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Original Article

Study Success Policy Patterns in Higher Education Regimes: More Similarities than Differences?

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Greater participation in higher education and the improvement in completion rates are on the agenda in most European countries. At the same time, higher education has been through a range of reforms (e.g. the Bologna process) making higher education systems more similar, even though regime-inherent differences still exist. With the backdrop of these ambiguities, the aim of this article is to investigate differences and similarities in study success policies in higher education across four European country cases, classified as liberal, socio-democratic, conservative and hybrid. The policies are related to funding, teaching and learning as well as to student information and support. Using secondary case study data, we do not find a clear trend of policy patterns reflecting the different higher educational regimes. However, in line with the literature, for funding we find a pattern that clearly reflects the different regimes. Given limitations, we suggest some implications for further research.
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Introduction

The improvement in higher education completion is high on the political agenda in most European countries and at the overall European level. One of the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy is that at least 40 per cent of 30–34 years olds should hold a higher education degree (European Commission, 2014). Completion of a higher education degree can be defined within the greater framework of study success, which also extends to such other forms of success as completing on time or getting a job upon graduation.

This paper focuses on the wider concept of study success, albeit ambiguous and multidimensional. There is no common understanding of how study success should

be defined and measured, and research shows that there is a range of competing definitions or concepts across countries in Europe. Examples of such concepts vary from the rate of students continuing from 1 year of study to another, via completion within estimated time, to completion within a set time frame, to achieve a good grade for the higher education qualification or progression into employment or to postgraduate study (Hovdhaugen *et al.,* 2015). Hence, the understanding of study success in one country might be quite different from the understanding in other countries. Its understanding and importance might also be related to a country's vocational education and training system, which is often regarded as an alternative to higher education.

When surveyed, most European countries, however, use either one or more of three concepts of study success: completion rate, retention rate and time to degree completion (Vossensteyn *et al.,* 2015). These definitions of study success can be linked to policy initiatives, countries aiming to improve either rates of completion, retention rates in higher education or the time students spend to complete a degree.

This article builds on an inventory of policy instruments addressing student completion and success in higher education in various countries. The original study found that there is a high variety of policy instruments in European countries with the aim of facilitating study success. These instruments, addressing institutions, institutional staff and students, can be classified in three categories: funding and financial incentives (funding policies); teaching and learning policies; and student information and support policies (Vossensteyn *et al.,* 2015).

Background

Over recent decades, skill formation systems in Europe were in need of change, reflected in the Bologna declaration for higher education (e.g. Kehm *et al.* 2010) and the Copenhagen declaration for vocational education and training (Tessaring and Wannan, 2004; Powell and Solga, 2010). For higher education, for example, these processes have already led to numerous consequences; higher education in Europe is very different today to what it was before the Bologna process started (Westerheijden *et al.,* 2010). One of the aims of the Bologna process was to make European higher education systems and outcomes more aligned. The extent to which that has happened can be debated; several scholars argue that there have been some superficial changes which have made higher education systems more alike, while there still is diversity underneath (Musselin, 2005; Westerheijden *et al.,* 2010). Further, others argue that change is not uniformly spread within systems, which contributes to creating diversity (Musselin, 2005).

Nevertheless, scholars who investigate higher education policies from the perspective of different welfare regimes (Esping-Anderson, 1990) still identify at least some differences between countries for example in terms of the organisational structure of higher education (e.g. Triventi, 2014) and funding regimes (e.g. Pechar

and Andres, 2011). Hence, embedded in the policy contexts of different welfare regimes, we assume that these countries in consequence might stress different notions of study success, which in turn may be reflected in different study success policy patterns.

From the backdrop of these ambiguities, and informed by the literature on higher education as part of welfare regimes (Dolenec, 2006; Pechar and Andres, 2011; Triventi, 2014; Willemse and De Beer, 2012), the aim of this paper is to investigate differences and similarities in study success policies across a small strategic sample of four European countries — three countries classified as liberal, socio-democratic and conservative (Esping-Andersen, 1990) regimes, and one as a hybrid of the three. This article contributes to existing knowledge on how welfare state regimes are linked to various policies, by investigating patterns of policies across different regimes linked to student completion and success.

In the following section, we present the theoretical framework, followed by a description of the case study method and a presentation of the main findings. In the final section, we discuss our main findings, in the light of limitations and implications for further study.

Theoretical Perspective

According to Esping-Andersen (1990), different welfare regimes can be described as qualitatively different arrangements between the state, the market and the family. The crucial point is the degree to which individuals or families can maintain a socially acceptable standard of living, which is independent of market participation (de-commodification). This perspective distinguishes between three types of regimes that are constituted by long political traditions and classified by characteristic patterns of welfare policies.

Liberal welfare regimes pursue a strong role of the market in the production of welfare and low de-commodification. This means that the state has a residual function and intervenes only in case of failure by the family or the market. Conservative welfare regimes aim at preserving social structures and hierarchies, in particularly the traditional family. Preservation of the status quo and its inequalities is reached through strong de-commodification, with the state as the main provider of welfare services. Socio-democratic welfare regimes are characterised by the coverage of universal welfare with the aim of de-commodification by treating all citizens equally and at a much higher standard than needed at a minimal level. (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Andres and Pechar, 2013).

The literature review

Even though education contributes to social welfare as such, it has been mainly neglected in studies drawing on welfare regime theory, a point which has been

criticised. Hega and Hokenmaier (2002), for example, argue to include education in welfare regime policies. In comparison with other welfare policies, so the argument goes, education reduces the individual's dependency on the instabilities of the labour market and thus improves her or his social position in the long run. In contrast, a lack of support for education, particularly higher education, reflects the logics of conservative welfare regimes that favour social reproduction of existing social structures.

In the meantime, scholars have investigated education explicitly being as a part of the welfare regime theory (for compulsory education regimes: Peter *et al.,* 2010; West and Nikolai, 2013; for regimes of vocational education and training, e.g. Busemeyer, 2017; Powell and Solga, 2010; higher education regimes, Bégin-Caouette *et al.,* 2016; Esping-Andersen, 2015; Pechar and Andres, 2011; Triventi, 2014; Dolenec, 2006; Hega and Hokenmaier, 2002) and skill formation regimes (Andres and Pechar, 2013).

For higher education policies, which this article investigates, several scholars have studied differences and similarities between welfare regimes. Dolenec (2006) aimed at establishing patterns of policy change in higher education in Western Europe by assuming that institutional characteristics of a welfare regime lead to certain reform trajectories in funding policies. She found that existing regulations still broadly conform to the welfare state regime typology. Further, to understand national approaches to funding, tuition fees and financial aid for students, Pechar and Andres (2011) applied two concepts, the welfare state regime typology and the trade-off hypothesis. They found a clear association between the higher education policies in a country and a given welfare regime. More specifically, they found that the trade-off hypothesis is supported by a comparison of liberal and conservative regimes, while social democratic regimes apparently avoid some of the trade-offs met by the two other regimes.[1] Using the example of loans, Pechar and Andres (2011) describe variations between the three welfare regimes. On the one hand, conservative regimes either have no loan schemes or comparatively restrictive financial conditions for students. This means that in consequence a relatively high proportion of students work during their studies (Orr *et al.,* 2011; Pechar and Andres, 2011). On the other hand, socio-democratic and liberal regimes strengthen their expansionist strategies by giving loans to students. While in liberal regimes students need loans to cover tuition fees and living expenses, in socio-democratic regimes students only need loans for living expenses. One important point is that countries striving for the goal of equality of conditions (conservative) appear to invest less than those striving either to enhance equality of opportunity and condition (socio-democratic) or just to enhance equality of opportunity (liberal). However, Pechar and Andres (2011) conclude that countries, independent of regime type, are open to new dynamics, but at the same time depend on historical forces and following specific trajectories from which it can easily diverge.

Investigating differences in higher education policies in 19 Western countries, Willemse and De Beer (2012) identified three clusters of countries, which roughly match the original classification of three welfare regimes. At the same time, they found that countries in these clusters did not meet all criteria as expected; this was particularly true for liberal and conservative regimes.

Triventi (2014) identified four types of higher education regimes, i.e. the Continental, the Nordic, the Anglo-Saxon and the North American regime. He assumed that a multidimensional typology of higher education regimes would influence student access and social inequality and that higher education is embedded in a complex environment and is developing complex relationships with other institutions such as compulsory education, the state, the labour market and students and their families. He found that these higher education regimes reflect broader institutional, cultural and socio-economic similarities between advanced industrial countries.

Finally, investigating the correspondence between indicators of academic research systems in 16 OECD countries and to what extent welfare regime types explain this correspondence, Bégin-Caouette *et al.* (2016) found that the most important dimension — academic centrality — separates socio-democratic from liberal regimes. To provide an example, academic research systems in socio-democratic regimes show higher doctoral graduation rates, while those in liberal regimes show important direct government research funding.

To sum up, in previous studies of higher education policies, welfare regimes have been mainly used for classifying countries in terms of funding policies (e.g. Dolenec, 2006; Pechar and Andres, 2011) and multidimensional classifications of countries based on OECD indicators (Bégin-Caouette *et al.,* 2016; Triventi, 2014; Willemse and De Beer, 2012). To our knowledge, the typology of higher education regimes has not been used for the investigation of study success policies, more broadly defined, comprising funding, teaching and learning and student information and support. Thus, to fill this gap, this article uses the typology of higher education regimes as a framework for the investigation of study success policies in a small strategic sample of four European countries.

Higher education regimes: case countries

The four countries which constitute the cases — England, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands — differ from each other somewhat in their size and structure. In a European context, Germany and England (UK) can all be considered large countries (65–82 million inhabitants), while Norway is small (about 5 million inhabitants) and the Netherlands is in the middle (just over 17 million inhabitants).

Even though this article focuses on the investigation of study success policies in higher education, we will provide a brief description of the situation of higher education systems, also in relation to vocational education and training. According

to Powell and Solga (2010) change or persistence in higher education might only be adequately understood when accounting for the relationship between the two systems. They have criticised that most analyses neglect the complementary and competitive relationship between the two systems, a relationship that also might have an impact on a country's study success policies.

In the following, we provide a description of the four case countries, embedded in the contexts of higher education and vocational education and training regimes. Each section followed a working hypothesis on what study success policies might be expected that inform the further analyses.

Liberal regime: England

Liberal regimes are dominated by the market with minimal interference by the state, providing citizens with equal opportunity in terms of access to higher education. Government spending for higher education is low in favour of targeted benefits, for example, for disadvantaged students. Class-based rights have priority over full citizenship rights. (Peter *et al.,* 2010). A moderate level of tracking in secondary education is characteristic to provide pupils with equal opportunity in access to higher education. For liberal regimes, we have chosen England to represent a typical case among European countries. However, since 2010, the English educational system has undergone major reform processes. A new possibility (Diplomas) was introduced as a compromise between the main academic track and vocational education in Further Education Colleges. This new possibility has been largely criticised for being too academic, with little relevance for practice (Nuffield 14–19 review, 2007). It appears that practical training in education has little value per se; it is rather regarded as a means to pass the required examinations for getting access into higher education (Hegna *et al.,* 2012, 225).

Higher education can be characterised as relatively standardised (see for the UK Thomas, 2015), with a lack of real alternatives such as vocational education training. England has a unified higher education system, where all institutions are labelled 'university'. At the same time, the admission system is very selective, with an inherent hierarchy of institutions. In sum, the higher education system is ruled by the market, unified, selective and decentralised with varying tuition fees and low student loans (e.g. West and Nikolai, 2013; Triventi, 2014). Reflecting the logics of the market, England has established a clear definition of study success, and two measures.

Due to an inadequate vocational education and training system as an alternative to higher education in England, we expect a broad spectrum of study success policies including funding, student information and support and teaching and learning, and some targeted policies addressing specific student groups.

Conservative regime: Germany

The German preference for retaining a social hierarchy in conservative regimes is reflected by a stratified education system. Already, in lower secondary education, students are allocated to different tracks, academic and vocational. In both, the academic and the vocational track, upper secondary education is specific. The academic-oriented upper secondary education, the Gymnasium (in German-speaking countries), has a propaedeutic function, originally tailored for entry into graduate level university studies. Vocational education can be provided in the form of an apprenticeship in a company, in the form of a school-based education or as a combination of school and work (dual model) (e.g. Andres and Pechar, 2013).

Similar to the structure of upper secondary education, higher education is binary, with universities on the one side and universities of applied science on the other.

Access to higher education institutions depends on early tracking within secondary education into an academic and a vocational track, providing a mechanism of pre-selection. Naturally, such pre-selection leads to more homogeneous study populations compared with regimes with no tracking at secondary level (Andres and Pechar, 2013). At the same time, government spending on higher education is moderate, leading to moderate access and high social stratification. Tuition fees are low and student loans and grants moderate, since the family is expected to financially support its children. In sum, the strong and large vocational education and training sector provides an alternative to the relatively small and homogeneous higher education sector in conservative regimes (e.g. Triventi, 2014).

We have chosen Germany to represent a typical case of a conservative regime. After the reunification in the 1990s, Germany has undergone major reform processes in social welfare systems, leading to a stronger 'liberalisation' (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2013, 291) reflected by reduced benefits in pensions and social insurance and an increased deregulation of the labour market (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2013). Despite these reform processes, Germany can still be described as typical case. Germany still combines a relatively small higher education sector with a strong vocational education and training sector (Andres and Pechar, 2013; OECD, 2016a). Among OECD countries, Germany has the second largest population of 25–34 years olds (51 per cent) with a vocational degree at upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary level as the highest qualification (OECD, 2016a, 1). However, the numbers of students in higher education has increased by 28 per cent between 2008 and 2013. At the same time, the increase in expenditure on higher education has not kept up with the increase in the number of students, which means lower expenditure per student. Compared with other OECD countries, Germany still spends relatively less of its overall public budget on (higher) education.

As a conservative regime with a strong vocational education and training system as an alternative to higher education, we expect fewer study success policies in Germany compared with countries representing liberal and socio-democratic

regimes. Due to reform processes as mentioned above, we expect at least some kind of current policies addressing higher education.

Socio-democratic regime: Norway

Socio-democratic regimes promote 'freedom for the state' with high government spending on higher education (Peter *et al.,* 2010). This comprises a universal system of public student grants and loans with no or low tuition fees and independent of parental economic situation. In secondary education, a low level of tracking leads to relatively wide access to higher education. At the same time, upper secondary schools in socio-democratic regimes offer both an academic and a vocational education track (Andres and Pechar, 2013). Admission to higher education is open and rather centrally organised, leading to high participation (e.g. Triventi, 2014; West and Nikolai, 2013).

For socio-democratic regimes, we have chosen Norway to represent a typical case, described by a strong higher educational sector and high governmental expenditure on education. In 2014, 43 per cent of adults between 25 and 64 years of age had a degree at tertiary level at their highest qualification; between 2005 and 2015, the percentage of adults with a tertiary degree had further increased by ten percentage points, an increase slightly over the average across OECD countries. At the same time, Norway is characterised by high levels of public spending for education at all levels; public spending per student on educational institutions at all levels is more than 1.6 times higher than the OECD average (OECD, 2016b).

Large parts of the Norwegian higher education system can be considered as almost open access, as there are just slightly more applicants than students. However, programmes such as medicine, law, psychology, architecture and some other long professional programmes are very competitive, which implies that only students with very good grades from upper secondary education can gain admission. Hence, in Norway, we observe a mainly open access system, with high competition in some prestigious degrees such as medicine (Strømme and Hansen, 2014).

For Norway, representing a socio-democratic regime with a balance between academic education and vocational education and training, and at the same time a high level of public spending for higher education, we expect universal policies.

Hybrid regime: the Netherlands

Due to reform processes as Bologna and Copenhagen, in addition to social and political reform processes during the last decades, we can identify hybrid regime types, existing side by side with liberal, conservative and socio-democratic types.

The Netherlands has been labelled as an outlier among conservative regimes. Pechar and Andres (2011) pointed out that the Netherlands in many ways differs from the patterns in other conservative regimes, for example, in terms of higher entry rates (tertiary type A) into higher education and in terms of relatively high

private expenditure on tertiary institutions, similar to liberal regimes. The share of public expenditure, however, has slightly reduced since 2005, from 75 to 70 per cent in 2013 (OECD, 2016c, 2). Moreover, the Netherlands has shown itself to share some characteristics of socio-democratic regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990) such as a relatively high participation in higher education. In 2015, 45 per cent of the population between 25 and 34 years had a tertiary degree, compared with 27 per cent of the older generation between 55 and 64 years old. Universities in the Netherlands are supposed to accept all applicants who are eligible, i.e. those holding an upper secondary leaving certificate. In addition, there are also types of institutions or programmes which are more selective, such as the numerous fixus programmes with two possibilities for selection, i.e. decentralised selection and weighted lottery (until 2017). At the same time, the Netherlands still has a strong vocational education and training sector with high graduation rates (OECD, 2016c; Netherlands: 3) like conservative regimes.

In a hybrid regime, like the Netherlands, we expect to find a mixture of polities reflecting some traits of each regime.

Methods

Data

This paper draws on secondary data collected by the project Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe funded by the European Commission. Data were collected as in-depth case studies in eight strategically selected countries including policy documents and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders at national level (Vossensteyn *et al.,* 2015). In our paper, we draw upon data from policy documents of a sample of four countries, representing three welfare state regimes (conservative, social democratic and liberal regimes) by Esping-Anderson (1990) and one hybrid case.

Analyses

Our comparative approach builds upon two main principles, difference and similarity. First, our comparative approach implies an a priori principle of difference between units of analyses, 'difference of kind' in the sense of contrasting objects (countries, cases) of varying qualities. Second, a comparative approach means that one strives to capture both similarity and variation between cases. A precondition for such an approach is a commonly defined set of criteria, including the units of analysis, the elements to compare and a theoretical argument for linking the common criteria (Marginson and Mollis, 2001). In this paper, countries representing different higher education regimes (cases) make up the units of analysis, while the elements to compare make up the patterns of study success

policies. To qualify for the second principle, namely similarity, study success is high on the political agenda in all countries examined by this paper; additionally, all the countries have gone through the Bologna process and NPM reforms, though at a different pace. A comparative approach is combined with a mapping approach of case study data. A mapping approach can be characterised as a descriptive method of data analysis, inspired by document and content analysis techniques (e.g. Robson, 2002). This approach consists of several tasks, which are iterative rather than subsequent. Here, we read the included case study data, applying different reading techniques, such as screening and narrow reading. During the narrow reading process, information was coded with respect to study success policies, according to the three categories funding, organisation information and study support of higher education.

Findings

We assume that access to and organisation of higher education has an impact on the establishment of study success policies in the five countries belonging to three different regimes. As a reminder, we distinguish between three groups of study success policies: (1) funding (at different levels); (2) information and support (directly addressing student choice); and (3) policies addressing teaching and learning at the micro level.

In general, we find a similarity across the Netherlands, Germany and Norway, manifested in a traditional binary organisation of higher education. England (liberal), however, shows a unified but highly differentiated system and is thus more selective at the tertiary level. Norway, which traditionally had a binary system, has, however, undergone a major reform, restructuring higher education institutions, where university colleges have been upgraded to universities (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2014). In consequence, the higher education system in Norway might have some characteristics of liberal regimes, being unified, but being more differentiated.

Map and synthesis of study success policies

In the following, we present a map of national study success policies by comparing the four case countries England, Germany, Norway and the Netherland in relation to their education regime type. As a reminder, we distinguish between three categories of study success policies: funding, student information and support and teaching and learning policies of higher education (see Table 1).

Funding policies

Across countries, funding policies are the most common policies addressing study success. England (liberal) shows four different funding policies addressing

Table 1 Policies addressing study success and completion in the countries of study

Policies	*Liberal — England*	*Conservative — Germany*	*Socio-democratic — Norway*	*Hybrid — the Netherlands*
Funding	Institutional funding — public funding and student tuition fees	Quality Pact for Teaching	Progression dependent grants	Performance-based grants
	Student Opportunity Funding	Higher Education Pact	Higher monthly allowance and fewer income restrictions	Advance instalment for study, a loan provided with generous conditions
	Access Agreements (closed in March 2018)	Combination of loan and scholarship for students meeting certain criteria dependent on parental income	Performance-based funding for institutions (part of funding is based on number of students who complete credits)	Performance-based funding (25 per cent of funds for teaching is based on number of degrees)
	Student financial support	Fellowship for talented and high-achieving students and students showing a special social commitment		Performance contracts between the Ministry and individual Higher Education Institutions
	National scholarship programme for students who need additional support			
Student information and support	Retention performance indicators, benchmarks and league tables	Website addressing information needs of students: online tests — federal state level	Study barometer — A survey of student satisfaction	Information and matching procedure
	Retention performance indicators, benchmarks and league tables	Implementation of part-time study programmes — federal state level	Career centres (not mandatory by law, even though most institutions provide career centres)	Binding Study Advice at the end of the first year and to later years
		Voluntary consultation and mentoring suggested by higher education law in Berlin.		Online student choice information

Table 1 *continued*

Policies	*Liberal — England*	*Conservative — Germany*	*Socio-democratic — Norway*	*Hybrid — the Netherlands*
				Study in figures — a small form providing some figures on study programmes (e.g. enrolment, intensity) Higher education institutions are mandated to provide improved student support and counselling
Teaching and learning	Higher Education Academy with the aim to improve the quality of learning and teaching	Quality Pact for Teaching (2011–2020)	Closer follow-up of students (by more assignments and replacing lectures with seminars) More structured study programmes Administrative follow-up of students (Students not getting any credits are contacted and might lose their place in the programme due to lack of progress)	Teacher qualifications (included in performance contracts)

institutions and targeted student groups. First, institutional funding comprises public funding and student tuition fees and is directly related to actual student numbers, which are annually reported to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The direct link between student number and funding has a positive impact on the development of institutional measure to improve study success, i.e. student retention and completion. Despite the major part of funding being paid by students rather than the state, it is still directly related to enrolled and continuing student numbers. This has led to even a stronger focus on retention, completion and progression outcomes (Vossensteyn *et al.,* 2015). Second, Student Opportunity Funding was introduced in 2003/2004 to enable institutions to better support students at risk of early dropout. The money paid to higher education institutions is formula-driven based on risk, which means that payment is dependent on the age

and entry qualifications of students (Thomas, 2015.) According to Bowes *et al.* (2013), most institutions use this funding for additional learning, teaching and assessment support and improved pastoral support. More than half of the institutions provide support with academic development, have made curriculum organisation and design work and provide career development. It was shown that institutions reported that this programme could contribute to their efforts to improve retention and success. Third, Access Agreements imply that all institutions charging tuition fees over £6000 are required to submit a document to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), which specifies how a proportion of additional fee income should be spent to ensure access and success of disadvantaged student groups, in particular students with low socio-economic status. The OFFA, however, closed in March 2018. Fourth, student financial support implies that all fees are deferred to enable all students to study in higher education and complete their studies. Additionally, public maintenance grants are provided for low-income students and additional living cost can be covered by loans. After the increase in tuition fees, the government provided institutions with funding for the National Scholarship programme, to provide further financial support to students with a family income below £25,000. This programme ended in 2015/2016. Thus, among four policies, two policies that explicitly addressed targeted student groups have currently expired.

Germany shows, in total, four funding policies. Two of these policies directly address higher education institutions: The Quality Pact for Teaching and the Higher Education Pact. The Quality Pact for Teaching[2] has provided funds for the development of measures and instruments to improve the quality of teaching (European Commission, 2010) since 2011, while since 2007, the Higher Education Pact[3] has funded higher education institutions depending on the number of new entrants (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2007). These two policies might be an indicator for an increasing liberalisation of the higher education regime in Germany, which had a traditionally weaker focus on teaching and student centralisation, unlike liberal and socio-democratic countries (see, e.g. Kwiek, 2009) and a strong vocational education and training system. The remaining two success policies in Germany can be characterised as policies addressing targeted groups of students, i.e. a fellowship addressing talented and high-achieving students with special social commitment (provided since 2011) and a combination of loan and fellowship targeting students that meet certain eligibility criteria depending on their parents' income.

The Netherlands (hybrid) show three of four policies being performance-based. The first policy is performance-based grants, including travel passes (i.e. public transport) and a grant for the duration of the study programme for students with an income below a pre-defined threshold. These grants are as per definition loans which students can transfer into grants if they complete their studies within 10 years. A second policy is an important change in student financial support. Since

2015, new Bachelor and Master students can apply for the so-called advance instalment for study, a loan is provided with generous conditions. The aim of this policy is to improve the quality of higher education, maintain access and to increase students' consciousness about study costs and timing of studies. A third policy is performance-based funding (since 2011), which means that 25 per cent of funds for teaching is based on number of degrees. Finally, performance contracts have been established between the Minister of Education and individual higher education institutions. Performance contracts evidently have become important internal steering instruments for higher education institutions. Thus, institutions have prioritised the improvement in study success and completion (in time). This policy pattern indicates a clear change of a traditional conservative regime in moving towards a more liberal regime type with various performance-based funding policies at different levels.

Pro-market funding policies as such are still less prevalent in Norway, classified a social democratic regime. Among three funding policies, two of them directly address students. The first of them, progression dependent grants, means that part of the loan is transformed to non-repayable grants, depending on completed examinations. The second, higher monthly allowance and fewer income restrictions, implies a modification of the study support system, i.e. an increase in allowance and fewer restrictions on income when studying. The remaining policy addresses performance-based funding for institutions, which means that part of institutional funding is based on number of students who complete their credits. A white paper on the structural reform of the higher education sector, however, underlines an increasing focus of the importance of output for funding (performance-based funding) (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2014).

Across all countries, performance-based funding policies appear to be most prevalent in the Netherlands. According to EURYDICE (2000), the Netherlands, in addition to the United Kingdom, has incorporated a relatively strong pro-market approach in contract-based funding, which includes higher education institutions being encouraged to sell their services to commercial organisations, a result of the reduction in public funding (EURYDICE, 2000). Thus, in terms of funding policies, the Netherlands can be classified as a liberal regime.

Information and support policies

For information and support policies, there are greater differences between the four countries, independent of regime type.

The Netherlands (hybrid) reveals five policies versus two or three in the other countries. These policies focus particularly on the transition to higher education and the beginning of studies. Implemented in 2014, the information and matching procedure in the Netherlands implies that beginner Bachelor students must register for a student programme before May 1 to have the right to visit the institution for a form of 'audit', called the 'study choice check'. In this, they also meet with faculty,

get information on the programme and receive a recommendation on whether this programme might suit them. The institution's advice is not binding. Students registering after the May deadline can be refused. In addition, research universities can set admission requirements for students transferring from a University of Applied Science after the first year. Every study programme provides some kind of audit, conducted by a digital survey and/or by an interview. The Binding Study Advice (BSA) is an institutional policy addressing the end of the first year. A negative BSA means that students have to interrupt their studies, i.e. students are not allowed to enrol in the same/similar programmes at the same institution for a number of years. The goals are to help students progress more rapidly into the second year and complete their study on time. In the meantime, institutions have been allowed to use BSA also in later years, an experiment scheduled from the academic year 2013/2014 until 2019. In the academic year 2012/2013, the 'Hard Cut' Bachelor-Master progression was introduced. This means that students may enrol in a Master programme only after successful completion of their Bachelor, a policy which is in line with the argument of the Bologna process that a Bachelor degree is a terminal degree which should either lead to direct labour market entry or access to the next level of education. Other policies comprise information policies like the provision of online student choice information by a foundation providing independent information on higher education through an extended national web portal, or the provision of study programmes, enrolment and intensity in figures. Further, higher education institutions are mandated to provide improved student support and counselling, in exchange for the right to provide negative binding.

In Germany, information and support policies for students are usually provided by higher education institutions individually. At federal state level, however, three policies were identified. First, in one of the largest federal states, the Federal Ministry implemented a website (Studifinder), which presents a mix of self-evaluation tests and information on study programmes. By the means of these tests, students are assumed to learn about their competencies and skills, and based on the test results, the website provides a selection and recommendations of disciplines and programmes. This website leads students to the websites of higher education institutions with the respective programmes. Its main aim is to stimulate conscious choice of study programme and to facilitate a better match between student and programme. Second, since 2014, a new law in the same federal state has allowed higher education institutions to implement part-time study programmes aiming to consider the diversity of students, in particularly older students with families and/or work obligations. Third, in the federal state of Berlin, the higher education law suggests (voluntary) consultation and mentoring talks for students. Until now, most higher education institutions have abolished the previous mandatory consultation and mentoring talks.

In England, two information policies were defined: first, the use of performance indicators on continuation and completion providing data at institutional level,

including benchmarks and a National Student survey asking students in their final year of study about their satisfaction with higher education experience. The second policy implies Key Information Sets for future students that provide comparable sets of information about all full- and part-time undergraduate programmes.

In Norway, information and support services include two national policies, first the Study barometer, a survey of student satisfaction that has been conducted since 2013 and might inform future students on their study choices. Second, even though not mandatory by law, most higher education institutions have established career centres to support students in their transition to the labour market after their studies.

In comparison with information and support policies across the four country cases, on the one hand, Germany and England appear to share some similarities; both provide programmes that mainly give information to students (England Key Information Sets; Germany Studifinder). In contrast, the Netherlands and Norway focus more strongly on counselling and personalised support. In the Netherlands (hybrid), higher education institutions provide some academic support and counselling for students, particularly at the beginning of their studies. This kind of support policies might lead to a stronger selection of students after transition to higher education, a characteristic of conservative educational regimes. Norway, however, is the only country providing both a national survey of students on student satisfaction and career centres addressing students' career plans after study. This can be seen an indication for the specific focus on individual students in social democratic countries such as Norway, characterised by equality of condition and opportunity, i.e. 'without discouraging individual aspirations or denying the opportunity for private socio-economic achievement' (Pechar and Andres, 2011, 28).

Teaching and learning

To improve teaching and learning, Germany provides one main policy, an agreement between the Federal Ministry and the federal states for the period 2011–2020 — the Quality Pact for Teaching, already mentioned as a funding policy. This programme addresses higher education institutions to implement institutional policies and measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Examples of such institutional policies are hiring additional staff and providing more student-related counselling. Institutions had to apply for funding by submitting a proposal including a plan. Even though not defined as a primary goal, one reason for the implementation of this programme was the improvement in study success. A main critique of this policy is its project character.

Across the remaining three regimes, England, the Netherlands and Norway share some similarities. For all three countries, we found more established programmes with a focus on the quality of teaching and learning.

In England, the Higher Education Academy was established in 2004 with the aim to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. The Higher

Education Academy is owned by Universities UK. In their evaluation, Brooks *et al.* (2014) have shown the value of the Academy for the influence on national policy and institutional practice to increase study success.

For the Netherlands, we identified one policy at the national level: teacher qualifications. First, to improve didactic competencies among university teachers, teacher qualifications were introduced in 2004 at one institution and have become national policy. Teaching qualifications have been included in performance contracts as indicators of research universities.

For Norway, three policies were identified. These include, first, a closer follow-up of students by providing more assignments and by replacing lecturers with seminars; second, the introduction of more structured programmes instead of accepting students at a faculty and letting them combine subjects themselves; and third, a closer follow-up by the administration. This means that students who have not received any credits after a certain period are contacted by the administration and might lose their place in the programme due to lack of study progress.

Thus, for teaching and learning success policies, the boundaries between different regimes, in particular between liberal and socio-democratic regimes, are rather blurred, and the pattern across these regimes appears to be characterised by overarching reforms (e.g. Paradeise *et al.* 2009), independent of national histories and welfare regime types.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to investigate differences and similarities in three types of study success policies, i.e. funding, student information and support and teaching and learning, across four countries that were classified as liberal (England), socio-democratic (Norway), conservative (Germany) and hybrid (the Netherlands) higher education regimes.

Generally, across different study success policies, we do not find a clear pattern which reflects the three different regimes, i.e. liberal, conservative and socio-democratic. For funding policies specifically, however, we find a picture which roughly reflects the original three regime types by Esping-Anderson (1990), a pattern which aligns with that from the literature (Dolenec, 2006; Pechar and Andres, 2011; Triventi, 2014; Willemse and De Beer, 2012). While England (liberal) and Germany (conservative) primarily provide financial student support for targeted groups, Norway (socio-democratic) provides universal financial student support.

The Netherlands, which we classified as hybrid, shows some clear similarities with liberal countries in funding policies, for example by providing performance-related grants to students and the study advance instalment. In other words, across different study success policies, the Netherlands shows more similarities with the

liberal regime than with the conservative regimes, with a relatively strong focus on performance-based funding and corresponding information and support policies, particularly at the beginning of higher education study. A similarity between the Netherlands and liberal regimes in funding policies has been earlier shown in the literature (Dolenec, 2006). At the same time, the Netherlands shows some similarities with socio-democratic regimes such as Norway in terms of student information and support policies.

For the remaining policies, student information and student support and teaching and learning, Norway, classified as a socio-democratic country, appears to reveal the most student-friendly policies. These policies include closer follow-up of students (e.g. by more assignments), more pre-structured study programmes and administrative follow-up of students who do not complete their credits. These policies have been earlier described in an evaluation of the Quality Reform in Higher Education which puts an increased emphasis on a closer follow-up of individual students (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2007). Furthermore, Norway has been monitoring student satisfaction at the beginning of studies, since 2013.

Furthermore, both England and the Netherlands reveal the implementation of initiatives addressing the improvement in teaching and learning on a more general level with the Higher Education Academy in England, a national body that embraces teaching excellence, and increasing implementations of qualifications for teaching staff in the Netherlands.

Addressing our aim to reveal patterns of study success policies according to three higher education regimes, we conclude, in line with Willemse and de Beer (2012), that higher education policies, in particular policies addressing information and study support and teaching and learning in higher education, lead to a less clear-cut pattern compared with the analysis restricted to policies like social protection, labour market policies and funding policies which might be easier to quantify.

Overarching reforms, in particularly the New Public Management movement (see, e.g. Paradeise *et al.* 2009), with a focus on performance-based education, might further have led to a gradual erasure of clear boundaries between liberal, conservative and socio-democratic higher education regimes, particularly when it comes to funding policies. Facing ongoing transformation in the higher educational landscape and skill formation systems in Europe, we agree with Triventi (2014) that further studies should investigate how such tendencies might change similarities and differences between different regimes and how specific countries move towards another type of regime.

Strength of our study lies in a descriptive analysis of study success policies drawing on rich case study data from four European countries, classified as liberal, socio-democratic, conservative and hybrid. However, the findings indicate that the

Netherlands as a hybrid case challenges the static nature of the welfare regime typology.

However, as with all studies, ours has its limitations. One limitation relates to the use of secondary case study data, which restricted the choice of country cases to four countries related to three higher educational regimes. Another limitation relates to the systematic mapping and synthesis of study success policies, i.e. a rather static analysis of a three regimes typology, which does not enable investigations of dynamic changes over time or of reasons behind implementing different kinds of study success policies. Data were collected in 2014/2015, and some policies already no longer existed.

Further studies applying longitudinal design and combining quantitative and qualitative data might investigate these changes over time and further develop indicators quantifying policies of student information and support and teaching and learning. These studies might specifically investigate changing policies over time of so-called hybrid regimes transitioning from one regime type into another.

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Notes

1 This means that '[t]he socially embedded human capital approach of [socio-democratic] countries allows for expansion of higher education without neglecting those parts of the age cohort who are unable or unwilling to make use of this opportunity (Pechar and Andres, 2011, 47)'. In these countries, we can 'observe a certain degree of social engineering in balancing and adjusting supply and demand of higher learning opportunities by fostering the development of both general and specific skills'. (Pechar and Andres, 2011, 47). In conservative regimes, public expenditure on higher education is supplemented by relatively low tuition fees, a pattern which comprises not only egalitarian values but additionally a high trust in public administration (Pechar and Andres, 2011).
2 https://www.qualitaetspakt-lehre.de/.
3 https://www.bmbf.de/de/hochschulpakt-2020-506.html The Higher Education Pact allows a cooperation between federal level and federal states to ensure the international competitiveness of higher education institutions.

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