Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjhe20

A cultural perspective of higher education governance reform in Poland: divergent interpretations by rectors across distinct categories of universities

Davide Donina, Anna Pokorska, Dominik Antonowicz & Marta Jaworska

To cite this article: Davide Donina, Anna Pokorska, Dominik Antonowicz & Marta Jaworska (2022): A cultural perspective of higher education governance reform in Poland: divergent interpretations by rectors across distinct categories of universities, Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, DOI: 10.1080/1360080X.2022.2103940

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2022.2103940

Published online: 21 Jul 2022.

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND MANAGEMENT
https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2022.2103940

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

A cultural perspective of higher education governance reform in Poland: divergent interpretations by rectors across distinct categories of universities

Davide Donina, Anna Pokorska, Dominik Antonowicz and Marta Jaworska

Department of Science and Higher Education Research, Nicolaus Copernicus University (UMK), Toruń, Poland

ABSTRACT

In 2018, a new governance law (*Ustawa 2.0*) modernised the institutional governance of Polish public higher education institutions. This article investigates the governance changes from the cultural perspective of higher education governance through a survey administered to all Polish rectors. Responses were analysed by splitting higher education institutions into three categories (traditional academic [comprehensive], specialised, and applied sciences) to explore whether distinct institutional environments/subfields influence the perception of the new governance model. This article provides several research contributions: it is the first to adopt a cultural perspective to analyse higher education governance reforms in a Central and Eastern European country; it addresses specialised universities and universities of applied sciences, which are usually overlooked in higher education governance studies; and it extends the knowledge of the recent Polish higher education reform by highlighting divergent interpretations of the same governance framework across distinct institutional subfields within the same higher education system.

KEYWORDS

Higher education governance; Poland; Law 2.0; university council; rectors; specialised universities; universities of applied sciences; institutional subfield

Introduction

Since the 1980s, universities in Europe have undergone major governance reforms inspired by the principles of new public management (NPM). Key features of these reforms have been enhanced institutional autonomy, hierarchy, and vertical steering with the empowerment of central administration, of individual executive leadership at both the central (rectors) and faculty levels (deans and department heads), and of central governance bodies in which external stakeholders are involved at the expense of traditional academic self-governance collegial governing bodies, such as the senate and faculty councils (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Donina & Hasanefendic, 2019; Donina & Paleari, 2019; Edlund & Sahlin, forthcoming; Gornitzka, Maassen, & de Boer, 2017; Huisman, de Boer, & Goedegebuure, 2006; Kretek, Dragšić, & Kehm, 2013; Magalhães, Veiga, & Amaral, 2018).

CONTACT Davide Donina davide.donina@v.umk.pl Department of Science and Higher Education Research, Nicolaus Copernicus University (UMK), ul. Fosa Staromiejska 1a, Toruń 87-100, Poland

On 20 July 2018, the Polish Parliament also approved a new law on higher education governance ('Constitution for Science', also called *Ustawa 2.0* or Law 2.0). Poland is a European Union country with 39 million inhabitants (prior to Ukrainian refugee crisis); its higher education sector is composed of 349 higher education institutions (123 public ones) wherein 1.2 million students are enrolled (70% in the public sector). Public budget on higher education and research is about 6 billion euros and European Union full-time students are not charged any tuition fee in public institutions by law. Drivers of the reform were normative assumptions that higher education institutions should be open, accountable, and relevant to the social and economic fabric (Antonowicz, Kulczycki, & Budzanowska, 2020; Ernst&Young & Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową, 2010; European Commission, 2017; Shaw, 2019; Thieme, 2009; Urbanek, 2020). Accordingly, the new law modified university governance, enforcing the same institutional governance framework for all categories of Polish public higher education institutions: (a) traditional academic [comprehensive] universities, (b) specialised universities, and (c) universities of applied sciences. They represent three distinct institutional categories with own historical roots, distinctive identities and different degree of embeddedness of Humboldtian tradition and academic/vocational orientation.

As in most European countries, the reform aims to decrease the role of collegial decision-making bodies, while strengthening the academic leadership (rector) to transform loosely coupled organisations into more tightly coupled ones (Bleiklie, Enders, & Lepori, 2017; de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Paradeise, Reale, Bleiklie, & Ferlie, 2009). It also adds a new central governance decision-making body – the university council (*Rada Uczelni*) – encompassing external stakeholders. Similar to other countries (e.g., Italy; see Donina, Meoli, & Paleari, 2015a), lay members' involvement caused concerns among the academic community. They were perceived as an undue interference in internal university affairs and Polish long-standing tradition of academic self-governance (Antonowicz, 2015; Dobbins, 2015; Kulczycki et al., 2021; Kwiek, 2014, 2015).

Scholars have just started to analyse the recent Polish higher education governance reform (Antonowicz, Rónay, & Jaworska, forthcoming; Urbanek, 2021; Waligóra & Górski, 2022). They addressed it from the structural perspective of university governance, namely through the analysis of formal governance arrangements and power structure. However, there has been no empirical attempt to examine the reform from a cultural perspective of higher education governance. The latter assumes that university governance is a process largely dependent on how social actors perceive and make sense of governance structures. Therefore, it considers perceptions better than formal written rules in assessing the authority relationships and reconfiguration of power between professional groups (Birnbaum, 2004). Accordingly, the cultural perspective locates actors (groups and/or individuals) at the centre of enquiry and focuses on how they interpret governance arrangements (Tierney, 2004).

This research gap is frequent not only in the Polish case but in higher education governance reform studies in general (Huisman et al., 2006). Furthermore, the few studies based on the cultural perspective have only addressed traditional academic universities and Western European countries as the context of analysis, while specialised universities, universities of applied sciences (henceforth UAS), and Central and Eastern European countries are under-researched.

This article addresses these gaps by investigating the perceptions of the new institutional governance arrangements by the rectors, whose view is crucial because they a) have the primary responsibility for managing the higher education institution; b) are directly involved (and empowered) in the new governance arrangements and have first-hand knowledge of the functioning of newly-established university councils and of its cooperation with other governing bodies; c) experience daily the consequences of organisational governance changes; and d) have a key role in the implementation and long-term effectiveness of policy changes. By relying on rectors' perceptions, this study compares beyond formal rules how higher education institutions with different historical roots, degree of embeddedness of Humboldtian tradition and academic/vocational orientation (namely, (a) traditional academic [comprehensive] universities, (b) specialised universities and (c) universities of applied sciences) enact the same governance reform. Research in other organisational fields showed indeed that institutional subfields may vary in terms of logics and associated structures and practices (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2016, 2021; Quirke, 2013). Accordingly, we explore whether the diverse institutional environments or subfields within a higher education system in a single country influence the perception of the new governance model and we shed light on potential diverging responses to a unitary national law across institutional subfields (i.e., distinct categories of universities). To this end, with the support of the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (KRASP), we carried out a large-scale national survey administered to the rectors of all Polish public higher education institutions in May–June 2021.

Thus, this study extends the use of cultural perspective on higher education governance to the Central and Eastern European context, and expands knowledge on recent Polish higher education governance reform by showing that i) concerns about lay members are no longer an issue among Polish rectors, and ii) there are divergent expectations from university council members and different interpretations by rectors of the same institutional governance framework between institutional subfields.

The article is structured as follows. Next section presents the literature review on the cultural perspective of university governance and the main results of studies based on rectors' perceptions. The following sections present the context of analysis (namely, the new Polish structural governance arrangements) and methods and sample. This is followed by the report of survey results and discussion in light of the previous literature. We conclude by summarising the main contributions and avenues for future research.

Literature review: cultural perspective of university governance

Higher education literature widely reports how reforms modified institutional governance. Most studies have adopted a structural perspective of higher education governance, analysing governance structures, formal distribution of authority and decision-making powers, and organisational rules and procedures within higher education institutions (e.g., Donina & Hasanefendic, 2019; Donina & Paleari, 2019; Gornitzka et al., 2017; Kretek et al., 2013; Urbanek, 2021). This perspective is rooted in rational choice theory (McCubbins, Noll, & Weingast, 1989; Moe, 1990) and rests upon the assumption of the pivotal role of the

structural architecture because it expects that rules, procedures, and authority allocation play a key role in shaping collective choices and determine how university business is carried out (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Kaplan, 2004; Kerr, 1963; Wood & Smith, 1992).

By contrast, the cultural perspective (Birnbaum, 2004; Tierney, 2004) goes beyond the mere reporting of formal governance arrangements and power structure. It assumes that it is necessary to see through the eyes of groups and individuals directly involved in higher education governance to obtain a full understanding of governance arrangements following a particular innovation (i.e., reform). Yet, only a few studies have addressed the perceptions of key parties involved in university governance, usually by comparing the opinions of rectors and other internal actors following an institutional governance reform to assess the outcomes of changes.

For instance, Huisman et al. (2006), through a national survey, assessed how different constituencies (leaders, managers, staff, students) within the 13 Dutch traditional academic universities appraised the new governance structures dictated by the 1997 MUB Act. They showed that Dutch executives have gained a more prominent role in university decision-making, but other constituencies also participate in governance, and they were overall satisfied with the 'professionalised' governing structure that improved decisiveness. Similarly, Facchini and Fia (2021) – focusing on the Italian case study after the 2010 governance reform (Gelmini reform) – compared the perception of rectors and department heads regarding the role played by various subjects involved in internal decision-making processes concerning specific decisions (e.g., allocation of budget and resources for hiring, teaching and research activities). Their findings stressed the increased influence of rectors in the overall decision-making process. Magalhães et al. (2018) focused instead on the perceptions of rectors (comparing to those of senate members) about the role and ideal characteristics of external (lay) board members in a cross-national comparative survey of 26 universities from eight Western European countries. Their results showed that rectors have a favourable view of lay members' capacity to contribute. Rectors agree they are adequately prepared and their role is important in strategic planning and decision-making. However, they would like them to behave as non-interfering friends, that is, as allies against political authorities, supporting the academic leadership whenever necessary, promoting the university in the society, and providing general statements and advice from an outside perspective. Nevertheless, rectors also expressed favour for a passive role of lay members: they should avoid interfering with core activities of higher education institutions (teaching and research). Finally, Carvalho and Videira (2019) compared the perceptions of academic and administrative staff regarding changes in power relations within Portuguese universities following the 2007 RJIES governance reform and suggested that academics perceive changes as negatively affecting their participation in decision-making processes, but not necessarily interpret this as a loss of professional autonomy.

Context of analysis

Polish higher education system

The Polish higher education system consists of three major institutional categories with own historical roots, distinctive institutional identities and different degree of embeddedness of Humboldtian tradition and academic/vocational orientation. They are therefore distinct institutional environments or subfields in which the same unitary governance reform is being adopted:

(a) traditional (academic) universities – encompass academic, comprehensive, and largest universities in Poland. They have been traditionally the most prestigious but also the most loosely-coupled internally (a federation of autonomous faculties and departments) and openly inward-oriented institutions. The principles of academic self-governance and Humboldtian tradition are deeply entrenched and idealised, thus their formal, explicit goal has been to pursue pure knowledge. Traditional universities have their own rectors' (sub)conference (KRUP);

(b) specialised universities – smaller, not-fragmented academic institutions with a specific disciplinary focus (economy, medicine, pedagogy, agriculture, technology, physical education, fine arts, etc.). Most of them were established in the early 1950s when the communist government spun them off from traditional universities. They have been less influenced by the Humboldtian tradition, whilst strongly shaped by the target job environment professional cultures, norms and values because their primary role has been the education and training of future workers. Thus, they have focused on being instrumental to society and economy. Specialised universities have several rectors' (sub) conferences depending on their institutional profile (e.g., medical (KRUM), fine arts (KRUA), economic (KRUE), pedagogical (KRUPed), technical (KRUPT), physical education (KRAWF) agricultural and life sciences (KRURiP));

(c) universities of applied sciences (UAS) – post-1997 vocational universities that are small in terms of student enrolment and simple in regards to organisational structure, with no roots in the Humboldtian tradition. They developed from post-secondary schools with the explicit mission of being instrumental to regional economic development. UAS have their own rectors' (sub)conference (KREUZ).

Institutional governance reform

Polish higher education governance presents a long-standing tradition of academic self-governance. After the re-institutionalisation of the Humboldtian academic self-governance model following the collapse of the communist regime, Polish higher education governance has been change-resistant and characterised by incremental changes only (Antonowicz, 2015; Antonowicz et al., 2020; Dobbins, 2015, 2017; Kwiek, 2014, 2015). This was due to the 'policy-of-no-policy' by the Polish government (Kwiek, 2008) and to its corporatist nature (see Siaroff, 1999) in the higher education sector. The state dialogued indeed with a few officially recognised interest group representatives (KRASP, the General Council for Higher Education (RGNiSzW), and Students' Parliament of the Republic of Poland (PSRP)), which usually stood against radical policy changes and blocked or moderated major reforms (Antonowicz et al., 2020; Vlk, Dobbins, & Riedel, 2021).

Law 2.0 is also the outcome of a participative policy design process (Antonowicz et al., 2020), yet it undermines the traditional academic logic (Urbanek, 2021). It redefines authority by supporting the introduction of stronger organisational leadership and hierarchical structures. Law 2.0 compels all Polish public higher education institutions to add to the rector and senate a third compulsory central governing body (the university council–*Rada Uczelni*) that involves lay members (Figure 1), stipulating the mandatory tasks of each (see below). However, Law 2.0, which applies across institutional subfields, also provides leeway to design their own institutional governance model and tailor internal organisation. Therefore, higher education institutions into their own statute can decide the composition of compulsory governing bodies (within the limits set by Law 2.0), detail procedures for electing (and dismissing) their members, entrust them with additional tasks and/or add further governance bodies.

The rector is elected by the electoral college, composed of an absolute majority of academics, administrative employees, and students. Higher education institutions can define specific requirements for candidates running for the rector office. They remain the executive head of the higher education institution and are responsible for the management of the whole organisation. Law 2.0 empowers them by centralising formal decision-making powers, for instance, by assigning additional competences in creating internal organisational structures and the possibility of appointing and dismissing individuals in managerial positions, such as faculty deans. The rector proposes the statute and the strategy to the senate and reports annually on its implementation to the university council.

The senate becomes primarily responsible for academic matters, but it also adopts the statute with an absolute majority vote (after consultation with the university council) and approves the institutional strategy. It affects university management indirectly through the election (and dismissal) of university council members. However, the senate is weakened regarding non-academic issues, in which its powers are limited to advise and opinion-making through recommendations to the rector and university council. The senate is chaired by the rector, who is the only ex-officio member (previously, vice-

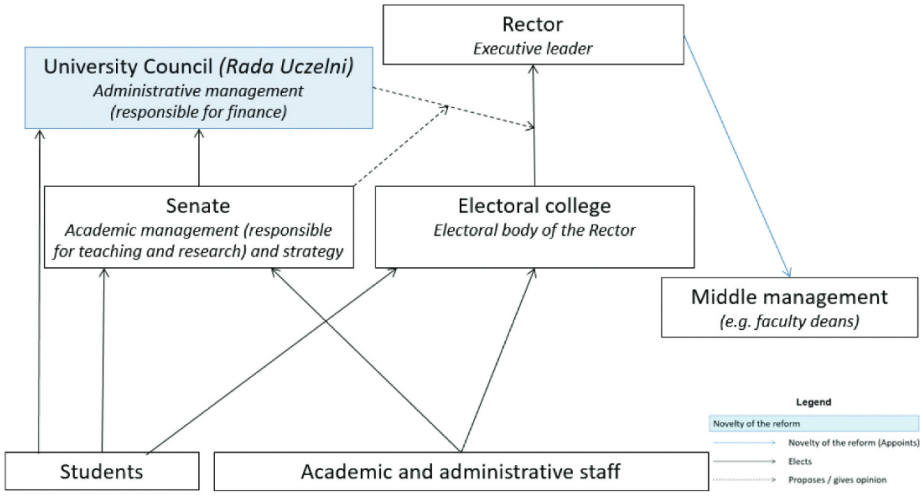

Figure 1. Institutional governance by Law 2.0.

rectors and all faculty deans were also ex-officio members), and is composed by law of a majority of elected professors (at least 50%), other elected academic and administrative staff (at least 25%), and student representatives (at least 20%).

Law 2.0 adds a third central governing body (the university council), which is expected to perform a supervisory role over the rector. As the Minister Jarosław Gowin articulated: *The university council shall support rector, but also control their activity* (Ziółek, 2018). The tasks of the university council are to monitor assets and financial management, to give opinions on the draft of the statute and the strategy, and to evaluate its implementation. It can also indicate candidates for the rector office (after consultation with the senate), although in most higher education institutions such power is shared with other stakeholders. A major novelty of the reform is the involvement, for the first time, of external members in full-fledged decision-making bodies of Polish higher education institutions. By law, the university council is in fact composed of seven or nine members, of whom six or eight are elected by the senate (at least half from among lay members) according to rules specified in each university statute, and it is completed by the president of the student union. Both internal and lay members of the university council are elected by the senate according to the democratic model, namely anyone can put themselves forward for election as expertise is not a key requirement (Cornforth, 2003; Donina, Meoli, & Paleari, 2015b). The only formal requirements set by law are that the candidates are not over-67 years old, have a bachelor degree, no criminal record, passed a lustration process (see Ellis, 1996), and are no active politician to avoid political interference. The rector cannot be a member. The university council chairman is also elected by the senate from among the lay members. According to the government, lay members should embed Polish higher education institutions into society by representing the societal interests and bringing the external perspective into higher education institutions. However, as in other countries (e.g., Italy; Donina et al., 2015a), their involvement caused controversies and concerns among rectors and academic community in the policy design process (Antonowicz et al., 2020; Urbanek, 2020) because lay members were perceived as an undue interference in university internal affairs rather than a steering mechanism and/or accountability measure.

Law 2.0 also impacts the internal organisation of Polish higher education institutions. Faculty deans and faculty councils are no longer mandatory by law, although most higher education institutions maintain them. Faculty deans (when present) are no longer elected by the faculty council, which was composed of an absolute majority of academics and students. The formal power to appoint (and dismiss) them is shifted to the rector by law; thus, they are expected to become part of the top-down chain of command. However, in most higher education institutions, the rector chooses the dean from among the faculty staff and makes the decision after consultations with the faculty community, or they even simply appoint individuals indicated by the faculty staff. The faculty council is also usually present but restricted to advisory and opinion-making role only (see Urbanek, 2021 for an in-depth analysis of changes to authority structures within faculties of Polish traditional universities).

Methods and sample

This study is based on an extensive online national survey with standardised responses (single- and multiple-choice) conducted among rectors of all Polish public higher education institutions in May–June 2021 with the support of KRASP.

Table 1. Public higher education institutions in Poland and sample representativeness.

Categories of universities	Population	Sample	%
Traditional	18	15	83.3%
Specialised	69	31	44.9%
Applied Sciences	36	14	38.9%
Total	**123**	**60**	**48.8%**

The aim of the article is to explore whether the distinct institutional environments or subfields within a higher education system in a single country influence rectors' perception of the new governance model. We detailed this general objective into three subtopics: i) rectors' perception of how Law 2.0 changed power distribution among existing governance and management bodies (rector, senate, deans), ii) their views on the impact of the university council on academic self-governance, institutional autonomy, quality, and transparency of the decision-making process, and iii) their potential concerns and expectations from lay and internal university council members. Rectors' participation was voluntary and their responses were confidential and anonymous for ethical reasons. Overall, the response rate was high given the high-level profile and busy agenda of respondents: 60 rectors out of 123 completed the survey.

In order to test whether the institutional environment/subfield influences the perception of the new governance model, we relied on the three broad categories of Polish public higher education institutions introduced in the context of analysis. Table 1 summarises the sample and its representativeness with respect to the population.

Survey results

This section presents and compares the responses of rectors across categories of universities.

Regardless of the institutional subfield, rectors generally agreed their role was strengthened by Law 2.0 (about 70% of answers in every category; Table 2). They point out it happened at the expense of the senate. Such account is stronger among rectors of specialised universities and UAS (55 and 57%, respectively) than traditional universities (33%), wherein 40% of respondents believed the role of the senate was not affected (Table 2).

The role of the deans also decreased following the implementation of Law 2.0 according to the majority of rectors in traditional and specialised universities, whereas UAS rectors asserted it was not influenced (Table 3).

Table 2. Rectors' perception of the impact of reform on the role of rectors and senate.

	Rector			Senate		
	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)
Increased	10 (67%)	22 (71%)	10 (71%)	–	–	–
Not influenced	2 (13%)	4 (13%)	1 (7%)	6 (40%)	3 (10%)	3 (21%)
Decreased	–	1 (3%)	1 (7%)	5 (33%)	17 (55%)	8 (57%)
Equalised internal balance	3 (20%)	4 (13%)	2 (14%)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Further clarified	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4 (27%)	11 (35%)	3 (21%)

The majority of rectors of traditional and specialised universities (60 and 58%, respectively) claimed the university council did not affect self-governance, whereas the UAS rectors' answers were balanced between 'not influenced' and 'slightly decreased' (43% each; Table 4).

An overwhelming majority of rectors in all institutional subfields agreed that the introduction of the university council did not affect institutional autonomy (Table 5).

Rectors' perception of the university council shows also only minor differences across institutional subfields. Overall, they are satisfied about the impact of the university council (Table 6). In terms of quality of decision-making process, satisfaction was comparatively higher among rectors of traditional universities (47% answered it significantly or slightly improved) than amongst rectors of specialised (42%) and UAS (35%). Dissimilar situation is reported in regards to transparency of decision-making. Although rectors again acknowledged the positive impact of the university council, this time UAS rectors perceived the biggest improvement (50% claimed it against one-third in academic and specialised universities).

Lay members did not concern rectors in any institutional subfield. This opinion was unanimous in traditional academic universities, whereas there was a minority of critical voices in specialised and UAS (Table 7).

Rectors did not present unanimous expectations from the lay members (Table 8). The majority of UAS rectors (64%) expected lay members to report requests from social and economic surroundings, whereas this expectation dropped to 33% among rectors of

Table 3. Rectors' perception of the impact of reform on the role of deans.

	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)
Increased	–	3 (10%)	1 (7%)
Not influenced	5 (33%)	4 (13%)	8 (57%)
Decreased	10 (67%)	23 (74%)	5 (36%)
No answer	–	1 (3%)	–

Table 4. Rectors' perception of the impact of university council on self-governance.

	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)
Significantly increased	1 (7%)	–	–
Slightly increased	–	1 (3%)	2 (14%)
Not influenced	9 (60%)	18 (58%)	6 (43%)
Slightly decreased	3 (20%)	10 (32%)	6 (43%)
Significantly decreased	2 (13%)	2 (6%)	–

Table 5. Rectors' perception of the impact of the university council on institutional autonomy.

	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)
Strengthened	–	–	1 (7%)
Non affected	13 (87%)	23 (74%)	13 (93%)
Limited	2 (13%)	8 (26%)	–

Table 6. Rectors' perception of the impact of the university council on quality and transparency of decision-making.

	Quality			Transparency		
	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)
Significantly improved	–	1 (3%)	2 (14%)	–	2 (6%)	2 (14%)
Slightly improved	7 (47%)	12 (39%)	3 (21%)	5 (33%)	8 (26%)	5 (36%)
Not influenced	8 (53%)	15 (48%)	9 (64%)	10 (67%)	18 (58%)	7 (50%)
Slightly deteriorated	–	2 (6%)	–	–	3 (10%)	–
Significantly deteriorated	–	–	–	–	–	–
No answer	–	1 (3%)	–	–	–	–

Table 7. Rectors' concerns about the presence lay members in decision-making body.

	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)
Yes	–	4 (13%)	1 (7%)
No	15 (100%)	24 (77%)	13 (93%)
I don't have an opinion	–	3 (10%)	–

traditional universities and 19% in specialised universities. Rectors of traditional and specialised universities had greater expectancy that lay members build bridges with businesses (20 and 26%, respectively) and contribute to the organisational management through their expertise and skills (27 and 19%, respectively). These proportions dropped to 7 and 14% among rectors of UAS. Instead, UAS rectors hoped lay members build bridges with the local community in general (14% of UAS rectors versus 6–7% in other subfields). Many rectors of specialised universities (26%) imagined that lay members could lead to the acquisition of additional external funds, whereas this expectancy was less prominent in traditional universities (7% of respondents only) or not present at all in UAS.

Lastly, expectations from internal university council members presented divergences (Table 9). Rectors of traditional universities mostly appreciated knowledge of the specific higher education institution, social capital and status within it, managerial experience in the higher education sector, and research accomplishments (all around 50% of preferences). Rectors of specialised universities and UAS considered the knowledge of the specific higher education institution as well as social capital and status within it to be even more important (above 77 and around 65%, respectively). Managerial experience in the sector was also relevant for UAS rectors (50%). Instead, research accomplishments were less valued by rectors of specialised universities and UAS (29 and 14%, respectively).

Table 8. Rectors' expectations from lay members.

	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)
Express needs of social and economic surroundings	5 (33%)	6 (19%)	9 (64%)
Build bridges between HEI and business	3 (20%)	8 (26%)	1 (7%)
Build bridges between HEI and local community	1 (7%)	2 (6%)	2 (14%)
Contribute to HEI management through their expertise and skills	4 (27%)	6 (19%)	2 (14%)
Support rectors with their interaction with local authorities	1 (7%)	1 (3%)	–
Acquire external funding	1 (7%)	8 (26%)	–

Table 9. Rectors' expectations from internal members (multiple answers allowed).

	Traditional (n = 15)	Specialised (n = 31)	UAS (n = 14)
Expertise on the HEI	8 (53%)	24 (77%)	11 (79%)
Social capital and status within the HEI	7 (47%)	21 (68%)	9 (64%)
Bargaining power within the HEI	3 (20%)	2 (6%)	–
Management experience in HE	8 (53%)	10 (32%)	7 (50%)
Research accomplishments	7 (47%)	9 (29%)	2 (14%)
Teaching achievements	–	3 (10%)	1 (7%)
Strong personality with potential to counterbalance the rector	–	1 (3%)	–

Teaching achievements had marginal relevance in the choice of internal council members in specialised universities and UAS (around 10% of rectors), whereas they were completely disregarded in traditional universities. Finally, almost no rector believed that internal members should counterbalance their own power.

Discussion

Law 2.0 mostly mirrors NPM principles in the distribution of decision-making powers since it strengthens the rectors, who are regarded as the biggest beneficiary of the new governance model, whilst decreasing the power of the academic senates, especially in specialised universities and UASs (Table 2). Also, Law 2.0 involves lay members in the management of all Polish public higher education institutions through the newly-established university councils (*Rada Uczelni*). Overall, the rectors have a positive assessment of the new institutional governance framework, downplaying concerns about the involvement of lay members in full-fledged decision-making bodies of Polish higher education institutions preceding the approval of the new law (Table 7). This arguably occurred because rectors do not perceive self-governance (Table 4) and autonomy (Table 5) as threatened. Only a few rectors judged them as slightly decreasing. Their responses may have been driven by their specific organisational contexts. The same governance body (even within the same institutional subfield) may in fact interpret the tasks assigned by the law differently. For instance, there could be higher education institutions in which the 'financial monitoring' role of the university council is interpreted only as a rubber-stamping task, whereas in others it may use this (potentially strong) power to interfere and micromanage teaching and research activities.

Rectors were more sceptical about the impact of university council on the quality and transparency of decision-making (Table 6). This finding is at odds with the NPM assumption about the involvement of lay members in university governing bodies (Amaral, Meek, & Larsen, 2003). It may be because the lay members are not adequately prepared and/or still learning the specificities of academic business to contribute proactively or because the new Polish university councils have not had enough opportunities to make important decisions, as they have been operative only since 2019.

Another gap with respect to the NPM rhetoric concerns faculty deans (see de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009). The rectors' responses did not support the notion that the role of faculty leadership increased. Contrarily, they perceived a decrease in the role of faculty deans in Polish traditional and specialised universities, whereas rectors in UAS believed it

mostly remained unchanged (Table 3). The latter responses may be explained by the small size and usually simple structure of UAS, which allowed centralised management already before Law 2.0 was implemented.

The expected role of university council members reveals the greatest disparities, which seem to reflect the different institutional profiles. Focusing on lay members (Table 8), expectations of rectors from traditional and specialised universities varied the most. Rectors of traditional universities indicated three dominant areas of contribution by lay members: reporting the needs of the socio-economic environment, building bridges with businesses, and contributing through their expertise and skills. The latter answer suggests that rectors of traditional academic universities were hoping for genuine cooperation and contribution from lay members and would like to leverage their competences or devolve some responsibilities to them. Rectors of specialised universities also believed lay members to report the needs of socio-economic surroundings and build bridges with local businesses to increase the focus on the local community, but also expected lay members would acquire external funds (e.g., spreading innovations developed into the university in exchange for royalties or bringing new research projects). Lay members in specialised universities were thus perceived as an instrument to access external funding through strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, who now can also become university council members. Lastly, UAS rectors had the most homogeneous responses as two-thirds of them expected lay members to report the needs of the local social-economic environment. This may be due to the vocational mission of UAS and their primary focus on teaching. Accordingly, lay members can propose directly into the decision-making body how higher education institutions should adapt their degree programmes to socio-economic needs. The different expectancies of UAS rectors regarding lay members may be the reason why they are the most critical about the improvement of decision-making quality and the most satisfied about improvement of transparency. On the one hand, quality of decisions hardly increased because it is difficult to accurately identify societal needs; on the other hand, transparency grew because lay members could express their opinions directly into the organisational decision-making body.

Expectations from internal members of the university council (Table 9) were also quite different among institutional subfields. Specialised and UAS rectors looked mainly for expertise, social capital, and status within the university, and their choices also considered individual teaching achievement, arguably because these higher education institutions are more vocational and teaching-oriented. Thus, they are mostly inward-looking in the choice of internal university council members. By contrast, rectors of traditional universities, besides expertise and social capital within the institution, take into greater account individual research accomplishments and expertise and knowledge of the higher education sector. Additionally, rectors of traditional universities considered important the internal council members' individual bargaining power within the university. This set of values mirrors the traditional academic profession value system based on academic prestige (research achievements) and organisational visibility. Therefore, the choice of internal university council members points out the resiliency of the historical Humboldtian self-governance model and of core academic values within traditional universities. This is also supported by the fact that most rectors of traditional universities believed the role of the senate was not influenced by the new governance arrangements (Table 2). Traditional universities may have upheld the senate with the historical role,

thus adjusting and adapting the structural governance changes to preserve core academic values, leading to a minor impact of the reform. By contrast, specialised universities and UASs, wherein academic values are less entrenched, looked more prone to accepting the structural changes imposed by the reform. These findings are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Pinheiro & Young, 2017) that stress the resilient nature of social institutions, particularly (traditional academic) universities with entrenched academic self-governance principles, which only slowly, and mostly unwillingly, change. Finally, almost no rector wanted internal university council members to be a political counterbalance to their own power. This indicates that the rectors may be concerned the university council becomes a forum for organisational politics and for discussion of potential rival and/or alternative visions of organisational development.

Conclusions

The Polish Parliament approved a reform of higher education institutional governance (Law 2.0) in 2018. Its key elements are in line with NPM principles: it empowers the rector, limits the role of academic collegial bodies, and adds a new central governing body (university council) which involves lay members. Although analyses of the reform from a structural perspective already exist, this article is the first systematic empirical investigation of the Polish higher education governance reform from a cultural perspective, which, to the best of our knowledge, has never been employed to analyse higher education governance reforms in Central and Eastern European countries.

Through a survey administered to all rectors of Polish public higher education institutions, we analysed how they perceive and interpret the new governance arrangements. Their responses were compared by breaking institutions into three categories: traditional (comprehensive) universities, specialised universities and UASs. Thus, we addressed another gap in current higher education governance studies since the latter two categories have been usually overlooked so far.

Furthermore, this article extends the knowledge on the recent Polish higher education governance reform. First, we show that in the view of most rectors the introduction of the university council with lay members does not negatively affect self-governance, autonomy, quality, or transparency of decision-making process. Thus, despite reservations preceding the approval of the new law, lay members in university decision-making body are no longer a cause of concern among rectors. Their positive perception may stem from the strengthening of their own formal powers within higher education institutions (Vlk et al., 2021 view). Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) stressed indeed that actors' organisational positions frame their opinions. Future research should therefore analyse the perception of other actors (internal and lay university council members, senate members, faculty deans) and internal constituencies (academics, administrative staff, students).

Second, the survey revealed divergent expectations from both internal and lay university council members, which seem to largely depend on the institutional subfield. For instance, rectors of specialised universities and UAS, arguably because of the vocational and teaching orientation of these institutions, consider teaching achievement as well in the choice of internal university council members. Otherwise, UAS rectors have quite homogeneous expectations that the main task of lay members is reporting the needs of the socio-economic environment, whereas expectancies of rectors of traditional and

specialised universities are varied. The analysis of the professional profile and interviews with university council members (according to human relations perspective of university governance; Kezar & Eckel, 2004) could contribute to further understanding their role as well as the internal functioning and practices of new university councils.

Third, this article shows how the same structural arrangements of a unitary national law are interpreted and edited differently across institutional subfields, proving that the institutional environment mediates changes in power-balance. This is evident in traditional academic universities, where rectors preserve core academic values in the expectations from internal university council members and because of the minor impact of the reform on the role of the senate. Therefore, traditional universities (the most embedded in Humboldtian legacy) have adapted environmental structural changes to preserve their internal cultural norms and value system, weakening the impact of the new legislation.

Acknowledgments

We thank KRASP for the endorsement and collaboration in the survey. Also Davide Donina gratefully acknowledges the support of The Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) through the Ulam Programme (agreement number PPN/ULM/2019/1/00128/U), within which this research was developed, and Dominik Antonowicz gratefully acknowledges the support of Polish Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki*) through the "Science for Society" programme (grant number NdS/529032/2021/2021).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Ministry of Educaton and Science [NdS/529032/2021/2021] and Narodowa Agencja Wymiany Akademickiej (NAWA) - The Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange [PPN/ULM/2019/1/00128/U].

ORCID

Davide Donina http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2462-876X
Anna Pokorska http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6913-0896
Dominik Antonowicz http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9115-2987
Marta Jaworska http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2328-3448

References

Amaral, A., Meek, V.L., & Larsen, I.M. (Eds.). (2003). *The higher education managerial revolution?* Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Antonowicz, D. (2015). *Między siłą globalnych procesów a lokalną tradycją. Polskie szkolnictwo wyższe w dobie przemian*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK.

Antonowicz, D., Kulczycki, E., & Budzanowska, A. (2020). Breaking the deadlock of mistrust? A participative model of the structural reforms in higher education in Poland. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *74*(4), 391–409. doi:10.1111/hequ.12254

Antonowicz, D., Rónay, Z., & Jaworska, M. (forthcoming). The power of policy translators: New university governing bodies in Hungary and Poland. *European Educational Research Journal*. doi:10.1177/14749041221095275

Birnbaum, R. (2004). The end of shared governance: Looking ahead or looking back. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *127*(1), 5–22. doi:10.1002/he.152

Bleiklie, I., & Kogan, M. (2007). Organization and governance of universities. *Higher Education Policy*, *20*(4), 477–493. doi:10.1057/palgrave.hep.8300167

Bleiklie, I., Enders, J., & Lepori, B. (eds.). (2017). *Managing universities: Policy and organizational change from a Western European comparative perspective*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bolman, L.G., & Deal, T.E. (1991). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership*. Hoboken: Jossey-Bass.

Carvalho, T., & Videira, P. (2019). Losing autonomy? Restructuring higher education institutions governance and relations between teaching and non-teaching staff. *Studies in Higher Education*, *44*(4), 762–773. doi:10.1080/03075079.2017.1401059

Cornforth, C. (ed.). (2003). *The governance of public and non-profit organisations: What do boards do?* London: Routledge.

de Boer, H., & Goedegebuure, L. (2009). The changing nature of the academic deanship. *Leadership*, *5*(3), 347–364. doi:10.1177/1742715009337765

Dobbins, M. (2015). Exploring the governance of Polish public higher education: Balancing restored historical legacies with Europeanization and market pressures. *European Journal of Higher Education*, *5*(1), 18–33. doi:10.1080/21568235.2014.969289

Dobbins, M. (2017). Exploring higher education governance in Poland and *Romania*: Re-convergence after divergence? *European Educational Research Journal*, *16*(5), 684–704. doi:10.1177/1474904116684138

Donina, D., Meoli, M., & Paleari, S. (2015a). Higher education reform in Italy: Tightening regulation instead of steering at a distance. *Higher Education Policy*, *28*(2), 215–234. doi:10.1057/hep.2014.6

Donina, D., Meoli, M., & Paleari, S. (2015b). The new institutional governance of Italian state university: What role for the new governing bodies? *Tertiary Education and Management*, *21*(1), 16–28. doi:10.1080/13583883.2014.994024

Donina, D., & Hasanefendic, S. (2019). Higher education institutional governance reforms in the Netherlands, Portugal and Italy: A policy translation perspective addressing the homogeneous/heterogeneous dilemma. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *73*(1), 29–44. doi:10.1111/hequ.12183

Donina, D., & Paleari, S. (2019). New public management: Global reform script or conceptual stretching? Analysis of university governance structures in the Napoleonic administrative tradition. *Higher Education*, *78*(2), 193–219. doi:10.1007/s10734-018-0338-y

Edlund, P., & Sahlin, K. (forthcoming). Society on board? External board members and the embedding of Swedish higher education organizations in society, 1998–2016. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–15. doi:10.1080/03075079.2021.1925239

Eisenhardt, K.M., & Graebner, M.E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(1), 25–32. doi:10.5465/amj.2007.24160888

Ellis, M.S. (1996). Purging the past: The current state of lustration laws in the former communist bloc. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, *59*(4), 181–196. doi:10.2307/1192198

Ernst&Young & Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową. (2010). Strategia rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego do 2020 roku. Higher Education Development Strategy until 2020. https://cpp.amu.edu.pl/pdf/SSW2020_strategia.pdf

European Commission. (2017). Peer review of Poland's higher education and science system. https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/sites/default/files/rio/report/PSF-Peer_review_Poland__FINAL%2520REPORT.pdf

Facchini, C., & Fia, M. (2021). Public sector reform in Italian higher education: The governance transformation of the universities—A comparison among perceptions of rectors and department chairs. *Higher Education Policy*, *34*(3), 560–581. doi:10.1057/s41307-019-00152-2

Faulconbridge, J., & Muzio, D. (2016). Global professional service firms and the challenge of institutional complexity: 'Field relocation' as a response strategy. *Journal of Management Studies*, *53*(1), 89–124. doi:10.1111/joms.12122

Faulconbridge, J., & Muzio, D. (2021). Field partitioning: The emergence, development and consolidation of subfields. *Organization Studies*, *42*(7), 1053–1083. doi:10.1177/0170840619855745

Gornitzka, Å., Maassen, P., & de Boer, H. (2017). Change in university governance structures in continental Europe. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *71*(3), 274–289. doi:10.1111/hequ.12127

Huisman, J., de Boer, H., & Goedegebuure, L. (2006). The perception of participation in executive governance structures in Dutch universities. *Tertiary Education & Management*, *12*(3), 227–239. doi:10.1007/s11233-006-9004-5

Kaplan, G.E. (2004). Do governance structures matter? *New Directions for Higher Education*, *127*, 25–33. doi:10.1002/he.153

Kerr, C. (1963). *The uses of university*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kezar, A., & Eckel, P.D. (2004). Meeting today's governance challenges. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *75*(4), 371–399. doi:10.1080/00221546.2004.11772264

Kretek, P.M., Dragšić, Ž., & Kehm, B.M. (2013). Transformation of university governance: on the role of university board members. *Higher Education*, *65*(1), 39–58. doi:10.1007/s10734-012-9580-x

Kulczycki, E., Rozkosz, E.A., Szadkowski, K., Ciereszko, K., Hołowiecki, M., & Krawczyk, F. (2021). Local use of metrics for the research assessment of academics: The case of Poland. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *43*(4), 435–453. doi:10.1080/1360080X.2020.1846243

Kwiek, M. (2008). Accessibility and equity, market forces, and entrepreneurship: Developments in higher education in central and Eastern Europe. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, *20*(1), 1–22. doi:10.1787/hemp-v20-art5-en

Kwiek, M. (2014). Structural changes in the Polish higher education system (1990–2010): A synthetic view. *European Journal of Higher Education*, *4*(3), 266–280. doi:10.1080/21568235.2014.905965

Kwiek, M. (2015). The unfading power of collegiality? University governance in Poland in a European comparative and quantitative perspective. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *43*, 77–89. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.05.002

Magalhães, A., Veiga, A., & Amaral, A. (2018). The changing role of external stakeholders: From imaginary friends to effective actors or non-interfering friends. *Studies in Higher Education*, *43*(4), 737–753. doi:10.1080/03075079.2016.1196354

McCubbins, M.D., Noll, R.G., & Weingast, B.R. (1989). Structure and process, politics, and policy: Administrative arrangements and the political control of agencies. *Virginia Law Review*, *75*(2), 431–482. doi:10.2307/1073179

Moe, T.M. (1990). The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure. In J.E. Chubb & P.E. Peterson (Eds.), *Can the government govern?* (pp. 267–329). Washington: Brookings Institution.

Paradeise, C., Reale, E., Bleiklie, I., & Ferlie, E. (2009). *University governance: Western European comparative perspectives*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Pinheiro, R., & Young, M. (2017). The university as an adaptive resilient organization: A complex systems perspective. In J. Huisman & M. Tight (Eds.), *Theory and method in higher education research* (Vol. 3, pp. 119–136). Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Quirke, L. (2013). Rogue resistance: Sidestepping isomorphic pressures in a patchy institutional field. *Organization Studies*, *34*(11), 1675–1699. doi:10.1177/0170840613483815

Shaw, M.A. (2019). Strategic instrument or social institution: Rationalized myths of the university in stakeholder perceptions of higher education reform in Poland. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *69*, 9–21. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.05.006

Siaroff, A. (1999). Corporatism in 24 industrial democracies: Meaning and measurement. *European Journal of Political Research*, *36*(2), 175–205. doi:10.1111/1475-6765.00467

Thieme, J. (2009). *Szkolnictwo wyższe: Wyzwania XXI wieku: Polska*. Europa USA: Difin.

Tierney, W.G. (2004). A cultural analysis of shared governance: The challenges ahead. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 19, pp. 85–132). New York: Springer.

Urbanek, P. (2020). Reform of the higher education system in Poland from the perspective of agency theory. *European Journal of Higher Education*, *10*(2), 130–146. doi:10.1080/21568235.2018.1560344

Urbanek, P. (2021). Institutional logic in a higher education system under reform. Evidence from Polish public universities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1–21. doi:10.1080/13603124.2021.2006796

Vlk, A., Dobbins, M., & Riedel, R. (2021). Explaining institutional persistence and change in Polish and Czech higher education from a stakeholder perspective. In M. Dobbins & R. Riedel (Eds.), *Exploring organized interests in post-communist policy-making* (pp. 173–193). London: Routledge.

Waligóra, A., & Górski, M. (2022). Reform of higher education governance structures in Poland. *European Journal of Education*, *57*(1), 21–32. doi:10.1111/ejed.12491

Wood, F., & Smith, R. (1992). Governing bodies of 26 Australian universities. *Journal of Tertiary Educational Administration*, *14*(1), 61–74. doi:10.1080/1036970920140105

Ziółek (2018). UAM spełnia warunki. Accessed 10 February 2022. https://uniwersyteckie.pl/rozmowy/uam-spelnia-warunki