Chapter 9
Higher Education Reforms and Center-Periphery Dilemmas: Ukrainian Universities Between Neo-Soviet and Neo-Liberal Contestations

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Abstract The awakening of the civil society in Ukraine has called national universities to play a major role in social and economic transformations aimed at eliminating post-colonial legacies and accelerating the country's European integration. However, the higher education system of Ukraine used to be on periphery of "knowledge empires" (Altbach PG, Empires of knowledge and development. In: Altbach PG, Balán J (eds) World class worldwide: Transforming research universities in Asia and Latin America. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1–30, 2007), controlled by various imperial forces over the last few centuries. Will the marginalized academe be able to help their country reverse the relegation trends in economy as much as in building civil society? The analysis draws on the literature and document analysis pertaining to higher education transformations, and interviews with professors at the leading universities in the cities of Kyiv and Lviv, in order to explore cumulative disadvantages, as well as seek opportunities for reform leverages. The analysis is framed by focus on tensions between neo-Soviet and neo-liberal reform approaches in the post-colonial higher education, which have incompatible perspectives on academic freedom, grassroots initiatives, and structural innovations.

Keywords Civil society • Economic transformation • European integration • Global academic standards • Higher education reform • Ideology • Knowledge based economy • Marketization of higher education • Neo-liberal reform • Professoriate • Ukrainian universities

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9.1 Introduction

Following the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine's universities faced a major challenge: in order to empower the intellectual and technological revamp of the national economy, they had to fully revamp themselves. This implied not only embracing European and global standards of higher learning, but also providing a vital space for the creative class to connect science, education and knowledge transfer to enable new ideas and products, and to make them globally attractive. This required from Ukrainian universities a concerted effort to stimulate transformations in research and education, so that local campuses would turn into accumulators of local and global talents, and spearhead the innovations so badly needed by the emerging knowledge based economy.

This was easier said than done. The military conflict with Russia, which started immediately after the revolution, thrust the integrated Soviet-style military-industrial complex of Ukraine, and its dilapidating post-colonial infrastructure, into collapse. The trade embargo imposed by Russia on Ukrainian goods meant that the Ukrainian economy lost its traditional markets. While some argued that the resulting economic pain would spur the reorientation of the economy through the adoption of European standards and markets, as well as stimulate the growth of new economies (indeed, the IT industry appeared to be taking off), the state budget continued to be gutted by defense spending and austerity measures. Resulting cuts in government subsidies seriously affected most social sectors, including education. When choosing priorities in the time of crisis, policymakers were more likely to propose deep cuts to higher education than other "more critical" sectors.

Having endured tight bureaucratic supervision imposed by the neo-Soviet government of President Yanukovych, which shaped human resource development to reconstruct Russian zones of trade, cultural and military influence, in 2014 Ukrainian universities suddenly faced the prospect of austere neo-liberal reforms pushed by the west: i.e., marketization of higher education, devolution of budgetary responsibilities, public-private partnerships, increasing reliance on private tuition fees, sponsorship and industrial contracts, as well as strategic internationalization (see Zajda 2014). While the Yanukovych-era trends were repulsive to reform-minded academics, the alternatives being proposed were not without influential detractors. The following section sheds light on the nature of the tensions and explains how neo-Soviets and neo-liberals clashed over placing the Ukrainian university into either the Russian or the European center-periphery constructs. The chapter draws on inputs from the literature and document analysis pertaining to higher education transformations in the Ukrainian context. It also engages inputs on related issues from a data-set of 50 semi-structured interviews with professors at leading Ukrainian universities in the cities of Kyiv and Lviv.

9.2 Ukrainian Higher Education: Center-Periphery Legacies

For centuries, Ukrainian socio-political contexts were formed through colonial dependencies on various powerful empires, which used Ukrainians as cheap labor and subjected them to terrible suffering through ideological and military conflicts on the territory that Snyder calls the European "bloodlands" (Subtelny 2009; Snyder 2012). According to some scholars, the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922 signaled the possibility of a "renaissance" in Ukraine's politics and culture (Szporluk 2000; Subtelny 2009). However, the aspirations for self-determination were quickly tramped by the Stalinist regime, which placed Ukraine back into colonial dependence on the Kremlin. The Soviets and their descendants nurtured in Ukraine a sense of defeat, compliance and dependence through political repressions, genocide and forced migration, as well as redistributive hierarchies guided by cronyism and corruption. Ukrainian academic elites maintained some semblance of integrity by investing themselves in the de-ideologized natural sciences and engineering, or by escaping to intellectual centers in western diasporas and universities. Meanwhile, national culture, history and political studies, among other social sciences and humanities, were heavily censored, regimented and periodically purged in Ukrainian universities, as they were elsewhere in the Soviet empire (Cummings and Hinnebusch 2011), so as to curb creative and independent thinking.

While the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the new independent state generated some openings for transformations in Ukrainian universities, the lingering mind-set of dependence on the colonial regime in Moscow, as well as the tendency to develop new dependencies (for example, on western donations), thwarted the development of innovative programs and processes in the country (see some findings in Korostelina 2013). The newly independent Ukrainian governments were cautious about radical reforms, most frequently resorting to institutional and programmatic adjustments, which produced hybrids that were equally unattractive to talented local students, to western-educated returnees, and to foreign collaborators. Inspired in part by the Chinese transformations in higher education aimed at enhancing national performance in global competition, the Ukrainian government that took power after the 2004–2005 Orange Revolution began to develop its own model of a global research university. However, the project was shut down several months after it began, i.e., as soon the neo-Soviet government of Viktor Yanukovych came back to power (Oleksiyenko 2014). With the backing of Vladimir Putin's regime in Russia, the Ukrainian neo-Soviets tightened bureaucratic controls in the Ministry of Education and reversed innovative trends, including the post-Orange Revolution re-interpretations of Soviet history in the university curricula (e.g., on the national liberation movements in western Ukraine, as well as regarding the Stalinist-era genocide trough deliberate mass starvation). Although the reasons for the 2014 popular uprising against the Yanukovych government are too complex to discuss in detail here, the growing bureaucratization, regression and corruption in the education sector was certainly among key grievances.

The following sub-sections illustrate the systemic, institutional and individual challenges that Ukrainian academics confronted since their country became independent in 1991, with some references to their experiences in Soviet times.

9.3 Systemic Challenges

Almost half of the professors interviewed for this study indicated that the collapse of the Soviet Union led to significant transformations in Ukrainian universities. In their words: "The higher education system became more open… Our students study in Europe; our students are mobile. Our professors conduct research in the framework of European educational programs"; "the students became more independent… and more demanding". "They demand more dynamic processes, interactivity, exploratory studies, where they act as subjects (rather than objects) and active participants of the educational process". "The teachers lose the authoritarian style and adopt democratic styles…". Some also pointed to "the development of dialogical forms of study"; teachers are seen as having "more freedom in selecting information, and expressing their thoughts".

However, more than 80 % of the interviewees argued that the pre-2014 higher education reforms failed, having produced a rigid system of governance that makes Ukrainian universities unattractive to both local and foreign students. One interviewee argued that Ukrainian higher education turned out to be a "combination of the Soviet and European systems of education… artificially joined… keeping everything negative from the Soviet system, and adding everything negative from the European system; without any positive elements of one or the other system". Many participants expressed an expectation that the Revolution of Dignity would offer an opportunity to overturn the existing model. So what exactly made the professors unhappy about the post-Soviet model of education?

Several participants argued that the post-Soviet reforms progressed quite rapidly in the 1990s, when the Ministry of Education was weak and under-resourced. Various private universities emerged (e.g., National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, and the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv), centers of excellence were created in public universities, and new courses were introduced, primarily with the help of resources provided by various western donors. However, in the early 2000s, the emerging oligarchy began to consolidate its hold over the economy, taking over the process of nation-state building. Governmental structures were centralized and the post-Soviet bureaucracy was strengthened (Ukraine's centralization efforts corresponded with similar trends in the Russian Federation). Among other governmental agencies, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education increased its regulatory functions, and began to control resource flows in the university self-funding programs. Bureaucratic functions became firmly entrenched after the 2005–2010 Orange Revolution government failed to make reforms, while "the dynamics of innovation began to slow down; meanwhile, what might be called post-Soviet legacy began to return".

Some study participants pointed out that, as it became more bureaucratic, the Ministry of Education accelerated control over curricula development and urged enhanced access to private forms of higher education in order to generate more budget income. Indeed, the participation rate in higher education was expanded from 40 % in 1991 to 80 % in 2012. At the same time, the workloads of professors increased to an average of 900–1,000 instruction hours per academic year. The comeback of the neo-Soviets in 2010 intensified prescriptive regulation: for example, the Education Ministry formalized all university courses and increased formal accountability for each course, essentially placing professors into the same industrial format as was practiced by the Soviet Union. Government bureaucrats took control of tuition rates and collected all of the revenue, returning only a small fraction of it to universities. Meanwhile, professors' salaries remained low. Some study participants complained that they often had to spend their own money on paper and other classroom supplies. Many worked in unheated, unrepaired or unlit classrooms. According to one professor: "Our worst challenge is that we have a very centralized system of powers. We have the ministry that controls all functions. We don't have academic freedom or institutional autonomy. We can earn some money, but then we are forced to give this money away, and then we make requests in order to get money and buy paper, computers, etc."

In practice, by 2012, Ukraine adopted a highly disadvantageous form of state-controlled entrepreneurialism, which created layers of extractive bureaucracy to keep tight control over the rates of admissions and fees. However, it should be noted that the Ukrainian system did not emerge as a commercial project similar to the tuition-fee-based entrepreneurial models in Australia or the UK. Although the neo-Soviets engaged some neo-liberal strategies, the oligarchic government primarily practiced control "for the sake of control over political agenda and processes". Like other ministries, the Ministry of Education intensified control to enable various forms of corruption (e.g., privatization of university lands and premises by governmental officials and their supervisors in the industrial oligarchy). The neo-Soviet system emerged as a much worse replica of the Soviet model. In contrast to the Soviet regime, one study participant argued, the neo-Soviets had no vision of why they needed education: "Today, this vision is that education is peripheral, and can be funded or unfunded; it can be a target for budget cuts. Today, there is no vision that education is a pivot of economic and welfare development in the country."

One interviewee explained why such a vision did not evolve: "In Soviet times, the ministers of education in the republics were statisticians. The Soviet administrative system never anticipated local initiatives. For example, giving initiative to the Baltic republics could be dangerous. Therefore, the system was very simple. All decisions were made in the All-Union Ministry and the regional ministries were dumbly implementing what was ordered from Moscow. When Ukraine announced independence, all the short-sighted implementers got full freedom and began to implement whatever might have come to their mind. However, given that they were once recruited and promoted as implementers only, nothing good was coming to their mind".

To reproduce the Soviet pretense of equity, the neo-Soviets adopted the bureaucratic template of assigning the same heavy workload and the same low pay-scale across all universities. As one professor remarked: "The system of competition and grant-giving is absent; instead there is the Soviet-style approach of 'a little bit to everyone'". Another respondent pointed out: "The resource distribution is organized hierarchically, and in reality there is very weak competition. Hence, some irrelevant research projects are subsidized." One professor explains the neo-Soviet evolution of the hierarchical distribution in the following way: "At the moment, we have an equitable distribution of resources. We finance those who do not need money, but cannot finance those who need money. In my opinion, this distribution principle is wrong. The government made bad decisions from the very beginning. In the early 1990s, we had 140 universities (of three to four accreditation levels), and we had the highest concentration of universities in the entire Soviet Union. At that time, we thought that we did not need larger quantity, but we did need better quality. However, the process went wrong: there emerged private universities and new universities in small cities, hence public financing, which was in fact decreasing, became divided among the larger number of universities. As a result, we now have over 350 universities (and we used to have 140), and among those, two thirds are public universities; this means that the number of the public universities has doubled".

Like in Soviet times, the populist notion of equity did not reflect reality, given that certain rectors built good relations with the Ministry of Education to get a larger piece of the budgetary pie. In the words of an experienced academic: "Today, if you are closer to the ministry and to the minister, or to his deputies, then you can secure good finance. Today, there are no clear criteria of public funding distribution. In fact there are such criteria, but they are very ambiguous. It's very hard to explain why a 10–15 year old university is assigned to train thousands of specialists, and a 100-year old university is assigned to train only 100 specialists in the same specialty. In other words, the system is completely in the mode of manual steering… This is not even the Soviet approach. This is a synthesis of the Soviet system with criminality. This is a criminal system – banditry – synthesized with the Soviet Party system. This is a terrible synthesis".

9.4 Institutional-Level Challenges

The neo-Soviet universities were turned into a vertical hierarchy, which took powers away from individual professors and cancelled out some of the early post-independence gains. One of the professors argued that "in Soviet times, there was not as much demand for reports". Professors felt that they had to fill in numerous forms to communicate their needs, or report on any course changes, no matter how minor. One participant argued that they were saddled with "Stakhanovism-kind of workload norms, followed by excessive bureaucratic paperwork". Moreover, the neo-Soviets insisted on actual paperwork, despite the time and effort-saving

potential of modern information technology. A researcher at the National Lviv University was among others who expressed similar complaints: "The question is: can't we fill in these forms online? Why do we need to post them at the Main Post Office? … Who will read such volumes of paper? It's impossible to review them efficiently and effectively…There are requirements that these need the signature of the Minister, and a fresh stamp. But we live in the twenty-first century and information technologies allow us to make process improvements. However, you have to make visits to Kyiv because everyone does so, and then you have to walk around the ministerial offices – really very humiliating and redundant." Another professor echoed: "people sink in the papers. Nobody knows who really needs them, you fill in all kinds of circulations, letters, references… and most interestingly, nobody really needs this".

The universities however had little choice and no satisfactory means to challenge the authorities. One professor argued that the Ukrainian system did not really depart from the Soviet model at all: "there is a complete monopoly…. The higher education system in Ukraine, is hyper-centralized. In formal terms, the law defines the autonomy of higher education institutions, but it provides no support academically, financially, or administratively. Moreover, in the last 2 years we witnessed a tendency to curb academic freedom and university autonomy". As one interviewee put it, "there is a need for decentralization: the rector should not be the owner of the university; the minister should not be the owner of the educational system. There should be academic freedom." Hence, the decentralization of education must become the imperative. Another participant said: "I think that the Ukrainian university is an interesting post-Soviet hybrid. It has a non-transparent system of decision-making… There is no effective accountability". Indeed, the increasingly opaque governance facilitated new levels of corruption at universities. According to one study participant, Ukrainian universities awarded thousands of fake doctorate (candidates of science) degrees to officials across municipal, regional and national government agencies. The granting of degrees was often seen as an opportunity to curry favour and create powerful protégés in the government. Given that the award criteria were regulated by a governmental agency, universities often did not feel responsibility for the legitimacy of such degrees. Plenty of theses were fabricated, plagiarized, and recycled by commercial agents. Moreover, as one professor noted, "clans, acquaintances, nepotism" became a key fixture in higher education, while payments for passing grades became commonplace. As corruption took hold and the "diploma factory" churned out more fake degrees, Ukrainian higher education institutions acquired a notorious reputation at home and abroad.

Asked about the powers of individual professors in challenging this state of affairs, many interviewees expressed skepticism about the discretionary roles of academics. One professor took on a defensive position: "This is not a military organization – you can express your thoughts… more so in private conversations. If faculty members want to express their thoughts, they can do so by forming a civic organization. But at the institutional level, such thoughts are not discussed; only the issues regarding how the received directives should be implemented. So if there is something irrelevant, this does not become a subject for discussions or petitions."

Another professor was more straightforward: “Why would I express my opinion in the department meetings? In order to have someone come and audit me afterward? We have massive layoffs; if I complain about anything, I will be number one on the redundancy list; they will find thousands of explanations [to justify the firing]. Clearly, professors will not express their thoughts to department heads; department heads will not speak to deans or to the rector. The only way out is to become financially independent, not to be afraid of losing the job, and then to express your own opinion”.

Many professors interviewed for this study were deeply skeptical about the prospects for change, even during the radical upheaval of the Revolution of Dignity, which is when most of the cited conversations took place. The Soviet legacy had left a mark on people, instilling them with a sense of fear, argued one local observer: “Everyone is afraid of the rector. The rector is afraid of the minister. That is how it works from the bottom to the top. It is impossible to make your opinion go far”. Some referred to the prevailing “schizophrenic” approach to communication, where on the one hand big public declarations would be made in favor of a more humanistic and democratic style of governing higher education, while on the other hand, directives would be handed down from the top without serious consultations on the ground. The consultations that did take place, would be conducted in the Soviet style: with a ready-made plan that offered a solution convenient to the central bureaucracy presented for rubber stamp approval by “the masses”. Even the younger generation of reformers who started off by trying to change the system, would more often than not succumb to bureaucratese and red tape once they moved up in the ranks. The desire to maintain their status and keep the momentum of social mobility going often kept the former radicals from further disruptive approaches.

Many professors expressed concern about the significant deterioration of the quality of education as a result of corrupt practices and control of resource distribution by a swelling kleptocracy, not particularly interested in improvements. For example, respondents claim that emerging fields of science have been simply stifled by under-resourcing and fear of innovation. One participant argued: “We need to restructure science; identify new trends: for example, complimentary sciences, physics and medicine. Unfortunately, we don’t have biophysics. I know this because I had a student who wanted to take biophysics. He had to go to Moscow, to the Moscow Physics and Technology Institute; there they had created biophysics and he studied there. It’s extremely difficult to swiftly create these kinds of specializations here. Dogmas are terrible in our Ministry. It’s impossible to create new specialisms. You need to go through God knows how many experts. Terribly difficult, while modern times require quick changes”.

The inertia in Ukrainian universities has led a growing number of students to leave for studies abroad. Outbound mobility significantly outweighed inbound flows between 1998 and 2012, with more students choosing Europe over Russia, which had been the traditional destination (see Appendix 1). “Young people want a quality education. They want to have more than a diploma. They want a diploma of a European standard. We need to aim at issuing such diplomas. Can we do that? Theoretically, yes; practically, this is a very challenging proposition. Consider only

what it would imply to teach courses in German, English or Polish", argued a university instructor.

The lack of confidence was understandable, given that the Ministry of Education mandated the learning of foreign languages in Soviet style: i.e., teaching the theory of languages, but not practical communication. This type of conservatism seeped into other areas of university life, discouraging innovation and stifling creativity by an insistence on outmoded practices, notwithstanding their practicality in current circumstances. Although there have been some formal innovations (e.g., changes in the degree structures, as required by the Bologna process), most respondents felt that such "innovations" were simply blind imitations or mirages, similar to those that were adopted immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. "For example, the university transformed the Department of Atheism into a History of Religions department, and changed the names of the courses; but in fact, the nature of the department [and of the teaching] remains the same. The Department of Scientific Communism was transformed into the Department of Political Studies. The same people lecture on Marxist-Leninist philosophy, although they don't claim this openly any more". More profound changes would be impossible to make without dismantling the old institutional culture and hierarchy. One professor proposed the following: "In my opinion, the key reform would be to change the rigid hierarchical system. We are talking not only about subordination to the Ministry of Education and university autonomy, although this is very important, but about the internal structure of universities, where we have academic departments that report to faculties, which in turn report to deputy rectors, of whom there are many in any university and who are governed by rectors, and then rectors are controlled by the minister. That is the pyramid. Only in certain cases, when the 'pharaoh' is alive and kicking at the top, is there a chance that the pyramid will work and will not collapse. However, we have had bad luck with pharaohs. The pyramid has become a tomb, and it is not a living organism anymore".

9.5 The Professoriate

Many participants in the study explained the neo-Soviet re-emergence and continuity of "the Soviet legacy" by referring to "the problem of mind-set". Some mentioned "old stereotypes" and "inertia from Soviet times," which they claim dominate in academic circles. Some argued that it was "very hard to change the teacher's psychology". For the Soviets, education often implied a literal "knowledge transfer," so a likely scenario is that: "the university introduces interactive methodology, but teachers instead demand from students information regurgitation; they don't develop critical thinking and don't organize the educational process for experiential learning".

One professor reflected on the continuing impact of the Soviet legacy in the following way:

> This may sound banal that we need to get rid of Soviet style or even a post-Soviet style. However, the style of communication and education remains to be Soviet. The teacher continues to be a sage, who knows better, who does not make mistakes, who is infallible. He consequently maintains a superior position to that of a student. Why is that Soviet? Because the old Soviet saying: 'When I am the boss, you should be an idiot; when you are the boss, I will be an idiot,' still applies one hundred percent, and I think it will be most difficult to overcome

Another difficulty is that the hierarchical system essentially killed the sense of collegiality in academic circles. None among the participants referred in their interviews to any important work done by their colleagues. Some department heads were praised, if they succeeded in acquiring funds for their departments. Poorly financed, academic departments were unable to base recruitment on competitive meritocracy. One professor claimed that, "our department has 54 people, while in reality only 8–10 people work there". Some departments engaged a large number of adjuncts on fractional positions (e.g., one fourth of the position) to recycle the same course taught across several universities. Accountability and collegiality were further eroded when academic performance was evaluated on the basis of the average number of publications per department, rather than on individual output.

Not only was collegiality lacking, but professors were skeptical of each other's work, having an insider's understanding of how corruption works, and just how pervasive it is inside the academic walls (e.g., how doctoral degrees were awarded, or how papers were published in commercial journals). As in the old days, some Ukrainian professors were distrustful of domestic publications and relied more on those coming from "recognized" (primarily by post-Soviet academics) centers of excellence in Moscow (often ignoring the cases of corruption and plagiarism widely reported there). As one professor explained:

> I review modern articles very carefully to make sure there are no fabricated data there. Another point, where it was published. If it's in Moscow or St. Petersburg, then I have more trust. If elsewhere, I am more critical about the data.

Meanwhile, most respondents explained that they had limited opportunities for access to western journals and data-bases, as the ministry regularly withdraw institutional funds, discriminating against "non-Soviet block" sources.

Teachers did not place a lot of trust in the norms and assessment of academic performance in the modern Ukrainian university. One professor argued: "When we ask whether teachers and researchers have a lot of influence on their universities, we have to remember two things. First, universities are headed by the Ministry of Education, and regardless of our self-governance, we always confront a glass ceiling that we are unable to break. Second, the idea of institutional autonomy was never cultivated during the years of Ukraine's independence. Many people regard their place in the university in the same way that they would feel about manning a machine in a factory or working a service counter: i.e., 'My work begins here and ends there, and I have no idea where it comes from and where it goes to'. In other words, there are very few who raise their head high enough in order to see and think about where we belong in the education cycle and in society".

Many study participants were unable to see how innovations could work under such circumstances. Professors argued that students had no ambition to study foreign languages and apply for study abroad programs. Some attributed the apathy to a general lack of academic aspirations, given that the academic profession was unattractive to younger generations: salaries were very low; the work was regimented and overloaded with bureaucratic routine; tensions with the dominant group of retirement-age faculty were often strongly pronounced. De-motivated to institute change, some teachers would "teach using notes written sometime in the last century", one participant noted, adding that, "it would be good if those were original and not plagiarized notes, and if they were not trying to present them as the absolute truth." With a teacher-turned-bureaucrat at the helm of a hierarchical system in the classroom, students were often afraid to engage in discussions or question what was being taught. One professor recounted: "I tell my students, 'if you don't like how they teach, why you keep quiet? You are not the Leninist youth organization members anymore, you are citizens of the New Ukraine. Tell Mr. X and Mr. Y: what is this that you are teaching? This is outdated knowledge.' But they keep quiet. We were taught to keep quiet; we rarely demand".

Meanwhile, innovations such as the newly introduced testing system (ostensibly created to enhance transparency and fairness) were perceived as a threat by many in the academic community. The fear was justified by the institutional bureaucracy's constant efforts to exert more control over individual teachers. One professor expressed a widely-held sentiment:

> What our higher education lacks is freedom. Freedom for the rank-and-file teachers. I don't understand why managers should define the framework of my assessment of students' learning outcomes.

Bureaucratic control became more pervasive with advance of technologies. One participant argued that mobile technologies made things worse – whereas in the past subordinates used to take personal responsibility for completing a task independently after it was assigned at a departmental meeting, modern mobile technology empowered them to abandon this responsibility by allowing them to constantly consult with their supervisors on how to implement the task and avoid any mistakes. "These are very dangerous tendencies", argued the participant.

Hierarchical dependence also discouraged some professors from applying for competitive grants or seeing competition as something positive. Many of them learned that obtaining and implementing a grant involves heavy bureaucratic work, requiring lots of accounting reports and hierarchical approvals, which could take a significant amount of time away from their research and teaching. Moreover, many university researchers were unable to overcome their previous dependence on public subsidies. One scientist compared dependence on grants from the military-industrial complex to "a drug-addiction". While these subsidies had dried up after the collapse of the Soviet Union, very few professors acquired the skills necessary to reach out and secure funding from alternative sponsors. What complicated matters was that, in the highly bureaucratic institutions, the rectors and their teams would only support projects that could "feed their executive teams". As a result,

university bureaucracies disregarded many projects that provided no substantive subsidies to their administrative apparatuses.

9.5.1 *Deconstructing the Neo-Soviet Legacy, While Embracing a Neo-Liberal Future?*

Ukraine is not the only country in the world where post-colonial dependencies produced a sense of revulsion to any new forms of power relations, whether they be generated nationally, regionally or globally. Many post-colonial governments chose complacency, resistance and disengagement from competition in fear of re-colonization (Jodhka and Newman 2007; Shahjahan 2012). The 2014 Revolution of Dignity overthrew the national government that tried to re-colonize the country through neo-Soviet political and economic dependences. Millions of Ukrainians, including large numbers of university students and professors, fought for freedom and a decisive break with the past, with hundreds losing their lives to bring down a corrupt regime controlled by Moscow.

On the heels of the "people power" victory, Ukrainian higher education reformers called for swift action on the long overdue demands for university autonomy, development of a modern academic profession, internationalization of academic programs, and the creation of stronger university-industry linkages. In July 2014, after an intense campaign by civic activists and progressive education leaders, the old Ukrainian parliament passed a new law on higher education, geared at bringing about systemic changes that would alter the country's post-Soviet educational agencies to meet new societal expectations. However, the level of lobbying against the passage of the reform-oriented legislation made it abundantly clear that new rounds of struggle would be needed to bring down the corrupt institutions, their governance structures, and organizational cultures within a vast system of 800 higher education institutions serving almost 2.5 million students. In addition to sweeping structural transformations, profound attitudinal changes would be required to address barriers to progress and facilitate change across the country's diverse cultural, linguistic and political landscape.

Embracing neo-liberal reforms, as implemented elsewhere, seemed to many like the only way out, insofar as decentralization and generation of sustainable local budgets was concerned (see examples of similar efforts elsewhere: Mok 2008; Kwiek and Maassen 2012). The professors involved in this study argued that Ukraine had to introduce a competitive grant system in higher education and empower individual academics for change, in this way disrupting individual and institutional complacency. While the new Ukrainian Law on Higher Education allowed for greater institutional autonomy, real change could only take place if the devolution of powers, would move to the level of academic departments, for example through Responsibility Center Budgeting/Responsibility Center Management (see the RCB/RCM concept explained by Lang 1999). This would meet the

expectations expressed by one of the professors in the following way: "There is no need for this large number of bosses who sign something, permit something. When you have to go somewhere, for example, you need to get a signature from the dean, vice-rector, financial office and registrar. All this is redundant; it wastes time. We need to simplify all the procedures, as they do elsewhere." The decentralized system of governance would move academic leadership to the level of individual scientists, who would confront the realities of local and global stakeholder demands, while seeking grants, sponsorships, alumni donations, successful student intakes, etc. at home and abroad. The academic fields of study, especially in professional education, would then be able to shape the quality of education on offer, as well as pubic perception of their institutional brands, by becoming responsive to changes in various professions and the shifting demands of employers, markets and students, which necessitate continuous [curriculum] innovation.

To begin reforms, Ukraine needs a driving force of ambitious, resourceful, risk-taking and innovation-oriented professors, administrators and students, who would be strong enough to confront local bureaucracy and break the boundaries for new linkages with new economy. Alas, a critical contingent of such people fails to immediately materialize. As elsewhere in post-colonial contexts, the legacy of the Ukrainian higher education system engenders a cumulative disadvantage rooted in disenfranchisement, apathy and cross-generational mistrust, which impedes empowerment and progress. Moreover, the public has acquired a high degree of skepticism about domestic education, regarding it as a hotbed of corruption, dogmas and barriers to innovation. With this reputation, universities find it impossible to receive priority consideration in the rapidly shrinking public budget. Ukraine aspires to rapid EU accession, but lacks the conditions enjoyed by many European countries: e.g., sufficient tax payments, strong democratic institutions, and balanced market mechanisms. Ukraine has nothing of the kind, given that the rudiments of these conditions, which began to develop after the collapse of the Soviet Union, were in various ways corrupted by the neo-Soviets. While in most places universities would be the logical sources of knowledge, skills and innovation for building such conditions, in Ukraine they lack the adequate powers and legitimacy at a critical time.

To promote a decisive break from the previous norms of academic work, the Ukrainian reformers seek international sponsorship, which is indispensible given an economic crisis and the war with Russia. The new government has urged for a wider student exchange and more intensive research collaborations with the EU counterparts. However, the EU and other foreign sponsors took a scrupulously critical stance to evaluating and endorsing donor opportunities, in view of negative experiences with corruption in the previous decades. There seems to be a newfound realization on the part of donors that excessive trust in the past allowed the neo-Soviets to benefit from foreign donations. At the same time, the previously funded projects often demonstrated an inability to secure support for sustainable development from local sources, failing to be duplicated widely. The Bologna process and other innovative imports were largely "faked" and remained under-implemented. Moreover, foreign sponsorship was frequently hijacked by the key implementers of the

neo-Soviet revisions, who were responsible for the much maligned bureaucratic resurgence and kleptocratic order. In view of these failures, and the loss of public trust, new international partnerships are argued to require a totally new approach.

Disruptive innovation strategies in post-revolutionary Ukraine call for large scale and long-term engagement of foreign experts in Ukrainian universities to stimulate local students and the young professoriate to adopt radically different forms of inquiry and learning in higher education. These foreign experts are expected to become internal reform monitors, "movers and shakers", in addition to playing traditional roles of foreign language skill development, as well as program and course innovators. The experts are expected to be administrators, as much as academics, in order to induce far-reaching changes in the organization and management of learning processes, as much as in the curriculum and research project development. The proponents of disruptive innovation in Ukraine have also began to seek out more radical projects such as establishment of international branch campuses of some renowned global research universities. The new players in the liberalized Ukrainian higher education market would change standards of teaching and learning as well as retain ambitious, open-minded and talented scholars and students, who are looking for opportunities to teach and study in international environments.

There is a widely held belief that local universities will benefit from helping the local economy to become stronger, as a strong economy means more contributions to the growth of universities. As one professor involved in the study remarked:

> robust university-business linkages are vitally needed. We need to create optimal stimuli for small and medium enterprises [to develop]. As soon as the business environment is more vibrant, there will be more dynamic processes in education. We can observe this in relation to a variety of initiatives, whether they be one offs, mid- or long-term. This will ensure the attractiveness of our country to investors. First, business; second, social lifts for youth.

While neo-liberal reforms present the most obvious opportunity to get rid of the Soviet legacy, Ukrainians run a risk of setting their expectations too high, developing new types of dependencies, and promoting uncritical elites that will erect new hierarchical and stratified forms and norms of higher education. The reforms have a low chance of succeeding in the absence of crucial conversations about such risks, as well as mitigation of any new Stakhanovism in higher education. As the Ukrainian public continues to deal with an imploding economy and low quality education, while overcoming post-colonial complexes of inferiority, genuine empowerment through a local "academic revolution" will be not be possible without finding, conceptualizing and promoting the success stories of local professors' individual and collective achievements in innovative science, as well as expressions of academic freedom in the years of Soviet and neo-Soviet repressions. The renewed Ministry of Education needs to become a central hub that will recognize, share and celebrate such achievements, as well as reward new local initiatives for quality improvement, globally-recognized standards, and innovative learning. Belief in local initiative, courage and boundary-breaking is crucial for far-reaching transformations.

9.6 Conclusion

To implement and sustain reforms in the long run, the Ukrainian authorities have to disinvest themselves of the fallacy of centrality that propelled the powers of ministerial or institutional bureaucracies, and diminished those of individual scholars. Many believe that the 2014 Revolution of Dignity has created an immense opportunity for the ultimate eradication of the neo-Soviet bureaucracy and the old post-colonial regime. However, the real reforms in higher education are yet to come. Sustainable results will become feasible and visible once professors and students put aside their doubts and focus on acquiring more independence and freedom, while assuming responsibility for the future of their universities and the society.

Appendix 1: Dynamics of the Ukrainian Higher Education, 1998–2012

	1998	2004	2008	2012
Tertiary enrolment:				
ISCED 5B	526,362	592,917	441,336	357,033
ISCED 5 A	1,109,982	1,843,831	2,372,462	1,997,504
ISCED 6	20,645	28,326	33,915	36,452
Participation rate (%):				
ISCED 5B	31.7	24.0	15.4	14.9
ISCED 5 A	66.9	74.8	83.3	83.5
ISCED 6	1.2	1.15	1.19	1.52
Private university enrolment (%)	–	8.2	15.2	11.3
Student-teacher ratios	[13]	13.2	14.2	12.0
Total outbound students	13,123	24,988	32,628	39,627
Outbound flow to North America and Western Europe	4811	12,509	13,874	15,687
Outbound flow to Russia	[4,760]	6841	12,101	[12,805]
Inbound students from Europe	–	[4770]	5772	3885
Inbound students from Russia	–	[3673]	[4734]	2990
Total population of Ukraine (million)	50	47.4	46.4	45.5
GDP per capita (PPP$ current international)	3008	5229	7264	7298

Source: UNESCO 2014. ISCED 5B are programs awarding associate (pre-Bachelor) degrees; ISCED 5A are programs awarding Bachelor and Master degrees; ISCED 6 are programs awarding doctoral degrees

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