued that this understatement, or, indeed, intentional ignorance, would likely undermine the Bologna aspirations to promote access and social mobility for all students. Put differently, how students are selected in practice go against the assumed social cohesion policy frame embedded in the Bologna vision (cf., van Geel, 2019, for how Dutch education professionals and Ghanaian migrant youths frame the relationship between mobility and education differently). What we may conclude from their analysis is that mobility programs embedding spatial educational mobility as a solution towards identified policy problems of access and social immobility contained fatal design flaws. While the extent to which such design flaws could ultimately undermine policy efforts towards the European Higher Education Area require further analysis, we know the imbalance between incoming and outgoing student ratio among EHEA countries remain stark (see Fig. 10.3), with countries such as the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland,

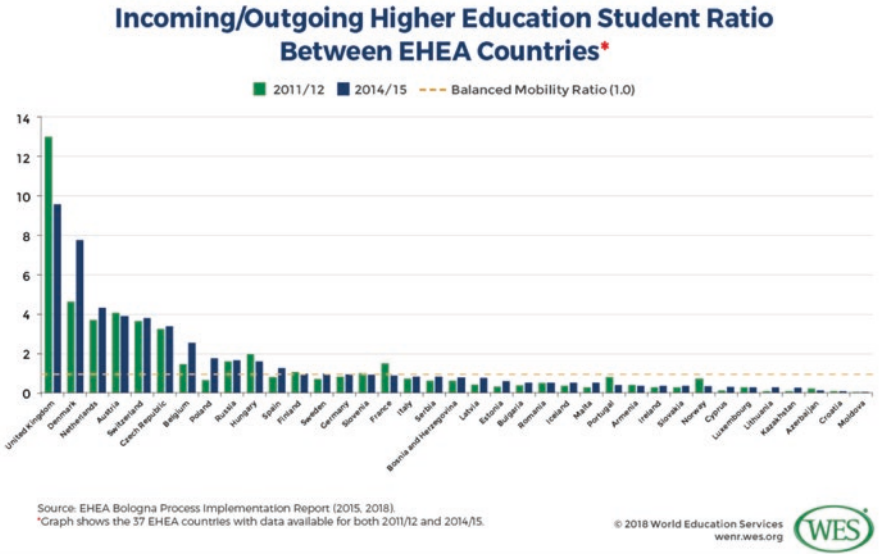

Fig. 10.3 Student Ratio between EHEA Countries (Incoming and Outgoing). (Source: WENR, https://wenr.wes.org/2018/12/student-mobility-in-the-european-higher-education-area-ehea (accessed 15 August 2020))

Czech Republic, and Belgium attracting far more students than they are sending out. Applying the framing perspective, their research interrogates the distance between policy discourse and practice—a common research interest also among policy scientists.

Turning to one of the Europe of Knowledge institutions, Salajan (2018) investigated the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), formally created in 2008 to facilitate innovation by coordinating collaboration between academic, research, and industry. Studying the main documents establishing the EIT, Salajan (2018) found that the policy frame the European Commission promoted used the following rhetorical language: one of urgency (quick action must be taken), one of challenges (absence of such an institution constituted an internal threat), one of competitiveness (notion of 'strong' Europe), one of innovation (exploit academic research findings for commercial use), one of entrepreneurship (infuse entrepreneurial spirit into academic actors eager to innovate), one of exemplarity (the EIT will be the reference point), and one of excellence and prestige. According to Salajan (2018), what the policy frame leading to EIT's creation tells us is that the European Commission perceived the role of the university as servicing the economic competitiveness and innovative capacity of Europe.

What we find in common among the studies in the 'European Story' category is the growing centrality of universities and higher education—whether through improved standing in global rankings, or increased educational mobility, or establishing new institutions at the European-level, and more—as essential to the sustainability and competitiveness of Europe. This turn towards universities and higher education as providing the solutions to European problems reflects the general turn towards knowledge as the way forward for (smart) policymaking around the world (Chou et al., 2017).

The second theme among the literature we identified is **'When Europe Hits Home'** and here we find research that examines the effects of (top-down) Europeanization on participating member states of European processes from a framing perspective. For example, comparing education policymaking in England and Scotland, Grek and Ozga (2010) addressed the question: What does the referencing or non-referencing of a 'Europe' frame reveal about a devolved polity? They showed that policymakers in Scotland preferred aligning and referencing their position with 'Europe' while those in England invoked global influences and thus positioned England as a global actor and not merely European. Grek and Ozga's (2010) findings challenge the common assumption in the literature that depicts the UK as a monolithic entity. Indeed, it points to potential tensions between units within devolved polities, and the differentiated impact that Europe has 'at home'—a finding familiar to Europeanization scholars who have examined other sectoral developments.

In a similar research, Brooks (2019, p. 2) found that 'the idea of Europe constitutes an important "spatial imaginary" for higher education within the continent, and helps to frame the ways in which students are conceptualised' (for more about how students are framed, see Brooks, 2018; Budd, 2017). Here, following Watkins (2015), 'Europe' as a spatial imaginary refer to 'socially held stories that constitute

particular ways of talking about places and spaces' and can be constructed as 'place imaginaries', 'idealised space imaginaries', and 'spatial transformational imaginaries' (Brooks, 2019, p. 6–7). Empirically, her research found that for policy influencers in Germany, Ireland, Poland, and Spain (not those in the UK and Denmark), 'Europe acted as a spatial imaginary—providing various socially-embedded stories that constitute particular ways of talking about specific places' (Brooks, 2019, p. 16). There existed a collective sense that they were involved in a '"European project"—the idea of building a region in which values and beliefs are shared, and mobility between nation-states is both common and straightforward' (Brooks, 2019, p. 9–10). For her, Europeanization is akin to a process of spatial transformation.

What the existing studies in the category 'When Europe Hits Home' have in common is how the policy frame of 'Europe' enables participating states to address the issue of positionality with regards to current policy definitions and solutions, as well as *future* ones. This is significant because it shows the imprinting of today's 'ways of doing things' onto tomorrow and beyond. At the same time, the huge body of higher education literature exploring the theme of 'When Europe Hits Home' paints a far more complex story, with some highlighting the impact as a translation of the European agenda for domestic purposes. There is thus tremendous scope to situate framing studies within this larger body of work.

The third theme we delineated is one we call **'National Story'**, which refers to a different set of research that applies the framing approach to analyze developments at the national-level. While these studies do refer to developments at the European-level and the increased external pressures to internationalize higher education systems, the focus is on examining how historical legacies and policy frames change over time as a result of interacting with both external and internal forces. For instance, Pick (2008) compared Germany and Australia using a frame analysis and found that both countries experienced profound changes to their higher education systems in the late 1980s that set these two countries on a pathway of convergence along a neoliberal policy trajectory. His analysis highlighted the increased dominance of the following frames in Germany's case in response to greater demands to access higher education and more European pressures to compete in a global market: the importance of employability and Europe in these developments. The policy frames we identified in the 'European Story' are thus also present in this category.

In sum, what the Dimensions literature review tells us is that the extant literature on framing and higher education policy in Western Europe is small, but rich and diverse. There is no unified framing analysis approach among the literature reviewed, with some scholars choosing to concentrate on identifying the policy framing in documents, while others focused more on practice and discourse uttered, as well as the implications of competing frames for the overall policy vision. Indeed, the diversity in applications confirmed that scholars were interested in different aspects of the policy cycle: from agenda-setting to negotiations and implementation. This is a departure from the general framing literature, which tends to focus on framing during the agenda-setting stage. When we examine the concentration of higher education studies applying the framing approach, we see that the majority is interested in the 'European Story', indicating that there is a tendency to study 'Western

Europe' as European-level developments. Indeed, our Dimensions analysis identified less publications falling under the theme of 'National Story'. This could change if we introduce individual countries as search keywords, but it is beyond our scope.

The literature review highlights different policy frames relevant to the Western European context—the social mobility frame, the employability frame, the innovation/competitiveness frame, and the Europe frame—each with a policy discourse conveying the problem identified, a specific vision of how it should be (i.e., ideational models), and a policy solution to realize the vision. At the same time, we should acknowledge that analytically these frames may be distinct, but they are all part of the larger story about higher education policy developments in Western Europe. What this means is that empirically these frames overlap to weave together a story with different plots and perspectives—all of which make up a wider body of knowledge. While the review shows that the framing approach sheds light on the many questions of interest concerning higher education reforms sweeping through Western Europe since the 1970s, this set of literature is scattered across different publication outlets, speaking to different audiences. Indeed, it appears that a robust set of research explicitly building on the framing approach is still wanting. In the next section, we turn to three detailed case studies to empirically contribute to this undertaking.

Framing Higher Education Policy in 'Europe', Germany, and Norway

In this section, we look more closely at the framing and reframing of higher education policies at the European-level, in Germany, and in Norway. We begin with an updated case of 'Europe' to provide the broader regional context against which most national reforms are debated and considered. The European higher education policy context has several unique characteristics as compared to a typical national context. The European Union (EU) merely has subsidiary competencies in higher education policy. This means that it cannot freely develop supranational policy, it can merely encourage cooperation and provide support with its limited policy instrument toolbox. The EU is not the only arena for cooperation in Europe. A key arena outside the EU's framework is the Bologna Process, a voluntary intergovernmental policy coordination process introduced in 1999. While Germany and Norway both represent national higher education policy contexts, the federal structure of Germany means that the framing analysis to a larger extent represents a 'zooming out', analyzing overall system trajectories, whereas in the Norwegian case we are able to look into specific reform initiatives and framing processes within. In this manner, the three cases illustrate the three stories—the European story, Europe hitting home, and the national story—as well as the potential of the framing approach to both zoom in and out of policy processes.

'Europe': From Europe of the 'People' to 'Euro', 'Knowledge', and Future

Higher education has been a sensitive area for European-level policymaking. The historical development has been gradual, marked by processes of (informal) expansion and formal constraints. While the initial developments largely took place within the European Community, the last two decades have been defined by institutionalization of the EU and Bologna as two distinct higher education governance sites (Gornitzka, 2010), at times with distinct dominant frames, and at times converging. In this section, we analyze these developments using policy documents adopted at the European-level and published academic studies.

Historically, the first ideas of European-level higher education policy have been traced back to the 1950s (Corbett, 2005, p. 27), followed by a gradual expansion of activities. In the 1970s, the basis for future cooperation was established, identifying areas for cooperation (Commission of the European Communities, 1973), principles for collaboration (mutual learning and information exchange) (The Council, 1976), and establishing administrative resources for coordination (the educational division in the new Directorate General for Research Science and Education) (Beerkens, 2008). In the 1980s, there was a period of informal expansion, in particular after the *Gravier* decision, which created the legal basis for Community involvement in (higher) education by widening the definition of vocational training (Pépin, 2006). Arguably, this in itself could be seen as a case where (re)framing of 'education' plays a prominent role in justifying policy action.

In 1987, the Erasmus exchange program was established. Mobility of students and staff became an undisputed goal where Community-level action was desirable, perceived as a 'safe' area for coordination where joint action would not challenge national diversity and ownership. Erasmus has since been a major pillar for constructing European-level policy coordination in higher education. It has also resulted in the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) that later become an important element in the Bologna Process. Student exchange was also linked to more general policies on mobility of workers and labor market, giving it legitimacy to bypass the more difficult and nationally sensitive cultural functions (Gornitzka, 2010, p. 538). Overall, the mobility focus is usually associated with both an employability frame (mobility of workers) and a culturally oriented frame (shared identity).

While the success of the Erasmus program led to further ambitions of expansion, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty halted this process and instead formalized the subsidiarity principle (De Wit, 2007). The Treaty formalized what were seen as appropriate areas for regional cooperation, e.g., developing the European dimension in education, encouraging academic mobility, promoting cooperation, developing information exchange and distance learning. In this period, the lifelong learning theme appeared as an important side theme for EU education coordination. While initially this was more associated with VET policies, it became widened (Cort, 2009). The 1993 Delors White Paper emphasized lifelong learning as a means to integrate the entire education and training agendas (Commission of the European Communities,

1993). This lifelong learning emphasis has also created more space for integrating economic and social policies (Holford & Mleczko, 2013), later linked to a growth and skills agenda.

The 2000 Lisbon Agenda marked a major turning point in European higher education policy cooperation, introducing the knowledge economy frame as the dominant (but not only) policy frame. The Lisbon Agenda was launched under the much-quoted aim of becoming 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. The three headlines were around employment, economic reform, and social cohesion—warranting a necessity to also modernize educational systems (Lisbon European Council, 2000). The introduction of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) also meant a new approach, resulting in a set of shared targets outlined in the Education and Training 2010 Work program (The Education Council, 2001). The role of educational systems was to cater to the demands of the knowledge society and employment. As progress on fulfilling the Lisbon Agenda was initially modest, it was relaunched with an even stronger growth and jobs focus. Policy coordination was thus more explicitly linked to economic and employability frames.

Initiatives such as the Modernization Agenda present an urgent need for national and institutional reforms (Maassen & Stensaker, 2011). The Modernization Agenda followed up on existing areas for cooperation, e.g., mobility, but it also took up new dimensions, such as higher education governance, autonomy, and funding. These are presented as necessary for universities to 'make their full contribution' to the goals of the Lisbon Agenda. In the aftermath, both European institution-building (e.g., the EIT, see Gornitzka & Metz, 2014; Salajan, 2018) and stretching of what is possible within the subsidiarity principle (establishment of the European Qualification Framework, see e.g., Elken, 2015) have been observed. Nevertheless, while the Lisbon Agenda was (re)launched with much fanfare, the targets were not met.

The intergovernmental Bologna Process was established in 1999, representing a parallel process to EU policy coordination. The formulations in the initial Bologna declaration were careful and sometimes vague (Amaral & Neave, 2009, p. 290). Nevertheless, the declaration started by highlighting the necessity to establish a more 'complete and far-reaching Europe', where education has a key role to play. The signatory countries committed to establishing the European Higher Education Area by 2010, constructed around six main action lines. These built on a range of pre-existing structures and mechanisms (e.g., ECTS). Whereas during the 2000s EU policy is to a stronger extent framed around the contributions of education to the knowledge economy and skills, the Bologna Process communiques explicitly stressed the role of education for developing and strengthening 'stable, peaceful and democratic societies' and cultural dimensions, emphasizing universities' independence and autonomy as vital assurances for fulfilling their roles. While the EU was unlikely to interfere with cultural aspects of education, Bologna's intergovernmental nature made this possible.

The Bologna documents also underlined the importance of mobility and employability, and as such echoed shared concerns expressed within the EU. The overall tone was, however, a stark difference from the tone in the Modernization Agenda, which largely emphasized the urgency of reforms. One could thus argue that, at least in the early 2000s, the Lisbon Agenda in the EU and the Bologna Process, embodied different policy frames. The differences have gradually disappeared over time as the European Commission became a member in the process. Indeed, we see that there has been a mutual adjustment between the EU and Bologna Process over time (Keeling, 2006, p. 208). This has been visible in how formulations in declarations have become more instrumental in its policy program and have increasingly moved away from emphasizing differences as a driving force (Veiga, 2019), or that the Bologna Process started to include specific numerical goals for share of mobile students, similar to EU benchmarks (Vögtle, 2019).

The European Higher Education Area was officially launched in 2010, and the progress on individual action lines as a whole has both resulted in successes and failures, largely 'remaining a patchwork' of the 48 different systems participating in this process (Vögtle, 2019). While most of the core action lines have remained in place, there are also some new initiatives, such as emphases on the relevance and quality of learning and teaching provision. In others, the action lines have become rephrased and have transferred to the next step, such as from mutual recognition towards discussions of automatic recognition. Nevertheless, the overall picture is scattered, and progress is uneven between areas and countries.

In the EU, the last decade saw a greater focus on skills. Several policies and instruments have been developed, incorporating the European Qualifications Framework (2008), the Skills Agenda (2016), and the ESCO (classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations). Here, the common denominator is viewing skills formation from a lifelong learning perspective, where formal educational institutions are part of a larger ecosystem. Education is assumed to occur across sites and locations, providing a basis for a lifelong and lifewide learning process. Emphasis on learning outcomes, modulization, and parity of esteem are part of this shift in EU policies for higher education. A key concern is skills mismatch: the skills acquired in formal educational systems not matching the needs of the labor market. This skills focus is also visible in the renewed agenda for higher education (The European Commission, 2017), where the role of higher education institutions as providing skills is highlighted. This skills emphasis is a manifestation of two policy frames: employability (stressing labor market needs and the necessity to maintain employment as a part of a social policy), and societal challenges (underlining *future* labor market needs when knowledge and competence are vital in solving grand challenges and educating for jobs not yet well defined). These two frames are echoed in the commitment to develop the European Education Area by 2025, essentially marking an attempt of strengthened horizontal policy coordination on the European-level.

In recent years, a renewed emphasis has emerged on the cultural aspects of regional integration and the role of higher education in contributing to shared norms. The European University Initiative was launched in 2017, with an aim to

'strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty "European Universities", consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU' (European Council, 2017). While similar to earlier calls for institutional cooperation across Europe, the initiative also marks a more extended scope of cooperation. European institutions enthusiastically embraced the first two calls, which resulted in somewhat uneven participation rates across various parts of Europe (Jungblut et al., 2020). It remains to be seen what effects these new consortia will bring, but they represent a potential next step in reframing European universities as engines for regional integration. Below, we look at developments in Germany and Norway to see how their policy reforms have been framed and reframed.

Germany: From Humboldtian Ideals to Employability and Knowledge Economy in Europe

The most prominent label that has been used to describe the essence of German universities is linked to the ideas behind the Humboldtian model of higher education (Clark, 1983; Hüther & Krücken, 2018). In the tradition of the German research university, the unity of teaching and research as well as a comparatively strong role of the professoriate are key elements of higher education. Moreover, higher education since the nineteenth century has been by-and-large a public endeavor as universities fulfil key tasks for the state (such as training civil servants) and, in turn, receive most of their funding from the public purse (Olsen, 2007). Up until the 1960s, German higher education mainly consisted of one type of institution—universities, which until today carry a higher prestige due to their heritage in the Humboldtian ideals (Hüther & Krücken, 2018). The policymaking environment for higher education in Germany is rather complex due to the federal structure of the state. The division of legal responsibility between the federal level and the *Bundesländer* has been an object of several reforms over the years that led to shifting responsibilities for parts of the higher education policy portfolio between the different levels. However, throughout all the years the main responsibility lay with the *Bundesländer* leading to increased complexity in higher education policy debates.

To understand the role of higher education in German education policy in general, it is necessary to consider two issues that are relevant for the way in which higher education policy is framed. First, German secondary education is stratified and only one of the three different types of schools formally qualifies pupils to attend higher education (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993). Second, Germany traditionally has a strong Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector that educates many young people and offers attractive career trajectories upon graduation (Busemeyer, 2015; Thelen & Busemeyer, 2012). Indeed, it was only in 1990 that more students attended higher education than VET (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993). Today, however, some parts of the VET sector struggle to find apprentices while the

demand for higher education rises continuously, which led to the creation of new higher education institutions that span both sectors (Graf, 2013). These two issues create conditions that, until the end of the 1960s, framed higher education as the domain of universities, generally inaccessible to most students.

In the 1960s, German higher education underwent several fundamental changes that contributed to the emergence of a policy frame in this sector: access and social mobility. In the years spanning post-WWII and the 1960s, the German higher education system was characterized as having low levels of participation, no student support, and moderate tuition fees, making higher education an elitist undertaking (Garritzmann, 2016). The change in governing coalition in 1969 at the federal-level—from Christian Democrats to a social-liberal coalition—set in motion reforms that increased the salience, and adjusted the framing, of German higher education policy (Garritzmann, 2016). Specifically, it led to a situation in which increased access to higher education became a central political goal and a key topic of public debates. Several policy initiatives launched during this period sought to expand access and social mobility, including the creation of a generous student support scheme, an increase in study places, and the abolishment of tuition fees (Garritzmann, 2016). The more fundamental change introduced in 1969 was the transformation of the German higher education system from a unitary to a binary system with the creation of *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied science). These institutions were intended to meet the increased demand for higher education, while having an orientation towards the labor market and employability by offering shorter and more vocationally-oriented programs (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993).

When the federal government changed back to a Christian Democrat-led coalition in 1982, the new government pursued policies that retrenched student support and limited access to higher education (Garritzmann, 2016). This continued in the mid-2000s when several Christian Democrat-led coalitions in the *Bundesländer* adopted initiatives to introduce tuition fees for higher education. It was only after widespread student protests and electoral losses in some *Bundesländer* that these initiatives were rolled-back, leaving Germany in the position of a low-subsidy and no-tuition country (Garritzmann, 2016); for instance, only around 15.8% of students received support in 2020 (Destatis, 2021). What we may conclude is that, while the access and social mobility frame has been present in German higher education policy reforms, this policy frame is associated with left-of-center political parties. Indeed, only when these political parties were in government, either at the federal level or in one of the *Bundesländer*, were they able to successfully advance higher education policy reforms promoting the access and social mobility policy frame. This is radically different from the Norwegian case, as we shall see next, where a more consensus-oriented style of policymaking ensured continuity in policy focus over time.

Given the comparatively high level of social selectivity and the elite characteristics of the Humboldtian model (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993), German universities traditionally did not emphasize the fostering of employability. While the introduction of *Fachhochschulen* represented the growing significance of the employability

and skills frame in the German higher education landscape, for most universities the shift towards employability as an important mission only became visible following the Bologna Process and the Europeanization of German higher education (see below). There was some competition between universities and *Fachhochschulen* regarding the question of attractiveness of labor market opportunities, but universities still had the upper-hand when it came to societal reputation due to their provision of credentials leading to higher ranks in the hierarchy of industry or the public sector (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993).

Employability became important in the framing of German higher education policy throughout the 1990s when debates concerning time to degree and the average age of university graduates emerged (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993). The launch of the Bologna Process ushered in a series of reforms indicative of a reframing of higher education policy; for instance, the introduction of the new BA/MA degree structure to replace the classical 5 year single-cycle degrees leading to a *Diplom* or *Magister Artium*. This was designed to provide students with the opportunity to leave higher education after 3 years with a degree that qualifies for the labor market (Hüther & Krücken, 2018; Vukasovic et al., 2017). In addition, the new quality assurance regimes entailed a focus on employability of graduates (Hüther & Krücken, 2018), which constituted a significant shift away from the historical ideal that students were responsible for their progress; now universities were held accountable for students' progress (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993).

The attempt to increase the overall percentage of higher education students enrolled in *Fachhochschulen* further moved the employability frame to center stage. While these institutions historically educated around a quarter of the total student population (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993), the percentage of students in *Fachhochschulen* increased in 2020 to 36.4% (Destatis, 2020). This development was driven by a general concern that rising student numbers might negatively affect the research function of German universities, particularly since a decline in student numbers expected since the 1980s never materialized (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993; Hüther & Krücken, 2018). As part of the broader discussion about the relationship between universities and *Fachhochschulen*, we find the outlines of a (now) dominant policy frame: the role of research and innovation for economic development. In the Humboldtian ideal, basic research has been the core duty of Germany universities and, to some extent, the public research institute sector (Frackmann & De Weert, 1993). By contrast, *Fachhochschulen* had a limited function regarding research: they focused primarily on applied research and were traditionally not allowed to award PhD degrees. This clear division was called into question as European discussions about the comparative weakness and fragmentation of the European Research Area vis-à-vis the U.S., and more recently Asia, emerged (Chou, 2012, 2014).

Since the 2000s, we find a steady process of gradual convergence of the tasks and missions of German universities and *Fachhochschulen*. Specifically, this is characterized by academic drift towards universities, exemplified by an increased focus on the research function of *Fachhochschulen* with a designated funding program as well as the initial developments of PhD programs (Hüther & Krücken, 2018). At the

same time, institutional differentiation among universities challenged the Humboldtian ideal, which, given its elitist roots, perceived universities as elitist organizations of more or less equal quality (Jungblut & Jungblut, 2017). Following the publication of the first international university rankings, leaders in European countries and universities collectively realized how far the world perceived their universities to lag behind U.S. universities with regards to research and innovation output. In Germany, this led to the introduction of the Excellence Initiative in 2005 (now Excellence Strategy), which identified national flagship universities based on their research performance with the explicit aim to further catalyze their output through additional funding (Hüther & Krücken, 2018).

Like in other Western European countries, much of the higher education policy reforms in Germany are linked to the broader processes of regional integration of higher education in Europe (Hüther & Krücken, 2018) in response to globalization pressures (Chou et al., 2016). Indeed, Germany was a founding member of the Bologna Process and Germany's pro-European integration stance is well-known (Vukasovic et al., 2017). This reframing of German higher education policy moving away from the historical Humboldtian approach throughout the first two decades of this millennium must be situated in the broader context of increasing regional integration at the European-level (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2020a). The nesting of German higher education policy as 'European', either through support for the new European University Initiative (DAAD, 2020) or as part of the European Research Area (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2020b), clearly signals that the changes that have been sweeping the global higher education landscape are also being received in Germany. At the same time, the development over the last five decades also shows that historical roots of German higher education still matter and create path-dependence regarding the way international developments are integrated into German higher education policy. Thus, the German case underlines the importance of historical trajectories and existing intuitional arrangements for policy framing.

Norway: Framing and Reframing Egalitarianism Incrementally

Compared to many other countries in Western Europe, Norwegian higher education has a comparatively shorter history. The oldest university was established in 1811, and additional comprehensive universities were only created after WWII when the expansion and construction of the field of higher education in Norway occurred. Up until then, only some specialized colleges for higher learning existed (e.g., technical college, veterinary college Norwegian higher education sector can be seen as part of the Nordic model, emphasizing a strong nation state, egalitarianism, and regional considerations (Pinheiro et al., 2014).

For Norway, the central policy dilemma in this sector has been between ensuring the regional dimension of higher education and facilitating quality by concentration of resources. Here, the regional dimension refers to the different parts of the

country, and not the supranational (i.e., between Norway and Europe). Given the equalitarian emphasis in the Nordic model of higher education, the access policy frame has traditionally been important in Norway, particularly during the post-WWII expansion period. The Norwegian access policy frame encompasses two distinct debates: *who* has access (broadening access) and *where* this access is located (regional dimension). The latter has also been the basis for structural changes in Norwegian higher education since the 1960s.

Until very recently, Norwegian higher education policy reforms have been characterized by incrementalism, we find long lines of development persisting across various governments and often over several decades. Policymaking processes are consensus-oriented and usually involve the stakeholders, the sector, and experts. Another notable feature is the tradition of public committees that provide advice to policymakers. The committees are appointed by the state, usually led by a prominent expert/stakeholder and have wide representation. The experts involved contribute to specifying the nature of problems, discussing their causes and relevance, and suggesting appropriate solutions (Tellmann, 2016). While the reports are advisory to the ministry, in higher education they often form an important input for policies discussed by the Parliament. We therefore also analyze the committee reports to identify the policy frames associated with these reforms because these reports reveal a significant portion of the framing process.

The various public committees convened in the higher education sector have addressed access, reaching very different conclusions. For instance, the Kleppe committee (1961) calculated how many graduates the labor market was anticipated to need and determined that further expansion of higher education was not necessary (Omholt, 1995), with a dominating employability frame. The Ottosen committee (1965) introduced two important changes concerning access. First, all post-secondary education became a part of 'higher education', a term the subsequent White Paper consolidated (St. meld. nr. 17, 1974–1975). Second, a new regional college system was established with considerable support in the sector (Aamodt & Lyby, 2019). By the mid-1980s, the system expanded considerably, and debates on access became increasingly engaged with concerns about quality (Kyvik, 1983). The Hernes committee (NOU, 1988: 28) argued that 'everything cannot be done everywhere' and concluded that duplication would likely lead to stronger hierarchies in quality instead of facilitating access across Norway. The proposed solutions broadly involved enhanced division of labor, collaboration and networks, along with the necessity to view the sum of institutions as a national system. Following the Hernes committee report, the 1990 White Paper (St. meld. nr. 40, 1990–1991) set in motion a large-scale merger in the university college sector in 1994.

The debate around system structure persisted. After the 2002–2003 Quality Reform, university colleges had the opportunity to become recognized as universities when they fulfil certain criteria. This led to an increase in the number of universities across Norway. The Stjernø committee was mandated to revisit the overall system structure and address system fragmentation (NOU, 2008: 3). The proposed solution was radical: all public higher education institutions were to be merged into

8–10 large regional institutions. While most committee reports have been implemented more or less 'as is', the idea of these radical mergers created considerable opposition and were thus not implemented. The ministry nevertheless continued to encourage greater collaboration and division of labor in the sector (the so-called 'SAK' policy). The idea of mergers did not disappear. In 2015, the ministry issued the White Paper 'Concentration for quality' for facilitating mergers in the sector (St. meld. nr. 18, 2014–2015), marking another step towards stronger consolidation and concentration of resources. Fragmentation was still perceived as an issue and the White Paper refers to widespread belief that now 'the time had come' for a structural reform. This time, however, the mergers were to take place from the bottom up. The argument put forth emphasized the need for Norway to adapt to a changing world amid growing societal challenges. The regional dimension of the access policy frame remained one of several stated reform goals.

While the long-term development has been that of incrementalistm, in 2021 Norway received a new government, which put decentralization of the system much stronger on the agenda again, marking a rapid U-turn from the processes of stronger concentration. The frames invoked are strongly linked to the *where* dimension of access, emphasizing the necessity to make education available across the whole country, e.g., by emphasizing the necessity to establish decentralized and distance learning opportunities.

The *where* dimension has been highly visible in Norwegian higher education policy. By contrast, the *who* dimension of the access debate has been less visible in many of the major committee reports and white papers. The primary focus has been on creating equality of opportunities. In the Nordic welfare state context, tuition-free higher education and relatively generous support from the public student support system (*Lånekassen,* established in 1947) are largely taken for granted, there are hardly any serious debates about introducing tuition fees. Recent studies have shown, however, considerable inequalities in access to higher education in Norway, e.g., in terms of parental education (Aamodt, 2019).

Along with access, quality has been a major overarching emphasis in Norwegian policy for higher education since the 1980s and can largely be connected to several of the overarching frames discussed in this chapter. It has been the normative underpinning for suggestions concerning concentration of resources, for suggesting reforms concerning educational provision, as well as linked to discussions on the contributions that education makes to society, labor market, and economic development. While these represent a user-oriented view of quality and could be seen to be associated with claims of relevance, there is a parallel and more academic view on quality in higher education in Norwegian policy framing as we shall now elaborate.

The Quality Reform (St. meld nr. 27, 2001), building on the Mjøs committee report (NOU, 2000: 14), presented a comprehensive reform of higher education in Norway, emphasizing issues concerning quality and efficiency. While the Reform argued for creating a knowledge society, thus linking these discussions with the societal challenges policy frame, it also launched the notion of 'useful *Bildung*' as a means to integrate traditional academic norms and emphasis on lifelong learning (critical thinking and ability to learn). The Quality Reform encompassed diverse

changes, including changes to the governance and study program structures, as well as introducing quality assurance and performance-based funding while emphasizing mobility, and more. While the Quality Reform has been associated with an Americanization and 'Bolognization' of Norwegian higher education policy, it also continued existing trajectories of higher education reforms by providing solutions (e.g. new degree structure) to identified problems in the system (Michelsen & Aamodt, 2007). The Bologna linkage introduced a more explicit regional integration policy frame into Norwegian higher education reforms by integrating student and researcher mobility and the notion of the European Higher Education Area into the reform package. The main policy frames embedded in the Reform are associated with local issues, emphasizing quality, societal responsiveness, and relevance—representing an amalgamation of employability, societal challenges, and economic development policy frames.

Debates concerning quality in Norwegian higher education policy have continued and are shifting. For instance, the 2016 White Paper 'Culture for quality' (St. meld. nr. 16, 2016–2017) proposed a range of measures to address educational quality. The reform package relates to several concurrent frames, given the multifaceted quality definition that underpins the problem formulation. There is an economic dimension concerning efficiency, a relevance dimension that refers to both society and employability, and a societal challenges argument that requires high competence and learning outcomes. Nevertheless, there is also a parallel, and less utilitarian dimension emphasizing the *Bildung* traditions of learning for personal development. There is now many reform activities underway in Norway, including new white papers on both system governance, relevance of higher education, and student mobility.

What the case of Norway reveals, in contrast to Germany, is how incremental higher education reform processes lead to co-existing, but differentiated, interpretations of individual policy frames. For instance, access, particularly its geographical dimension, shifted from system expansion to structure and quality. While the new U-turns emphasizes decentralization, this is not accompanied with expansion. Overall, this can also be associated with a broader shift from an input to a more output thinking in higher education governance, thus enabling discussions about the contributions that education makes towards employability, economic development, and grand challenges. It is in these broader debates that we observe how policy frames are blended. For example, employability has expanded from rationalistic calculations of labor market needs to a broader societal relevance frame where employability is viewed in a context of uncertainty, a rapidly changing labor market, and the necessity of restructuring the economy for the future, and in so doing overlaps with a societal challenges frame. Similarly, international economic competitiveness and solving societal challenges have emerged as prominent overarching policy frames, but these discussions take place in a Nordic welfare state context, and thus do not appear as radical shifts towards an economized view of higher education as elsewhere in the world.

Regional integration and internationalization in general are important policy objectives in Norway. Indeed, sections on mobility, European research funding, and internationalization can be found in nearly all recent white papers. Yet these are often strategically integrated into local reform concerns (e.g., Quality Reform). A characteristic of the Norwegian policy discussion is the persistent undertone of scientific excellence and academic values, e.g., by emphasizing the unique characteristics of higher education and *Bildung* as a norm. This can be a result of a policymaking mode where the sector and organized interests are heavily involved. This can also be interpreted as a strategic legitimization device to assure support for proposed measures. Overall, policymaking in Norway has generally been characterized by path-dependency – incrementalism and long lines of development. While more recent changes suggest a time of more rapidly changing policy priorities, it also remains to be seen whether this is a temporary state of affairs, or a new style for Norwegian higher education policymaking.

Conclusion: The Many Promises of the Framing Approach

This chapter reviewed how the framing approach has been applied in studies of higher education policy reforms in Western Europe. By doing a Dimensions analysis, the review found that the literature is highly diverse, rich, but few in numbers. Higher education scholars applying the framing approach focused on three overlapping empirical themes: the origin and evolution of European higher education policy cooperation, or what we called the 'European Story'; top-down Europeanization ('When Europe Hits Home'); and the evolution of national higher education policy reforms ('National Story'). These studies uncovered at least four distinct policy frames that are significant to higher education policy developments in Western Europe: the social mobility frame, the employability frame, the innovation/competitiveness frame, and the Europe or regionalism frame.

Examining higher education policy framing and reframing at the European-level, in Germany, and in Norway, we found that the framing approach enables us to observe how policy frames are used to usher in radical and incremental policy changes. For European-level developments, policy frames were used as discursive tools to carve out a space for European cooperation in an area of national sensitivity. In Germany's case, clearly distinct policy frames competed for dominance, the outcome being a function of which political party coalitions were in power. By contrast, Norway has for the most part been a case of incremental reforms focused on the policy problem of access, interpreted through a Nordic lens of equitable geographical distribution and over time also a concern for quality. The inclusiveness of the Norwegian reform process has resulted in a blending of different policy frames within the reform debates.

There are implications of our research design and case selection. For instance, by selecting two Northern European countries, where European integration in higher education has been more prominent on the agenda, we are able to see how 'Europe hits home'. At the same time, we are not able to explore *how* and *why* European integration in higher education are *less* on the policy agendas in other European countries. Ultimately, what our three cases revealed about the policy framing approach is that it allows us to compare and analyze reform efforts in three very distinct contexts. Indeed, the framing approach was used to discuss broader systemic changes (as in Germany's case), as well as to delineate specific narratives emerging from policy documents (e.g., Norway and European-level developments). Overall, a framing analysis encourages us to consider how the presence and absence of diverse policy frames, as well as their competition, accounted for the similarities and differences in reform outcomes in Western Europe. Nevertheless, this also points out that the framing approach, while flexible for both zooming in and out, must be employed with care for analytic precision.

To conclude, there are several avenues in which the framing approach could be usefully applied to lead to more interdisciplinary and comparative insights into developments in higher education. As our review and the detailed case studies have shown, the higher education policy sector is highly porous given the increasing role of universities in achieving policy goals in other sectors: as an engine for economic growth (nationally, regionally), as a scientific solution provider for policy challenges, as a leveler of social inequality, and more. What this means is that higher education scholars interested in studying reform efforts and resistance in this domain need to go beyond the boundaries of this sector. For instance, scholars have already called attention to the nexus between higher education and research policy developments in Europe (Chou & Gornitzka, 2014; Chou et al., 2017), as well as nexus with migration policies (Cerna & Chou, 2022); these avenues of research are particularly productive in the European context.

In a post-Brexit and post-pandemic Europe facing new geopolitical realities, integration in higher education may take on new directions. New geopolitical realities and a war in the region have strengthened commitment to Europe from within and from global allies, but it also introduced uncertainty. Indeed, this may lead to education obtaining less policy attention, but it could also reinvigorate emphasis on European values and norms and an acknowledgement of the importance of higher education's role in their dissemination. The framing approach would be especially suitable to explore the underlying tensions between competing frames, as well as opportunities seized for sectoral collaboration (see the case of European Scientific Visa in Cerna & Chou, 2014). Finally, the framing approach could also be integrated in comparative regionalism studies to explore how frames emerge, are supported, or contested in different parts of the world. As higher education internationalization becomes a shared experience around the world, the framing approach could shed light on the travel of ideas, the circulation of actors who promote them, and the friction they generate in diverse institutional settings.

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