THE POLITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION HE REFORMS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: MAJOR THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

LUCIA PĂDURE

PhD/politici publice și educație (UToronto), MPA/ Masterat Administrație Publică (Harvard), Consilier Superior Politici Educaționale, Ministerul Invățământului Superior, Ontario.

Abstract*: This articles examines factors that underscored higher education reforms in Central and Eastern Europe during the transition period from 1990 to 2005, and present the major themes in the literature. The study explores higher education reforms in three national settings – Hungary, Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Rooted in critical approaches to development, transition reforms and policy analysis in higher education, it addresses the new realities of global capitalism, inequitable distribution of power between the industrialized nations and the rest of the world, and the ways in which this power distribution impacts higher education systems in Central and Eastern Europe.*

Keywords: *hiagher education, reforms, the role of the state, promoting HE reforms.*

CEE higher education systems: National differences vs. regional features.

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) literature debated the issue of whether HE systems in CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE **(**CEE)in the 1990s were so similar that could be considered as one research object. Scott (2002), a UK scholar of HE, believed that "…the area and the HE systems concerned are far from being homogenous, for the homogeneity imposed by communism and Soviet domination did not last" (p.137). As such, he considered that understanding HE reforms in CEE since 1989 required application of two interlinked frames of reference. First, CEE was an artifice not a unit, and, second, HE systems had been going through a period of transition rather than transformation (the latter being more radical). Scott argued that …it may be dangerous to over-estimate the exceptionalism of the experience of HE in CEE under communist rule. It developed particular, and on the whole, negative characteristics during this period. However, these characteristics did not eliminate important differences across the region that existed before 1945 (p.141).

In addition, Scott (2002) believed that underdevelopment was an inaccurate characteristic for regional HE systems. As a result of reforms in CEE, HE systems acquired both advantages and disadvantages vis-à-vis Western European counterparts. Scott suggested that "…the decay of state authority and financial exigency may have reduced the barriers to privatization at the operational level" (p.151). This led to the development of a significant private sector in CEE HE, which was viewed by some in the region as more dynamic and flexible than the publicly funded HE. At the same time,

higher education systems in CEE experienced a much more reduced exposure to globalization and had less developed knowledge production systems. Scott concluded that HE systems in CEE faced similar problems as their Western European and North American counterparts in the areas of institutional governance, connection with the 'knowledge society'; delivery of education programs, and funding. As such, "…it is not CEE HE that is in transition; it is all higher education" (Scott, 2002, p.151).

Differences across national HE systems in CEE stemmed from different historical, cultural and political contexts (Gabriel, 1967; Kwiek, 2001; Pascu, Manolache, Parnuta & Verdes, 1983; Sadlak, 1989; Scott, 2002; Stanciu, 1977). Central European countries had a long history of university education and first Catholic universities appeared in the 14th century.

Charles University in Prague, the Czech Republic, was opened in 1347, the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland - in 1364 and University of Pecs, Hungary - in 1367. The University of Tartu, Estonia, was established in 1632. By the same time, the mid 17th century, first higher learning institutions were opened in Jassy and Bucharest, the Romanian Principalities, which evolved into Royal Academies at the end of the 17th – early 18 th century. The first Russian University was founded in 1755, while many former Soviet republics did not have universities before WWII. In the second half of the 19 th century the modern institutional model of universities emerged across CEE. Universities in countries like the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland were influenced by Humboldtian ideals such as the importance of academic freedom in the search for knowledge, while Romanian and imperial Russian universities were driven by the Napoleonic concept of state serving elite academic institutions with an emphasis on professional training.

At the same time, another strand of HE research argued that the 'socialist model' of university served as an important unifying factor in the region. Given this common background, Tomusk (2004), a former Minister of Education in Estonia in the early 1990s and long-time Deputy Director of the Higher Education Support Program at Central European University in Budapest, defined Eastern Europe as "The Other". This construct accounted for all the countries that were part of the former state-socialist camp and were influenced by totalitarian communist regimes, including Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union and Mongolia. The International Symposium *Central Europe-South Eastern Europe: Interregional relations in the fields of education, science, culture and communication* (Bucharest, April 2001) reached the same conclusion: countries in the region had a lot in common; they share a communist heritage, similar economic agendas and common frustrations with regard to political and economic failures and "…even a degree of nostalgia for socialism, given the growing disparities in income" (Messman & Barrows, 2001, p.156). 'Re-discovering' each other in Eastern Europe and increasing regional cooperation was important for successful economic, political and educational integration with Western Europe, particularly given the digital divide between East and West, which, according to Nelles (2001) "…is a growing form of technological marginalization that hampers European integration" (p.232).

The region shared common economic, cultural and historical characteristics, which resulted in grouping them together as Eastern Europe, post-Soviet/ post-communist countries, or the former socialist block. However, smaller sub-groupings were also widely used; for instance, Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Baltic States, and the Commonwealth of Independent States. EU membership became a new dividing line within CEE. In 2004, eight Eastern European countries (Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) became EU members, while Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007.

By the mid 2000s, the prospects of other countries in the region becoming members was not clear, so, the EU membership could be a dominant factor in grouping Eastern Europe in the next decade. This fact raised a series of questions about the future of HE in CEE. To what extent would EU membership or non-membership shape HE systems in CEE? Is the European Higher Education Area going to serve as a unifying factor? How would the Soviet heritage impact the future HE systems? To what extent would understanding regional/sub-regional identities explain the dynamics of higher education reforms in the region? I believe that deeper insight into the historical, political and economic context help explain HE developments in the region in 1990 - 2005 as much as new political and economic alliances.

Sequence of reforms and the role of the state in promoting HE reforms.

Scholars of CEE HE generally agreed on the sequence of post-communist reforms in the 1990s (Bollag, 1999b; Coman, 2001; Scott, 2002; Tomusk, 2004). Based on a comparative survey of 12 HE institutions in ten countries, Peter Scott separated three stages of HE reforms in CEE. The first

period of chaotic transition lasted from 1989 to mid 1990 and focused on two important changes: disengagement from tight association and subordination to the economic system and the state, and the liberalization of academic structures as part of a wider liberalization. Tomusk (2004) defined the chaotic changes in HE in this period as "changes from bellow", i.e. these initial reforms had been largely initiated by HE institutions rather than governments. Various studies on Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Bulgaria and Moldova showed that by the mid 1990s institutional autonomy, eroded by inadequate financial resources, did not stimulate structural changes. As Scott put it, "issues of management and governance were left undetermined…by utopian formulations in the laws on HE" (Scott, 2002, p.146). According to Scott, in the mid 1990s universities retreated "from liberal absolutism to emerging pragmatism":

Autonomy, initially seen largely in terms of an absence of state power, was gradually replaced by new notions of civic and market accountability. Importance of HE in terms of economic development, as well as political and cultural renewal was more readily acknowledged (Scott, 2002, p.146).

Tomusk (2001, 2004) and Thomas (2001) also acknowledged this change in the focus of HE reforms.

During this stage national accreditation procedures were established across the region.

Gombos (2003), Marga (2002), Tomusk (2004) and others showed that in 1993-1996 most CEE countries created National Accreditation Committees and Academic Councils to carry out quality control in HE and advise governments on policy issues. However, Tomusk (2001) believed that the stage of consolidation was not a result of planned reforms, but rather a coincidence involving the interplay of interests of three key players: …the academe's interest to acquire collective and personal security during difficult times; the State's interest to control the HE system not having enough money to claim for the total control; and the market's demand for radically different profiles of graduate (p.66).

The difference between scholars deepened when they evaluated the results of reforms and interpreted their status in the early 2000s. Scott (2002), given his underlying assumption that exceptionalism and the underdevelopment of CEE HE was inaccurate, regarded the 2000s as a stage of normalization, when agendas of higher education in both parts of Europe converged.

CEE HE should be viewed, according to Scott, "as fitting into a wider effort to reorient the whole of European HE towards the knowledge society" (p.137)

Bollag (1999b), Kwiek (2001) and Tomusk (2001, 2004) were skeptical about the results of HE reforms in the region. Kwiek (2001) believed that the 1990s was a decade of failed attempts at reforms. Tomusk (2001) made an observation that "reflections on (higher education) reforms have not reached deeper levels than first diagnostic articles of the early 1990s have", and explained this by the "literal lack of reforms as planned and purposeful changes" (p.61). Tomusk (Tomusk called this new period in HE development as the consolidation stage.) considered that reforms in the 2000s entered a period of 'drifting' when governmental officials waited for the European Union funding and supervision to implement reforms.

Based on literature analysis, CEE higher education systems faced several policy challenges in early 2000s. First, local governments lacked a clear policy agenda of HE reforms (Tomusk, 2004). Second, the traditional basic structure of HE seemed to be unable to cope with labor market requirements both in the West and East. According to Kwiek (2001) the situation in Eastern Europe was aggravated by the fact that "academics are not prepared for …global challenges at all as they are customer rather than institution- or government driven" (p.401). He believed that the era of the Humboldtian university as a nation-state project was closed and the impact of globalization on regional HE reforms should be studied by local scholars. The third challenge for successful reforms was the wide gap between the real situation and the rhetoric of change (Kogan, 1998; Tomusk, 2004). HE actors in the region advocated Europeanization and European standards of quality and country presidents cited the Bologna Process in their presentations to promote their political agendas9.

These challenges raised several questions about the nature of change. How much real improvement stood behind rhetoric in the 1990s and 2000s? Could European integration of HE become a new political slogan which would not change the system (a

quite familiar situation in the Soviet times when political slogans were translated into huge campaigns but remained unfulfilled and brought disillusionment)? Terminology issues were closely connected to these questions. What did the concept of 'reforms' mean vis-à-vis 'change', 'transformation' or 'response' when used to examine HE in CEE? Kerr, for instance, in the preface to the Cerych and Sabatier book on HE reforms in Europe in the 1980s (Cerych & Sabatier, 1986) (See, for example, the speeches of Iliescu and Nastase, then Romanian President and Prime-Minister, at the International Symposium on Intra-regional Relations in Education, Science, Culture and Communication (2001) defined 'reforms' as meaning 'new' and 'improvement' and distinguished between 'reforms' and 'response'. In the American context reforms were connected with changes in values, response was a reaction to the situation. While both involve change, the first was active and by choice, the second – reactive and of necessity. Was such a differentiation between 'reforms' and 'response' relevant in analyzing CEE HE systems? The literature on HE reforms in CEE over-used the word 'reforms', often meaning a technical change rather than a change in values. Certainly, Kwiek (2001) made a very important point when calling for critical thinking on HE reforms within academia: …re-invention of HE in the region should be accompanied by both conceptualizations and activities of the academy itself. Otherwise unavoidable – and necessary – changes will most likely be imposed from the outside. This eventuality calls for critical thinking (p. 403).

The international factor in HE reforms in CEE.

Cerych (2002), Hull (2000), Kwiek (2001), Tomusk (2004) examined the influence of international organizations, representatives of foundations, Western academics and Western models of HE in regional HE reforms. The literature mentioned the German *Fachhoschule*, the Dutch accreditation model, the OECD concept of 'short-cycle' or the 'non-university sector', the Australian methods of funding education, the European degree structures, the American model of management education and others. The neo-liberal doctrine, which stressed the need to diminish the role of state in public life, had a great impact by stimulating an explosion of private educational institutions and the development of institutional autonomy.

Cerych (2002), in his article on the impact of foreign aid in the Czech Republic, considered that foreign influence "played an important role in the launching of educational reform in the country" (p.112). At the same time, the work of foreign advisors was limited in education, which, more than other sectors, was deeply rooted in national traditions and history. He concluded that foreign expertise was valuable when experts really understood the local environment and the language and that local elites caught up quite fast and adapt Western terminology and methods used in reforming HE.

Tomusk (2004) was much more critical on the role of foreign expertise. Arguing that external agents guided reforms he believed that HE systems in the region changed from a "Marxist utopia" to a "technocratic romance". He then developed the argument

that Western experts and CEE political and educational leaders advocated and introduced certain Western models, which in the context of a fragile democracy, often had a reverse impact to the one expected or the one that was observed in the original country. The example he used was the Dutch accreditation model based on self-study and peer review that was heavily promoted by the European Council and was adopted by most CEE countries. "There is, however, a significant gap between the Dutch model of steering from a distance and Eastern European policy of direct administrative interference" (Tomusk, 2004, p.120). Ministries of Education in Romania, Hungary, Estonia and other countries were directly involved in the accreditation process or controlled pseudo-independent accreditation agencies. Many of the Romanian private institutions, for example, were closed down by the end of the 1990s, and Tomusk (2004) argued that this was not necessarily connected with the low quality of teaching or the lack of infrastructure in the private establishments. Instead, governments were looking for legitimate ways of closing institutions in conditions of scarcity of public funding. According to Tomusk (2001), they mistakenly assumed that accreditation was part of the state-HE relationship and helped catching up with the West – a thesis forwarded by Cerych (1995). Also, the strong lobby of public universities opposing private universities was another factor which turned a Western formative evaluation model aimed at improving performance into a summative one resulting in closing down many institutions.

Neave (2001a), in an editorial on policy-making perspectives on CEE HE, made the point that "…reconstructing HE in Eastern Europe is a particularly good illustration of the general international exchange and co-operation in policy-making" (p.198). At the same time, the discussion on the meaning of globalization, internationalization, Westernization and, most recently, Europeanization for the region was vague and the implications of these phenomenon on the quality of HE was not adequately researched. In fact, the perceived inevitability of globalization often hid the inability or undesirability of both HE and political leaders to radically democratize HE. Did changing the names of institutions, courses and programs by adding attributes such as 'international', 'European' or 'American' and making them look pro-Western reform the system? To what extent did these so-called international programs, which attracted huge numbers of students, increase the competitiveness of local students in the global labor markets?

Another unanswered question was how had international organizations such as the WB, IMF, OECD, EU and UNESCO had an impact on HE reforms in CEE? Had they simply provided a technical expertise and promoted Western models or had they played a much bigger role in setting and dominating the educational and development agenda? Significant research literature on the role of the WB in education, generally, and higher education, particularly, argued that these organizations have become the most important single provider of multilateral technical assistance and funding in education in developing countries (Jones, 1997; Mundy, 2002;

Samoff & Stromquist, 2001; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). According to this literature, the WB had financial powers and technical capabilities to render educational

policy advice and concessional finance, and concentrated "…ambition, power and resources for coordinating global initiatives in the field of educational development" (Mundy, 2002, p.483).

Within the same line of argument, Samoff & Stromquist (2001) and Torres&Schugurensky (2002) argued that, along with other bilateral and international institutions, the WB infused "…a new set of values appealing to individual self-interest rather than collective rights", thus restricting "…quite drastically the range of options available to policy-makers in developing countries" (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002, p.439). They analyzed the external political pressures of international organizations on national economic and social policy making in developing countries, and how this in turn impacted the choice of educational strategies. Neo-liberal economic reforms largely regulated by the conditions attached to the IMF structural adjustment loans led to diminishing public social expenditures and increasing public debts in developing countries. Accordingly, "…a weak, dependent capitalist class and an indebted state are unable to formulate a university policy compatible with the new economic paradigm", and instead the task of policy formulation was undertaken by a network of international agencies (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002, p. 436).

The WB and IMF have been important players in the CEE politics of higher education reforms since the early 1990s by promoting neo-liberal policies of privatization and New Public Management around the region and by advising specific policies of reorganization and funding in HE systems in particular nations. UNESCO, because of its different mandate and decision making process, as well as minimal financial resources, played a different role. It provided technical expertise, funded conferences and publications on HE reforms, and collected statistical data on HE through it Center (CEPES) in Bucharest. More recently, several CEE nations became members of the OECD, and the EU undertook a more systemic approach in promoting HE reforms in CEE via the process of EU integration. However, the effect of these policies and initiatives on HE require further research.

European HE integration and CEE HE systems.

The literature on developments in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) since 1999 have been extensive, reflected various opinions, interests and discourses and consisted of policy documents and scholarly research.

Official declarations, communiqués, agreements and materials of conferences and meetings related to the European integration of higher education were published on-line by associations such as the *European Association for International Education* (www.aic.lv) and the *European Network of Quality Assurance* (www.enqa.com). Scholarly research accounted for monographs, collections of papers and articles published in academic journals of education, such as the *European Journal of Education, European Higher Education, Higher Education, Higher Education Policy* and *Comparative Higher Education* (Haug, 2003; Rhoades & Sporn, 2002; Van der Wende, 2001). Publications dating before the Bologna agreement focused on the EU educational exchange

programs and their impact on increasing academic mobility and enhancing the European dimension and cultural diversity in education and training (Coulby & Jones, 1995; Field, 1998; Peck, 1998).

After-Bologna texts addressed a variety of topics related to the issues of internationalization, regionalization and globalization, and their impact on degree recognition and the creation of quality assurance systems in Europe (Bruneau & Savage, 2002; Neave, 2001b;

Van Vught, Van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2002). Several features characterized the literature on EHEA in the early 2000s. The numbers of conventions and declarations signed within the Bologna Process since 1999 have been overwhelming. For instance, about 20 events were held between the two meetings of Ministers of Education in Prague in 2001 and Berlin in 2003.

Western European academics dominated the Bologna process debate. North American scholars were involved to the extent they made international comparative studies on quality assurance systems (Bruneau & Savage, 2002; Rhoades & Sporn, 2003). Though most of the Central and Eastern European countries joined the Bologna process, the number of articles by scholars from the region and about the region (particularly South Eastern Europe) reached insignificant up to the early 2000s (Nicolescu, 2002; 2003; Rozsnyai, 2003; 2004; Tomusk, 2001; 2001a; 2003). In the period 1999-2003, only one conference out of 20 covered the eastward expansion of the European Higher Education Area and eas organized by UNESCO-CEPES (2003).

Most articles and Bologna publications were more descriptive than critical, while technical details on various projects related to the Bologna process were excessive. The weaknesses of the Bologna process were seldom discussed. For example, Haug (2002) briefly referred to the vague character of the Bologna declaration on quality issues. Van Vught (2003), Van der Wende (2001) and Westerheijden (2002) questioned whether nationally driven processes of higher education integration in Europe were an adequate response to globalization.

Sursock (2002) asked a conceptual question: "Do we have a clear idea of the kind of university we want for the 21st century and is quality assurance adapted to that goal?" (p.42).

I believe that Bologna initiatives have been very important in making higher education systems in Europe more flexible and dynamic in the 2000s. At the same time, rather than questioning their relevance to globalization or enthusiastically declaring that the Bologna process could achieve "convergence which fully respects diversity" (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003, p.246), the approach of 'constructive ambiguity' suggested by Sursock and Williams (Sursock, 2002) seems more appropriate. First of all, there is no single blueprint-solution for all problems and issues in such a diverse area as European higher education. Second, slowing down and examining carefully the impacts of some policies could be useful to identifying inappropriate technical solutions.

Interconnection between higher education and the economic system.

In the early period of transition, Aslund (1992) mentioned two paths along which reforms in CEE education and the economy interact.

The transition from central allocations to a market system on the one hand promotes payments for services previously furnished free (on a criterion of merit or privilege), but on the other hand requires support from education in the fostering of initiative and in the techniques appropriate to the profitable operation of a business (p.10).

He argued that management training is a prominent feature of modern capitalism, but was also used extensively in the centrally-planned economy. Aslund (1992) forecasted the rise of management training during the transition period based on the fact that it "gives fast returns and these yields accrue to all individuals involved" (p.118); training in business, management, law and economics was also seen as a way to educate a generation of specialists capable of operating in a new market economy. The mushrooming of private and public schools, institutes and departments in management and business was an important development in CEE HE in the 1990s. Western business schools, according to Hull (2000), "played a key role in disseminating modern management practices in non-western countries" (p.319). More than that, he considered that in those countries that experienced success in the transition to a market economy the transfer of management technologies made a significant contribution.

The diverse experience of the region showed that the interconnection between economic reforms and HE reforms was more complex than straightforward. First, it depended on what is understood by successful economic reforms. Judging by the speed and scale of privatization, the neo-liberal reforms were successful in most countries of the region. When reforms are being evaluated from the perspective of social results or freedoms people gained, according to the capability approach developed by the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (2000), then the increased poverty, inequality, and deterioration of public services in CEE raise important questions about the so-called success of the neo-liberal approach. Second, several countries in the region (particularly the former Soviet republics, Bulgaria, and Romania) experienced a dramatic decline in economic indicators despite the fact that they followed the path of the neo-liberal economic reforms and actively transferred Western management technologies via their HE and foreign aid programs. Some authors argued that the reason was the absence of a long history of rebellious intellectuals in these countries (Amsden, Kochanowicz & Taylor, 1994), while others stressed the conformist nature of local economic and social scientists and their loyalty to the new, but in essence old communist, governments (Nikova, 1994).

A series of articles published in 2002-03 analyzed the importance of creating and supporting local universities for regional development in Romania (Nicolescu, 2003), the Czech Republic (Rosenberg, 2002), Hungary (Gombos, 2003) and Poland, where an International Seminar was held on The Emergence of New Universities and their Role in Local Development (2001). The authors covered issues related to institutional reorganization and the mergers of regional universities, as well as identifying their

missions - training the labor force for local industries, providing linguistic services and furthering inter-ethnic and cultural understanding.

Case studies of particular CEE universities revealed similar problems to those Western European higher education systems faced in the 1960s and 1970s. At that point in time, local universities were created to respond to the specific needs of regions, particularly regions which were disadvantaged economically, geographically, socially or culturally10. One of the major issues common for Western European regional universities then and for regional CEE universities in / *The University of Tromso in Norway, which opened in 1972, is one example (Cerych & Sabatier, 1986)* / the 1990s-2000s was balancing curricula between disciplines directly relevant to local development and general sciences.

The discourse of higher education reforms in CEE and its impact on economic development presented in the documents of the World Bank and in official declarations of local educational and political elites was inspired by the human capital theory widespread in the West since the 1960s (Magalhaes & Amaral, 2007; Becker, 1964, Schultz, 1963, Psacaroupolis, 2005).

Academic research on how changes in higher education in CEE related to national development was scattered and limited. This issue was usually addressed in the HE literature in the context of general education reforms11. Rarely was the interaction between HE and economic development the focus of critical analysis, except in the case of one book chapter (Tomusk, 2004, Ch. 10). The major economic reason to support higher education put forward in the HE literature in CEE was the increasing social and private returns to education. As in the Western literature, it was argued that a more educated population increased productivity, production, consumption and, consequently, public wealth and personal incomes. In the context of CEE, high graduate unemployment levels and the huge brain drain of the educated labor force abroad (Gaugas, 2004; Mihailescu, 2004) posed serious questions on how higher education expansion contributes to economic development. Tomusk (2001), for example, considered that further increases in "…the students' Enrolment is absurd in economic terms and will clearly lead to further deterioration of the quality of education which had already suffered a lot" (p.65).

This purely 'economic' debate also raised important concerns about the philosophical and ethical issues of equity of access and freedom. Limiting Enrolment became a politically sensitive issue, since it was seen as a backlash on democratic rights: the freedom to choose and (For example, two studies with country cases published by Oxford Studies in Comparative Education and edited by Beresford-Hill (1998) and by Phillips & Kaser (1992)) accessibility to higher education. At the same time, tripled or even quadrupled Enrolments in some countries of the region created an illusion of improved accessibility and affordability of HE in CEE. For students, participation in HE often postponed hurdles related to entering the limited labor market. Despite the fact that most countries in the region stipulated in their constitutions or HE legislation that HE should be free for their citizens, the share of public funding had been declining since the early 1990s. Growing tuition fees and other educational expenditures in the

poorest countries of the region were increasingly covered by remittances sent home by parents that worked abroad. Similarly to themes in the HE reform literature in CEE covered above, economic development represented a highly unexplored area, especially from a critical perspective. Scholarly research has yet to reflect on whether public higher education served as a subsidy for the elite (as in Latin America, for example, according to Torres & Schugurensky, 2002) and how have increased enrolments and corruption practices impacted equity of access of different groups of population in CEE.

Conclusions: Formulating the Research Question

Several important points about the nature of changes in CEE HE in 1990-2005 have emerged from the above review of the literature. Central and Eastern European nations developed diverse economic, social and educational arrangements, but they also shared commonalties, such as the path of economic reforms in the 1990s and a history of authoritarian governments. Their HE systems varied by size, affiliation with Western Europe and openness to reforms, but all of these systems experienced expansion, privatization and diminishing public funding. Similar developments occurred in Western Europe or Northern America as well, but the speed and extent to which they took place in CEE HE was much more dramatic. In addition, the role of the state in regulating HE evolved along a different path than in the West via the establishment of national accreditation systems.

The extent to which transition reforms were successful in the region has been hotly debated, since there is no common understanding on how to measure the success. HE systems acquired many democratic characteristics (election of rectors and increasing role of academic senates), but HE qualifications did not relate well to the needs of the labor market. The quality and methods of instruction, the level of corruption even in advanced reformers such as Hungary, as well as the capability of HE to educate critically-minded individuals were serious concerns. It was also not clear whether HE expansion has had an impact on economic improvement and equity of access given the low capacity in science production and high graduate unemployment.

Internationalization was an important component of HE reforms both in terms of integration within the EHEA and adopting various international practices. The neo-liberal agenda of economic reforms promoted by the IMF and WB influenced HE directly via educational technical assistance and lending, but also indirectly via constraints on public social spending and diffusing a different set of values. Public funding for HE decreased significantly, while reliance on private sources and competitiveness within HE and within the public system increased.

European integration by the end of the 1990s had modified the agenda of transition reforms, stressing the need for public provision of higher education. However, CEE countries accumulated high public debts, which resulted in lowering their public spending.

The number of critical studies on HE reforms was limited, while interpretative studies, based on ethnographic methods, were very rare (See, for instance, the Ph.D. dissertation on teaching in Polish MBA by Kowalski (2004).

Case studies and comparative analysis were mostly descriptive and favored large countries or advanced reformers in the region. This inquiry is concerned with understanding the complex and multidimensional nature of HE reforms in Central and Eastern Europe. It will analyze similarities and differences in HE reforms in three CEE nations - Hungary, Romania and Moldova, and locate these reforms in the national and regional development context. To achieve this, the following research question guides this study:

How did governments negotiate and implement HE reforms in Hungary, Romania and the Republic of Moldova in the period 1990-2005?

Three sub-questions will be used to assist in answering the major research question:

1. What was the importance of the regional and historical context in explaining modern HE reforms in these nations?

2. How had local power dynamics interacted with the external projects of Sovietization, neo-liberal globalization and European integration in shaping current HE governance arrangements and policymaking in Hungary, Romania and Moldova?

3. Based on the case study of the Republic of Moldova, how had higher education policymakers and administrators understood transition reforms and power dynamics in HE?

In exploring these questions I use Critical Theory as a conceptual framework and qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews and discourse analysis, which are described in detail in the next chapter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE POLITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE. DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA by Lucia Padure A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto