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6. PARTISAN POLITICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

How Does the Left–Right Divide of Political Parties Matter in Higher Education Policy in Western Europe?

INTRODUCTION

Political parties are a key institution in modern democracies. Through representing their electorate they aggregate interests, offer coherent policy packages and when holding government offices are expected to shape policy accordingly (Klingemann, Hofferbert, & Budge, 1994). Thus, the participation of different parties in government can be one reason for policy differences both within and between countries. There is a rich body of literature in political science dedicated to the influence of the ideological background of a party on its policy positions and the resulting differences in outputs. In this literature, the number of existing studies on education and especially higher education policy is rather limited (e.g. Ansell, 2010; Boix, 1997; Busemeyer, 2007, 2009; Busemeyer, Franzmann, & Garritzmann, 2013; Castles, 1989; Jensen, 2011; Rauh, Kirchner, & Kappe, 2011; Schmidt, 1996, 2007; Voegtle, Knill, & Dobbins, 2011) and therefore represents an area where there is still ground to be covered.[1]

Higher education traditionally has been a more marginal policy topic that gained more importance in the last fifteen years, especially in the light of discussions around the knowledge economy, European integration and other arenas of international policy coordination (Gornitzka, 2008; Gornitzka, Maassen, Olsen, & Stensaker, 2007; Maassen et al., 2012; Maassen & Stensaker, 2011). The growth in political saliency of higher education led to a situation where it is treated less special and at the same time is expected to deliver problem solutions for other policy areas (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2011; Maassen et al., 2012). Furthermore, higher education is also debated in the context of different policy frames, including welfare as well as economic policy and thus offers possibilities for parties to pursue (re-)framing strategies. Therefore, higher education is not just any other policy field, but instead shows unique characteristics and dynamics that call for detailed analysis.

Whereas in other policy areas the link between the ideological position of a governing party or coalition and the expected policy output is rather clear (e.g. Bodet, 2013; Hibbs, 1977; Klitgaard & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2013), the existing studies concerning higher education policy show two disagreements. First, two groups of studies from the area of comparative politics deliver contradicting results and explanations for partisan dynamics in higher education policy. One group of

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authors argues that, in line with the expansion of the welfare state, parties of the left should increase public funding to higher education as a mean of redistribution, long term social mobility and thus support of their core electorate (e.g. Boix, 1997), or to cater to new groups of voters in the middle-class (Busemeyer, 2009). Second, the opposing group claims that due to the fact that access to higher education is skewed to the more wealthy part of the population, it is more likely that right-wing parties increase public spending on higher education (Rauh et al., 2011).

Further, a third strand of literature concludes that instead of being driven by the ideological pre-disposition of the party, differences in higher education policies are mainly influenced by institutional factors. While some studies see institutions as intervening or conditional factors under which partisan influence might take place (Ansell, 2008, 2010), or expect certain path dependencies stemming from policy legacies (Busemeyer et al., 2013), the most drastic version of the argument expects institutional setups to overshadow partisan influence (Iversen & Stephens, 2008; Jensen, 2011). Thus, the existing literature disagrees on the direction and rationale for partisan influence in this area as well as on the question whether agency or structure can be seen as the main determinant of differences in policy outputs.

This chapter takes these disagreements in the literature as a starting point to critically revisit the findings of the key studies on the connection between political parties and higher education policy. The main interest is to use the critique of the existing studies and their conceptual shortcomings as a basis to create hypotheses that allow to study both the differences in partisan positions as well as the partisan impact on higher education policy, while accounting for institutional factors as intervening variables. The paper will make a case for a more complex relationship between political parties, partisan positions, institutional settings and higher education policy outputs, than offered in the literature so far. In doing so the hypotheses proposed will aim to explain both differences between political parties but also between countries. For this purpose the paper incorporates approaches from comparative politics as well as work from political economy. Following the argument made by Busemeyer et al. (2013) this article will focus on countries in Western Europe, due to their similar socio-cultural and historical background. Finally, the paper will offer a research design with which the hypotheses can be put to a test.

The starting point of this paper is to explain the partly conflicting results of existing studies on the partisan effects in higher education policy. While addressing this, the paper will cover two aspects of partisan dynamics in higher education policy and thereby argue for two sets of dependent variables for further research. On the one hand, it addresses conceptual considerations on partisan differences in higher education policy positions, as portrayed for example in election manifestos, representing the parties' input into the policy process. Here the interest is to identify whether parties actually differ in their proclaimed political goals concerning higher education. On the other hand, the paper will cover partisan differences in policy outputs. Here the focus will be on the question, whether governments composed of different political parties lead to differing outputs and if

so how the relationship between the left-right orientation of the parties in government and several indicators of higher education policy can be described. While addressing both questions the role of the existing higher education system, the variety of capitalism and the electoral system will also be examined. So the question to ask is not only: Do political parties matter in higher education policy? But also if they matter and how do they matter? Do they offer different policy options, use different policy instruments and/or lead to differing policy outputs?

By combining the more actor focused comparative politics literature – especially the sociologically oriented cleavage theory – with the more structure and institution focused varieties of capitalism approach, this paper includes two main explanatory approaches to policy differences and through this tries to uncover the conflicts around the allocation of values in higher education policy (Qvortrup, 2012).

The chapter will start by addressing more in detail why higher education policy is a policy field well suited to study party effects. Next, the socio-economic partisan conflicts on higher education policy will be investigated. Furthermore, the cultural conflicts on the materialist / post-materialist (Inglehart, 1984) or manager / socio-cultural specialist (Kriesi, 1998, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2006) cleavage line will be discussed, focusing on the steering mode of the government used towards the higher education system. The influence of the existing variety of capitalism (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Iversen & Stephens, 2008) on the partisan conflict will be the focus of the next section of the paper. Finally, a suggestion for the empirical assessment of the hypotheses will be presented, and in the conclusion the question how this contribution advances the broader scientific debate on partisan policy influences will be discussed.

HIGHER EDUCATION – A MORE SALIENT BUT LESS SPECIAL POLICY FIELD

Higher education is a policy field that underwent numerous changes in the last decades, leading to a situation where it also became a more important policy area. Beginning with the massification of higher education in the 70s and culminating in today's debates around the knowledge economy, the pact between higher education and society has been object to changes leading to a plurality of belief systems around higher education (Gornitzka et al., 2007). A new pact between higher education and society often takes the form of a societal contract. It regulates the relationship between the state and its universities and gives higher education the institutionalised governance environment needed to produce the kind of outcomes expected by society (for a detailed discussion on the development of the societal contract for higher education see the contribution by Peter Maassen in this volume). The pact is negotiated to a large extent within the political arena and between parties competing in elections with different platforms and visions for higher education (Busemeyer et al., 2013, p. 533ff).

One part of this renegotiation is connected with the fact that contrary to primary and secondary education, which in all industrialised democracies have a participation rate of nearly 100%, higher education is not a public good accessed equally by all citizens in all countries and thus has a higher potential to be used as a

measure of redistribution (Ansell, 2010). The changes in higher education since the 70s also led to a re-framing of the policy field. While in the decades before massification, higher education was in the first place an elite issue, it transformed during the massification of the 70s to a topic debated in the frame of the welfare state and policies of social mobility (Maassen et al., 2012; Scott, 1995). In a second more recent process, the debate with respect to the knowledge economy lead to a growing discussion around higher education as a tool to support economic growth, innovation and economic competitiveness (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2011). At the same time higher education is more and more expected to function as a transversal problem solver for other policy areas (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2011), again leading to more saliency in political debates.

The processes of re-framing of higher education can be regarded as an opportunity for political parties to shift the debate as well as their position on issues related to it by debating it in a different policy frame. Through such a process a party can highlight different aspects of a policy without losing many supporters by formally changing the core of its political position, simply by addressing it in a different setting (Daviter, 2007). Thus, this possibility to debate higher education, in for example the context of welfare policy or economic policy, gives parties more room to manoeuvre.

Higher education also witnessed a growing Europeanisation especially since the late 90s and the rise of higher education as an integral part of the attempt to strengthen Europe's economic competitiveness (Gornitzka, 2008; Maassen & Stensaker, 2011; Musselin, 2005). These developments created a situation in which higher education policy became a more important, but at the same time less special topic, being governed increasingly in the same way as other public sectors (Olsen, 2007). One of the results of this is the emergence of different approaches to higher education steering (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000). Furthermore, the growing Europeanisation of higher education policy led to more inter-governmental policy coordination, especially in the frame of the Bologna Process. While this process could lead to policy convergence, policy differences are still visible (Voegtle et al., 2011) and convergence seems only to be possible if among other things the preferences of the governments towards higher education are rather similar (Heinze & Knill, 2008).

Higher education is a special and different policy area that recently saw a rise in political saliency and international coordination. It is a policy area in need of more detailed analysis, due to the fact that it is more fluid and can be discussed in multiple policy frames. These specific characteristics of higher education policy make it an appropriate area to study party positions and their impact on policy outputs, however, the findings will also help to get a better understanding of the general relationship between partisan positions, institutions and policy outputs.

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

To answer how political parties position themselves on higher education policy, one has to start with the general idea of the formation of political parties. One key

explanation is that parties develop according to opportunities stemming from the distribution of societal cleavages and the corresponding political views within a country (Peters, 2005 p. 132). It is expected that parties, in their attempt to win votes and offices, offer distinct programmatic choices, which are both appropriate to their electorate's needs and their own ideological characteristics (Schmidt, 1996). This idea is also captured in the classic works that conceptually structure the political space along cleavage lines (Bartolini & Mair, 2007; Inglehart, 1984; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan, 2009).

While Lipset and Rokkan (1967) identified four main cleavage lines and Inglehart (1984) expanded their concept by adding a fifth, there is a wide agreement within the literature that today's political conflicts in Western European democracies are mainly structured along two of the cleavage lines, namely the socio-economic cleavage and a cultural value cleavage (Kriesi, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2006).[2] Especially in higher education policy following the secular realignment (Knutsen, 2013) the conflicts between the church and the state, as well as the primary and secondary sector have lost their importance with the existence of matured mass public higher education systems in Western Europe (Walczak, van der Brug, & de Vries, 2012).[3]

Existing literature on partisan influence on higher education policy focuses almost exclusively on a left-right distinction based on the socio-economic conflict dimension. However, using the structuring power of class voting as an assumption when analysing higher education policy introduces some problems. First of all, one problem of a class voting assumption in higher education policy is that it is less likely due to the educational bias in politics. As Bovens and Wille (2009, 2010) have shown modern political parties are run by and for the well-educated part of the population. Less educated members of society are less likely to get involved in politics, especially in participatory ways that would allow them to actively shape policy outside of elections. Furthermore, their study shows that citizens with a lower educational background care significantly less about education policy. The problem of politicians not sharing the same personal background as their electorate and thus probably having different preferences can be bridged through the ability of these politicians to nevertheless defend the interests of members of a different class. However, politicians are better in doing so on older, highly politicised left-right issues than on newer, less politicised non left-right issues (Bovens & Wille, 2010, p. 409. This calls for the question whether higher education as a policy issue is old and politicised enough for politicians to be able to act as advocates for underrepresented groups.

On the one hand, the rise in saliency of higher education policy also made it a more politicised topic, but on the other hand the position of the policy area more in the centre of political debates is a new one. Furthermore, the educational bias of different electorates has also an effect on how far-sighted their policy preferences are. While well educated citizens perceive longer causal chains linked to policy packages offered by parties, less educated citizens prefer instant advantages and rely on short causal chains when seeking for rewards for their votes (Kitschelt, 2000, p. 857).

The educational bias might also lead to a second problem. It could create a mismatch between the party and its electorate with the party focusing on education as an important policy, while the electorate is not opposed to the plans but doesn't have it high on its personal agenda (Bovens & Wille, 2010). As long as the party would also address the issues, which are on top of the personal political agendas of their electorate, the mismatch between party and electorate wouldn't have negative consequences for the party. This "*representation from above*" (Bovens & Wille, 2009, p. 411) would allow to use the left-right divide and the class voting assumption to study partisan differences, as long as the focus is on the relation between the parties and not between the voters and the parties.

Furthermore, studies on individual electoral behaviour show that although the left-right divide lost some of its capacity to structure political preferences since the early 2000s, it is still an ideological core issue summarising diverse political positions (Walczak et al., 2012). This holds true especially for sophisticated voters with a high level of education since they are more prone to show strong partisan views (Dettrey & Palmer, 2013). Since party systems are comparatively stable institutions and also determine the behaviour of parties participating in them (Peters, 2005, p. 127), it is still rather likely to find the left-right divide on the level of political parties, even though this might be the reason for them to be de-aligned with parts of their electorate. Since this paper is not addressing the micro-foundations and voters' attitudes towards higher education policy and their reflection in partisan activities but rather focuses on the level of political parties, their positions and the consequences of their involvement in government, the application of the left-right divide as it is done in the existing studies seems reasonable even if a mismatch between the voters' preferences and the parties exists.

While there is an intensive debate on the applicability of class voting, it is argued that the importance of cultural values and the respective cleavage is growing in comparison to socio-economic class conflicts (Bovens & Wille, 2010, p. 416). Therefore, this paper will use both the socio-economic and the cultural cleavage to explain differences in party positions and policy outputs in higher education policy. By incorporating the cultural cleavage and linking it to higher education steering, including partisan approaches to public sector reforms, a more nuanced picture of partisan dynamics in higher education policy will be possible.

The Re-distributive Characteristics of Higher Education Policy

The conflicts around socio-economic issues are characterised by the question whether a party favours economic redistribution or not. It is expected that the political left caters to their electorate by favouring more re-distribution, while the political right is expected to protect its electorate from such measures. One possible policy instrument for a targeted re-distribution is publicly funded education. As Ansell formulates it: "Thus, education spending is a powerful tool that political actors manipulate for their own redistributive ends […]" (Ansell, 2010, p. 3).[4] Since primary and secondary education have become nearly universal, especially in

OECD countries, the conflicts in the field of education policy have shifted (Iversen & Stephens, 2008). While discussions around secondary education focus more on the public/private divide, debates around access to education and general expansion are increasingly connected to higher education.

Most of the existing studies on higher education in the field of comparative politics capture the re-distributive effect by linking the ideological composition of the government to changes in the amount of public spending in the area of education (e.g. Boix, 1997; Busemeyer, 2007; Castles, 1989; Castles & Obinger, 2007; Schmidt, 2007). One part of this group of studies finds strong links between the participation of left parties in government and higher public spending on (higher) education (Boix, 1997; Castles, 1989). The main argument here is that by spending more public money and expanding the provision of publicly subsidised higher education parties of the political left can increase the participation of their own electorate in higher education and offer them social upward mobility (Ansell, 2008, 2010).

At first this argument seems intuitive and fits well with the general literature on the welfare state that expects parties of the left to favour more public spending (Esping-Andersen, 1985; Hibbs, 1977; Huber, Ragin, & Stephens, 1993). However, there are two problems that need to be addressed. First, the implicit link between increasing public higher education spending and automatically enlarging access to higher education is not a given fact. One could imagine a government spending more money on higher education without enlarging access but for example, increasing per student funding and thus the quality of higher education instead. In this case the additional public funds would not lead to more re-distribution. Further, it is also possible to enlarge access to higher education without increased public spending. Instead a government could opt for more private higher education spending or could refrain from any additional funding thus decreasing per student funding and with this deteriorating the quality of higher education (Plümper & Schneider, 2007). Additionally, access to higher education can be regulated using two mechanisms: through the formal qualification needed as an entrance requirement, and through the number of study places available. Both mechanisms can be influenced politically and when investigating the empirical relation between the partisan composition of a government and shifts in the access to higher education one should address each of them. The two possibilities of de-coupling higher education access from funding call for an analytical approach that catches re-distribution not only over the amount of public money spent but also through the level of access to higher education. Thus, political parties potentially differ not only on the question whether to expand public funding for higher education, but also concerning the partially unrelated question in how far to enlarge access to higher education.

The second problem, connected to the link between the participation of left parties in government and increased public spending on higher education, is that contrary to other instruments of the welfare state, access to higher education is skewed towards the wealthy part of the population and the socio-economic background of students is positively related to their likelihood of attending

university (Lucas, 2001; Raftery & Hout, 1993). This means that additional spending first and foremost is to the benefit of the electorate of political right parties and thus increased public higher education spending through the low personal costs for attending higher education can actually be seen as a tool of reverse re-distribution, as demonstrated by Rauh et al. (2011). This effect makes it more likely for parties of the political right to focus on higher education since it shields their electorate and preserves their social position (Ansell, 2008).

Following the arguments made earlier about framing of a policy and combining it with these observations, one can expect that if parties of the left favour higher education policy, using it as a tool for social mobility, they would debate it in the framework of welfare policy, while parties of the right focusing on higher education policy as a means for reverse redistribution would debate it more in line with economic and innovation policies to align it with their remaining policies. This is also in line with the salience theory on party competition, which stresses that parties address the same issues in their electoral programmes but differ in the way they emphasise or contextualise the problems (Busemeyer et al., 2013, p. 7). Thus the first hypothesis that can be drawn from the literature presented so far is:

Hypothesis 1: If a party of the political left addresses higher education policy in its manifesto it does so in a welfare policy frame; if a party of the political right addresses higher education policy in its manifesto it does so in an economic policy frame.

An approach that further helps to bridge the question, whether higher education is a re-distributive or reverse re-distributive tool is the work by Ben Ansell (2008, 2010). He expects governments to face a trilemma concerning higher education policy, as they can only achieve two out of three possible policy objectives: mass enrolment, full public subsidisation and low total public costs. In his view the combination of these objectives leads to three different models of higher education systems. The first model is characterised by mass enrolment and low public costs, which are ensured through partially privatised funding for higher education. The second one ensures mass enrolment and full public subsidies while creating high costs for the general public, and the last model provides full public subsidies and low public costs through having low enrolment rates (Ansell, 2010). If only two of the three above mentioned objectives can be reached at a time, a party that would like to shift the focus to the neglected objective has to sacrifice one of the other two, thus the existing higher education system can generate path dependencies. An additional way out of the trilemma would be the already mentioned option of increasing access without any additional funding, which can be argued to lead to a deterioration in quality (Plümper & Schneider, 2007). Ansell (2010, p. 173) discusses this problem only very briefly and does not go into a detailed analysis of this option, however it seems a possible strategy, especially in cases where a party caters to voters with a lower educational background, who opt for a short-term improvement and disregard long-term consequences (Kitschelt, 2000).

Based on the structure of the higher education system, the approaches to higher education policy, using it as a re-distributive or a reverse re-distributive tool, will

manifest in diverse ways. Ansell (2010, p. 166) finds a strong conditional effect of partisanship and enrolment levels in higher education with right-wing parties favouring spending in elite higher education systems with less than 33% of gross enrolment rates and left-wing parties favouring it in mass higher education systems with a gross enrolment rate over 50%.[5] Therefore, if a left party is faced with a higher education system that ensures mass enrolment, it is more likely to expand public funding for higher education than a left party facing an elite higher education system. This is due to the fact that in the first case the increase in expenditure has the possibility of having a positive re-distributive effect for the party's electorate, while in the second case enlarging the access to a mass level would be needed before increased spending in higher education would have positive effects on the party's electorate. These arguments call for the inclusion of the existing level of access to higher education as an influencing factor on partisan positions.

If right-wing parties favour a limited access to higher education and left-wing parties refrain from investing into higher education until the level of access has reached a certain level, the question rises, how do higher education systems turn from elite to mass systems, as they did across all industrialised countries (Maassen et al., 2012)? One way of explaining the shift from an elite to a mass system is the aforementioned possibility of enlarging access without increasing higher education spending (Plümper & Schneider, 2007). Another explanation for the move from elite to mass higher education can be drawn from Busemeyer (2009). He argues that left-wing parties might expand public investment in higher education, to reach out to new voter groups in the middle class. To ensure that such a policy wouldn't put too much fiscal burden on their core electorate, left-wing parties might enlarge access to higher education but shift some of the costs for it to the users by introducing or increasing private higher education spending, while at the same time ensuring that this won't serve as a deterrent for the targeted part of the population (Ansell, 2008). Furthermore, also in situations where there is no attempt to increase access to higher education, private education spending can serve as a compensation for cut-backs in public spending (Schmidt, 2007) and partisanship has been found as a strong indicator for the nature of the public-private mix in social policy spending (Castles & Obinger, 2007). As the access to higher education widens, the preference for further expansion of private higher education expenditure shifts from left-wing to right-wing parties, since they use it to deter participation of a greater part of the population to protect their core electorate's labour market advantage (Wolf & Zohlnhöfer, 2009). Based on these considerations the analysis of the re-distributional characteristics of higher education needs to take into account separately changes in the public as well as the private level of funding.

In an analysis of party manifestos Ansell (2010, p. 137) finds an inverse-U relationship between the ideological position of a party on a left-right scale and support for educational expansion, with large centre parties being the strongest proponents of educational expansion while parties on the more extreme ends of the political spectrum are less supportive of expanding education. At the same time, comparing the relationship between party manifestos and policy outputs, such as

higher education spending, he finds that even though there are similarities in rhetoric on educational expansion between social democrats and conservatives, there is considerable conflict concerning the policy output. Based on this argument it is not possible to theoretically pin-point precisely where a given party would position itself, also because of the influence of the institutional setup of a country (Busemeyer, 2007) as well as the concrete level of enrolment (Ansell, 2010) and because the institutional structure generally affects which issues can be politicised and make it on the agenda (Kauko, 2013). However, one can identify areas in which certain parties are most likely to be found.[6]

Since there is no higher education system in Western Europe that could still be characterised as an elite system, the description of partisan preferences in elite systems serves more as an illustration to highlight the partisan positions in mass higher education systems which are at the core of this section.

In an elite system a left-wing party has very limited gains from public funding for higher education, since its electorate doesn't profit from it. Thus the party will opt for stable or decreased public funding (Ansell, 2010).[7] At the same time it will try to expand access to higher education. Contrary to that a party of the political right will try to keep access stable or increase it to the point that its electorate is well covered. It will support increased public funding, while at the same time limit private funding to relieve its electorate of additional fiscal burdens (Ansell, 2010).

Once the higher education system has reached mass enrolment the partisan interests shift. Since now also its main electorate has the chance of directly profiting from higher education, a party of the political left will favour the expansion of access to higher education, while ensuring the quality of higher education through increased public funding (Ansell, 2010). A left-wing party would also decrease private funding for higher education to prevent higher personal costs that would deter members of its electorate to enter universities. Table 1 illustrates this. The darker a given cell is shaded, the more likely it is that the party goes for the respective policy option.

Table 1. Policy position of a left wing party in a mass higher education system

	Decrease	*Stable*	*Increase*
Access			
Public funding			
Private funding			

Hypothesis 2a: If a country has a mass higher education system, then a party of the political left will increase access to higher education, increase public expenditures and limit private expenditures.

A party of the political right will try to keep the access in a mass higher education system either stable or, if possible, limit it. It will also limit public spending on higher education. However, to ensure a stable quality of the higher education system, which is still used by its electorate, a right-wing party will opt for increased private funding (Wolf & Zohlnhöfer, 2009). This gives an advantage to the right-wing party's core electorate, since it will be less deterred from participating in higher education by increased private spending (Coelli, 2009; Heine, Quast, & Spangenberg, 2008).

Table 2. Policy position of a right wing party in a mass higher education system

	Decrease	*Stable*	*Increase*
Access			
Public funding			
Private funding			

Hypothesis 2b: If a country has a mass higher education system, then a party of the political right will keep access to higher education stable, decrease public expenditures and increase private expenditures.

The impact of the level of enrolment to the existing higher education system is one way of explaining cross-country differences in the partisan conflict on higher education. Busemeyer et al. (2013) offer a second explanation. For them policy legacy is the main driving factor of cross-country variation in the partisan conflict on educational expansion, which can be either a consensual topic, or an issue owned by the political left or the political right (Busemeyer et al., 2013, p. 2). Starting from the assumption that the historical conflict between church and state over education was especially intense in countries with strong Catholicism, they link a strong Catholic religious heritage with a slowed down expansion of the educational sector. Together with a strong Christian conservative party in government especially during the post-war period, this led to the creation of conservative welfare states and segregated educational systems, with only a limited access to higher education (Busemeyer et al., 2013, p. 6). In these countries the authors expect parties of the political left to be the main proponents of educational

expansion. Countries with a strong Protestant tradition on the other hand are expected to be more supportive of educational expansion, characterised by comprehensive and state-centred education systems. Here the political right is expected to be the main issue-owner in education (Busemeyer et al., 2013, pp. 2, 6). The idea of a confession-based policy legacies is also in line with the argument that even though the religious cleavage has lost its explanatory power for many policy areas, there are still strong institutional factors influencing policy decisions whose roots can be traced back to the way in which the cleavage was bridged (Knutsen, 2013, p. 181). This is especially true in the area of education (Ansell & Lindvall, 2013; Busemeyer et al., 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to include these institutional factors into an analysis of partisan differences in higher education policy:

Hypothesis 3: If a country has a strong catholic heritage, then the education system is more segregated and thus access to higher education is more limited, therefore parties of the political left in these countries are the main proponents of educational expansion.

Furthermore, Busemeyer et al. (2013, p. 17) also find in their longitudinal analysis that educational expansion becomes more contested from the 1950s until today and at the same time also increasingly an issue owned by the political left. Considering the general move of European higher education systems to higher levels of enrolment, this result is most probably equal to the phenomenon of conditionality of partisan preferences for higher education depending on the level of enrolment as described above.

The Cultural Conflict Dimension in Higher Education Policy

After having shown how socio-economic conflicts and the re-distributional capacity of higher education can affect partisan positions, the focus will be now on the cultural conflict dimension. While in its classic version this conflict is one between materialists, who favour monetary and materialistic values and post-materialists, who give priority to goals such as sense of community and the non-material quality of life (Inglehart, 1984), more recent contributions refer to this conflict as the one between managers and social/cultural specialists (Kriesi, 1998) or between libertarian/universalistic and traditionalist/communitarian values (Bornschier, 2010). All of these dichotomies have in common that they describe different sets of values but also differing approaches to authority, power, autonomy, and steering.

The cultural underpinning of higher education and universities in Europe was characterised from its beginning by cultural values and the virtue of science and research as open processes. This vision of a university as a "*rule-governed community of scholars*" (Olsen, 2007, p. 29) never put a strong focus on materialistic or economic approaches. This can also be seen in the Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU) from 1988, where the core values of the European universities were defined. In this text values such as preserving the natural

environment, producing and proliferating culture, research and teaching that is morally and intellectually independent of all political and economic power as well as the European humanist tradition are high-lighted (MCU, 1988). In line with these arguments, higher education represents a time-wise reverse approach to the materialistic/post-materialistic divide since the post-materialistic historical core of the universities is challenged by the new materialistic focus from new public management reforms aiming at managerialism, economic efficiency and innovation (Olsen, 2007). Using instruments such as heightened accountability measures, output orientation and new governance arrangements, substantial change is introduced into a system that used to be rather stable (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, 2011; Gumport, 2000).

Pollitt (2001) in his work on new public management reforms identifies a general move of governments from classical state structures to more managerial approaches. While pointing to a strong discursive convergence on new public management concepts in all policy areas, he also identifies considerable divergence when it comes to the actual reforms. He explains this divergence both with the existing institutional context as well as decisions by actors. Due to the adaptability of new public management reforms governments can adopt the details to their local context as well as ideological preferences and a shift in the composition of the government might cause a shift in the objectives of on-going reforms (Pollitt, van Thiel, & Homburg, 2007, p. 5).

Following the work of Olsen (1988), who identified four different public sector steering approaches, Gornitzka and Maassen (2000) transfer these models to the steering of higher education. The four models, the sovereign rationality-bounded state, the institutional, the corporate-pluralist and the supermarket steering, differ with regard to: (a) the role of the state, buffer structures, other stakeholders and the market; (b) rationale for and nature of autonomy of higher education institutions; (c) accountability and modes of assessment of higher education; and (d) how change of higher education takes place (Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013). Thus, the four different steering modes also represent different partisan approaches to the relationship between the state and higher education.

Depending on the level of participation in a higher education system left- and right-wing parties have different preferences concerning their steering approaches. This is on the one hand due to the aforementioned skewedness of access and on the other hand due to an increasing complexity of steering of higher education as the systems move from elite to mass levels of participation (Ferlie, Musselin, & Andresani, 2008; Rosa & Amaral, 2007; Scott, 1995).

When participation is at an elite level, parties of the political left prefer the sovereign, rationality-bounded steering model. Due to its close link to the interventionist state, this model sees higher education as a governmental instrument for reaching political goals and ministries uphold tight control over universities, which in turn have only limited autonomy (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, p. 270). This steering approach permits the party to directly influence an institution, in which neither a large part of its electorate participates nor it is likely to have many supporters.[8] A right-wing party on the contrary, would prefer an institutional

steering model. This model is characterised by non-interference from the state, self-governance of the academic oligarchy and protection of academic values (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, pp. 270-271). Since a right-wing party represents the main participants in an elite higher education system it is also very likely to have many supporters within the universities, thus upholding the institutional autonomy and allowing for academic self-governance clearly caters to its electorate.

Once participation reaches a mass level, close and direct steering of higher education through a ministry gets more complicated, as the sector itself becomes more complex. Furthermore, the general pressure of new public management reforms towards more decentralisation and more autonomy of the public sector from direct ministerial control incentivises steering solutions that are more at arms-length (Maassen & Stensaker, 2003; Pollitt et al., 2007). At the same time the enlarged access to higher education leads to a growing participation of the electorate of the political left and in turn also to a growing political plurality of the academic oligarchy. Thus, a party of the political left facing a mass higher education system is more likely to opt for a corporate-pluralist steering model. This approach is characterised by the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, such as trade and student unions that together with the ministry negotiate the steering of higher education (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, p. 271). This offers the advantage that the left-wing party can include more of its traditional electorate in the steering processes and allows for participation in the steering even during times of right-wing governments.

When faced with a mass higher education system, parties of the political right opt for the supermarket steering model. In this approach the role of the state is minimal and the government interferes only to strengthen self-regulating capacities, while the main criteria for evaluation of higher education is its success on the market and ability to deliver services (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, p. 272). Having lost the monopoly of their electorate to participate in higher education, choosing a market-oriented steering model allows right-wing parties to ensure a strong influence of its electorate on higher education, while at the same time not alienating the members of academia through direct ministerial interference.

Hypothesis 4: If a country has a mass higher education system, then parties of the political left prefer a corporate-pluralist steering approach and parties of the political right prefer a supermarket steering approach.

Kriesi's (1998) division between managers and social/cultural specialists finds itself reflected in the left-right divide in elite higher education systems. While an institutional steering approach is an example of catering to a professional community and its autonomy, as it leaves the main decisions about higher education with the academics within the institution, the sovereign, rationality-bounded steering focuses on authoritatively managing universities from a ministry. While generally the political left is supposed to support social/cultural specialists and the right is supposed to support managers (Kriesi, 1998), in elite higher education systems one can find a reverse pattern. When enlarging the access to a mass higher education system, the steering approaches reflect the classical pattern

again. The political left is expected to favour a corporate-pluralist steering model that includes a multitude of stakeholders from the higher education community and diminishes the role of the ministry, thus reflecting more an approach favouring social/cultural specialists. The political right focuses on a supermarket steering that puts a focus on market mechanisms and thus strengthens managers. Based on these observations it is possible to construct the following overview over the partisan effects on higher education steering:

Table 3. Partisan preferences on higher education steering

	Left-wing party	*Right-wing party*
Elite higher education system	*Sovereign, rationality-bounded steering*	*Institutional steering*
Mass higher education system	*Corporate-pluralist steering*	*Supermarket steering*

Even though there are good arguments for the above outlined patterns, there is a chance that in reality one would not find clear shifts between the different steering approaches but rather that a change in government would lead to shifts within one approach. Due to the path dependency of prior governmental decisions, innovations have to be moulded to the status quo (Pollitt, 2001). This in turn heightens the possibility for variations within one steering approach or the emergence of hybrids (Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013).

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND THE VARIETIES OF CAPITALISM

It has been shown that the level of enrolment of the existing higher education system influences the partisan positions in higher education policy. However, this is not the only influencing factor, also the existing variety of capitalism impacts the way in which political parties position themselves on higher education policy.

The varieties of capitalism (VoC), a conceptual approach stemming from analyses of the political economy, is a concept, which is focused on structural arrangements in a country and the path dependencies stemming from them. Based on the idea of institutional complementarities of the system of political economy, VoC assumes that the interplay of certain sets of institutions in a country leads to comparative institutional advantages. Thus, VoC expects all countries to fall in one of two categories, according to the structure of their political economy: coordinated market economies (CME) or liberal market economies (LME) (Hall & Soskice, 2001). While CMEs function on the basis of negotiations, intermediary actors and

coordination, LMEs are driven by market-based competition. The importance of the VoC approach for an analysis of higher education policy is based on two arguments: (1) The VoC approach distinguishes two different kinds of skill sets, general skills and industry-specific skills, which are at the core of LMEs and CMEs and (2) due to the central role of higher education in the frame of modern knowledge economies there is a growing link between the political economy and the higher education system of a country (Graf, 2008, 2009; Hall & Soskice, 2001).

However, VoC also encountered a lot of criticism mainly along two lines. First of all, since VoC regards formal characteristics of the political system and their fixed institutional effects as determinants for policy outputs, it has been criticised for being prone to institutional determinism (Radaelli, Dente, & Dossi, 2012, p. 540). The key argument being that the political chain between the institutional starting point and a concrete policy output is too long to be ignored and that there are too many possible intervening factors. Secondly, VoC is often criticised for dropping cases in a finite number of boxes. This is seen as problematic because (a) the fit between the chosen box and the country might be very low and (b) there is often no theoretical justification linking the box to the phenomenon (Radaelli et al., 2012, p. 542).

Even though this criticism exists, this paper will argue for VoC as an explanatory approach. The main arguments underlying this decision are that: (1) by combining it with the more socially focused arguments from comparative politics the influence of the institutional determinism is diminished; (2) there are other explanatory possibilities proposed besides dropping countries in boxes; and (3) the link between the institutional characteristics assessed in VoC and the educational sector is, through the arguments on skill regimes, more direct than in other policy areas. However, it needs to be kept in mind that the basic intellectual starting point of VoC is inherently different.

CME and LME Higher Education Systems

In his VoC based analysis of internationalisation strategies of German and British universities Graf (2008, 2009) transfers the characteristics of the two different varieties of capitalism to higher education systems. Following him, a higher education system in a LME country is driven by the market, open to radical innovations and the state works only as an agent for market preservation granting significant institutional autonomy, while using performance-based steering (Graf, 2008, 2009). Cooperation between parts of the higher education system is driven by economic gains and innovation is self-incentivised through pull-factors of the market. Labour market success of graduates and higher education credentials are only loosely linked and transferable skills are of key importance.

CME higher education systems on the contrary are negotiation-driven, prone to more incremental innovation and the state provides a legal and regulatory frame that leaves the universities with more limited autonomy (Graf, 2008, 2009). The higher education system is characterised by strong national intermediary actors and cooperation is driven by mutual trust and long-lasting cultural links. Innovation is

driven through push-incentives from the state and the specific skills are of key importance.

The specific variety of capitalism also has an influence on the funding of higher education. While CMEs are characterised by higher public expenditures for higher education, LMEs show less public but more private higher education funding (Graf, 2008, 2009). This difference in funding is linked to the fact that the biggest challenge for modern-day economies is de-industrialisation and its impact on the workforce (Jensen, 2011). While LMEs due to their generic skill profile show a low risk of skill redundancy, CMEs with their high level of skill specificity show a large risk of skill redundancy. Here de-industrialisation leads to the need of extensive re-skilling of the workforce, which in turn demands educational expansion and thus also more public higher education spending (Jensen, 2011).

The last part of Jensen's argument partially contradicts the already mentioned findings of Plümper and Schneider (2007), that especially in times of growing unemployment shortly before elections, governments tend to increase the access to higher education without additional public spending. To bridge these two findings, one could re-formulate the last part of his argument as follows: De-industrialisation leads in CMEs to a need for educational expansions, which in turn demands an enlarged access to higher education. Whether this is accompanied by additional funding, depends on the nature of the higher education system and the partisan composition of the government.

Following the arguments made above on higher education and comparative politics, one can create a link to the VoC arguments saying that the partisan composition of the government matters, but the policy position of the governing parties depends on the given higher education system as well as the VoC. In practise this means that parties in LME countries would be more prone to support private higher education expenditures and only a limited expansion of access as well as public higher education expenditures, while their counterparts in CME countries would be more likely to support an increase in access to higher education and, if they want to keep the quality of the higher education system stable, also the amount of public funding attributed to it. Due to the differing nature of the state and differing modes of coordination, parties in LMEs are more likely to support supermarket steering approaches, while those in CMEs prefer corporate-pluralist higher education steering.

Hypothesis 5a: If a country is categorised as a LME, then political parties support private higher education funding and a stable access to higher education; if a country is categorised as a CME, then political parties support increased access to higher education and more public funding.

Hypothesis 5b: If a country is categorised as a LME, then political parties prefer supermarket steering models; if a country is categorised as a CME, then political parties favour corporate-pluralist steering models.

Table 4. VoC effects on policy positions on higher education

	LME	*CME*
Higher education funding & access	*More private funding, stable access to higher education & less public funding*	*Increased access to higher education and more public funding*
Higher education steering	*More supermarket steering*	*More corporate-pluralist steering*

The complementarities between institutions, which are at the heart of the VoC approach, are not only limited to the economic or educational system, they also include the electoral system. While majoritarian electoral institutions generally characterise LMEs, CMEs tend to have proportional representation (Cusack, Iversen, & Soskice, 2007; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Iversen & Stephens, 2008).

Based on this one can link the differentiation between LMEs and CMEs with electoral institutions and distinguish three different groups of systems (Iversen & Stephens, 2008):

– LMEs with majoritarian election systems, which are mainly governed by right-wing governments and experience only medium levels of public higher education funding but high levels of private higher education funding;
– CMEs with proportional representation and no Christian Democratic (CD) party are characterised by mainly left-wing governments and high public higher education funding;
– CMEs with proportional representation and a strong CD party, which mainly have centrist governments, due to the fact that the CD party is a cross-class party; parties in these countries prefer a medium level of public spending, close to the one of LME countries with majoritarian election systems, but there is also a strong vocational education and training (VET) sector.

This classification combines the VoC approach with parts of the argument made by Busemeyer et al. (2013) on policy legacy and the institutional impact of a strong Catholic heritage as discussed earlier in this paper:

Hypothesis 6: If a country is categorised as a CME and has a strong Christian Democratic Party, then political parties support medium levels of access to and public expenditures in higher education.

SUGGESTION OF A RESEARCH DESIGN

To further investigate the claims laid out in the hypotheses previously established a triangulated approach using both quantitative and qualitative data would be

advisable. This is due to two reasons: First, to establish the link between different partisan preferences and subsequent shifts in policy outputs it is necessary to also identify differences in the respective policy positions to strengthen the causal claim (Kelle, 2005; Klitgaard & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2013, p. 53). Second, from the outset this paper was interested in two different dependent variables, which are needed to answer the question whether political parties matter in higher education: the differences in policy positions and the differences in policy outputs.

In a first analytical step one would use party programmes, manifestos and coalition agreements as a basis for a content analysis.[9] In this analysis the party family of a specific political party in a country would serve as the independent variable, the respective policy positions on higher education would be the dependent variable and the institutional factors such as the level of enrolment in the existing higher educations system, the variety of capitalism, the catholic heritage as well as the existence of a Christian Democratic party would be intervening variables. This would also allow identifying the policy frame in which different parties in different countries address higher education policy.

In a second step, the partisan composition of a government would serve as the independent variable to explain policy outputs in the area of higher education using the intervening variables mentioned above. Indicators for policy outputs in higher education could include for example student numbers, student-staff ratio, public as well as private higher education funding. To identify more qualitative policy outputs, changes in higher education laws and government white papers also need to be taken into consideration.

When analysing the impact of political parties on a specific policy, the turnover of a government is a good reference point. It creates a situation, in which a part or all of the main political actors in a government are exchanged and new political programmes are put in place. Especially in situations where not only the people in office but also the ideological composition of the government changes, one can expect to observe subsequent changes in policies. Given the symbolic character of reforms and changes in policy (Scott, 1999), they can be used as a signal by the new incoming government to show the voters that their vote had an impact. Furthermore, analysing government turnovers helps to limit the number of intervening variables by keeping the time frame limited to the term before and after the turnover elections.

Future research, using the hypotheses and design proposed above, links well with claims in the literature that call for a joint analysis of both divergence in policy positions as well as divergence in policy outputs to control for effects such as cartel parties (Klitgaard & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2013; Peters, 2005, p. 135). By linking the more actor-oriented research on comparative politics and the more structure focused VoC approach a study based on the proposed hypotheses and research design would offer new insights into the structure versus agency controversy and would also allow to investigate different levels of policy rigidity (Baumgartner, 2013) based on the differing influences of policy legacies versus structural legacies.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that the existing literature suggests diverging answers and offers disagreements and ambiguities. Studies in the area of comparative politics support the view that parties matter both concerning differences in policy positions and policy outputs in higher education. However, there is disagreement on the question how the preferences for higher education policy are actually distributed along the political spectrum. When it comes to studies based on the variety of capitalism approach, they highlight more the importance of structures and see them as the reasons behind cross-national differences in higher education policy.

Responding to the question, do political parties matter in higher education policy in Western Europe and if so how, one can state, based on the arguments made in this paper, that it is rather likely that they matter both concerning differences in policy positions and differences in policy outputs. However, the extent to which they matter depends on several intervening institutional variables such as the level of enrolment of the existing higher education system, the variety of capitalism and policy legacies stemming from the way religious conflicts have been settled.

However, so far the argument rests solely on conceptual considerations, thus to move the research frontier even further ahead it would be necessary to use the proposed design to test the hypotheses offered. This would not only give a possibility to harmonise the existing findings but also add to the so far only limited amount of research on the partisan influences on higher education policy. Such work would not only give a clearer picture of the interaction between the partisan political sphere and higher education but also add to the general knowledgebase on partisan policy positions, the link between partisan input and government policy output as well as inter-country and inter-party differences. Higher education is not just any other policy area but represents a unique arena, which is more fluid and offers less clear cut partisan positions due to its recently gained saliency, its possibility to be debated in different policy frames and its peculiar re-distributive capacities. Both the existing conflict in the literature on partisan preferences in higher education and the primacy of an actor-based versus structure-based approach make higher education policy a good case study to gain knowledge on political parties' behaviour in a less typical policy area.

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NOTES

[1] For an overview see Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011).

[2] A third cleavage line, the conflict between center and periphery, might lead to potentially interesting analyses of party behaviour in higher education, especially concerning the question of the relationship of different kinds of higher education institutions and the level of centralisation of the higher education system. Unfortunately the limitations of this chapter do not allow for an in-depth analysis of this, especially since the territorial cleavage was weakened due to the nationalization of politics (Knutsen, 2013).

[3] In a more historical analysis of the political development of different higher education systems this would be different.

[4] For a debate of the redistributive capacities of education see Jensen (2011) and Ansell (2010, pp. 5-7).

[5] It is noteworthy that Ansell's definition of elite and mass higher education systems differs from the one proposed by Trow, who defines an elite system until 15% enrollment, a mass system between 16% and 50% and a universal higher education system to have more than 50% of enrollment (Trow, 2006).

[6] For the sake of simplicity the presented model focuses on comparing a large center-left and a large center-right party, however it would also be possible to expand it to other parts of the political spectrum. But as Ansell (2010) has shown with his inverse-U relationship between the party position and support for educational expansion, extreme parties are less likely to be in favour of educational expansion.

[7] I mentioned before that running on a programme to defund education is rather unlikely for political parties, however in a situation of budgetary constraints a left-wing party might shift funds from higher education to policy areas, which are more directly targeted towards its core electorate and have more direct redistributive effects.

[8] The second part of this argument is the logical next step from the assessment that access to higher education is skewed towards the wealthy (Lucas, 2001). Since the entry requirement into a higher education career is connected to prior participation in and graduation from higher education it can also be expected that those working in higher education are more supportive of right-wing parties if access is skewed to the wealthy.

[9] It should be noted that the pre-coded data of the Comparative Manifestos Project is not very helpful for this approach since, as Busemeyer et al (2013, p. 8) pointed out, the respective code neither separates between different levels of education nor between the preference for educational expansion and educational improvement. "

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