JOHANNA MOISIO

Understanding the Significance of EU Higher Education Policy Cooperation in Finnish Higher Education Policy

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UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

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ABBREVIATIONS

Cion	European Commission
COM	Communication of the European Commission
COREPER	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CSR	Country-specific Recommendations
DG	Directorate General in the European Commission
DGEAC	Directorate General for Education and Culture in the European Commission
EC	European Community
ECC	Education and Culture Committee at the Parliament of Finland (SiVL)
EEA	European Economic Area
EHEA	European Higher Education Area (Bologna process)
EU	European Union
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
ESU	European Students Union
ET2010	Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2010
ET2020	Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2020
EUA	European University Association
EYC	Education, Youth and Culture Council of the EU, Education Council
FI	Finland
HE	Higher education (or in reference i.e. HE 7/2009 is "hallituksen esitys", government bill)
HEI	Higher education institution
IO	International organisation
LERU	The League of European Research Universities
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MF	Ministry of Finance

MP	Member of Parliament
MS	EU Member State
MOE	Ministry of Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OKM	Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö (Ministry of Education and Culture)
OM	Oikeusministeriö (Ministry of Justice)
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
OPM	Opetusministeriö (Ministry of Education)
PLA	Peer Learning Activity
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
QMV	Qualified majority vote
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the EU
TWG	Thematic Working Group (OMC group)
UK	United Kingdom

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The first entry in my research diary is on 23 December 2011. Even though I left my research proposal to the University of Tampere in the fall of 2010, it is fair to say that the research was in full flow precisely three years ago. It has been a tough journey, but luckily it was impossible to know the workload beforehand. There are many people to thank for this trip taken, and I believe the least I can do is to thank them all here.

I express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Jussi Kivistö, Adjunct Professor at the Higher Education Group in Tampere, for his solid support, guidance and advice during this process. He convinced me that it was the time and place to start studying again and it was he who helped me limit my research topic and to focus, focus and focus.

I also convey my warmest appreciation to the examiners of this dissertation, docent Taina Saarinen, Senior Researcher from the University of Jyväskylä, and Tero Erkkilä, Assistant Professor from the University of Helsinki, for their constructive comments.

The research diary was an essential manual to a working and studying mum, especially since life provided our family a handful of other projects during these years, such as being two parents with demanding jobs that necessitated travelling, construction of an island cottage and my confidential posts at the labour union, to mention a few. The diary told me what was done and where to go next when I felt completely lost or insecure. That sense of insecurity was relieved, however, by encouragement from my family and friends Milla Uusi-Pietilä, Camilla Heikkilä, Tiina Palomäki and some of my colleagues who knew about this project from the beginning. Thank you for that.

The diary helped me to keep track of the timetable. The research was mostly done on weekends and holidays, during short breaks and several-month study leaves

and working. Thank you ladies for encouragement during this trip! Another Finnish asset that has made this research possible is the Finnish library institution. Our libraries make research possible to anyone, anywhere; for me, the Aalto University library in Töölö became my private office.

The pages of the diary are also full of notes from the fascinating interviews I had with my colleagues from the ministries and from stakeholder organisations. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all those interviewees who gave their time and knowledge for the benefit of the research. This research would not have been possible to conduct without you, thank you.

There are writings or drawings in the diary that are not mine. A little explorer has been interested in mommy's notes. But I was able to do my thinking in peace, since my little boy was taken care of by the best nanny ever, Marianna Jylhä, kiitos! And my love goes to our former neighbours in Kamppi, the Roiha-family, for being such good friends and support to my family.

But now the pages of my diary are running out. Last but certainly not least I want to thank my loving husband Juha for your absolute support, effort and time. You are the one who knows the sacrifices, how much work it was for both of us and how rewarding it has been to me. Kulta, now it is your turn. I will always support you.

I dedicate this to all the mums combining work and study and to Joonas, of course, the little European.

11 October 2014
On another Saturday night when the sun has set
Johanna Moisio

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Union (EU) higher education policy is formed between EU Member States and the European Commission. Cooperation in the field takes place within the Council of the EU as well as within different expert meetings and peer-learning activities. The EU has a complementary role to play in national higher education policy, thus its actions and decisions can be called soft law.

In 2006, preparations commenced in Finland that led to university reform. The national discussion on university reform was held concurrently with higher education modernisation discourse in the Council of the EU. The research presented in this document evaluates the connection between national higher education policy formation and EU-level discussion on the modernization of higher education institutions and describes the understanding in Finland of the significance of EU-level cooperation on higher education policy.

Empirically, this research relied on expert interviews (N=14) as a primary source of data, drawing on a range of national and EU policy documents as supplementary data. The Finnish higher education policy experts were asked to describe how they perceived the significance of EU higher education cooperation from a national point of view. These understandings were analysed by use of the phenomenographic method, and the results consist of four descriptive categories that present the variation between conceptions. The analysis also took into account Finland's official opinions from the documents. Theoretical observations complemented the results of the research, and the result categories revealed how EU policy cooperation succeeds in influencing how political goals and guidelines transfer from one political setting to another setting in a soft law sector.

The first result of this study was that in the last decade EU education policy cooperation was systemized. After the Lisbon strategy, the significance of EU-level cooperation in education increased, and the jointly agreed goals in the education sector structured the cooperation. The European Commission's role as an initiator was understood to be very important, even more important than the decision-making role of the Council of the EU. In the first category, the complex interdependence of policy processes that became apparent is an interesting finding. It was understood that Member States need information from each other and the Commission also needs support from the Member States (the Council of the EU) in order to succeed with initiatives. A new feature of interdependence identified is 'policy spin', in which Member States supply the Commission with policy ideas in order to get EU-level support for national policy formation.

In the second result category, the influence of EU cooperation varied, according to the experts, from external pressure to support to national policy formation. In the third result category, some interviewees stressed that EU discussion of higher education reform was only one of the factors affecting Finnish higher education policy formation; the incentives of previous national discussions, the OECD and developments within the Bologna process were also seen to have had an influence.

The fourth result category indicated that there are some irrelevant and even resisted forms of EU higher education cooperation. Soft law taking the form of a Council resolution or conclusion may have little relevance or policy transfer capability because of its position as a voluntary form of cooperation and as a tool excluding sanctions. Furthermore, there was a wide understanding that the Open Method of Coordination as a cooperation method in higher education was insignificant; there also appeared to be some uncertainty about its policy transfer capability.

Together, these result categories form an outcome space where the weakest form of EU higher education policy cooperation is voluntary and therefore mostly irrelevant. However, when cooperation develops commonly negotiated policy goals, EU cooperation becomes useful and even semi-coercive. These understandings help to illuminate in a new way the connection between EU-level discussion and national policy formation. Through the transferability and functionality of transfer mechanisms, it is possible to study the effectiveness of policy cooperation. EU-level cooperation may have a significant impact on national policy formation if wanted or if support is needed. Further research should study whether EU Member States take advantage of the possibility for 'policy spin' at Brussels when running for national reforms.

The role of the Member States in EU policy formation has attracted little interest in policy research. These understandings of interdependence between the EU Member States and the European Commission may contribute to the discussion of the importance of soft law and policy cooperation in other international organisations and arenas. It also became clear, however, that not all forms of EU cooperation have been useful to national policy formation. Thus, at times when resources are scarce, it is possible to ask whether resources are well allocated in the EU cooperative effort. It is worth remembering that many of these cooperation methods have supported the Member States' trust of each other and the outcomes of other education systems, benefits that are priceless. The benefits of soft law policy cooperation in different EU Member States should be presented more concretely by the European Commission.

Key words: European Union, higher education, policy, phenomenography.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Euroopan unionin korkeakoulupolitiikka muodostuu jäsenmaiden ja Euroopan komission välillä. Korkeakoulupoliittista yhteistyötä tehdään EU:n neuvostossa, erilaisissa asiantuntijatapaamisissa sekä vertaisoppimistapahtumissa. Euroopan unionilla on korkeakoulutuksessa jäsenmaiden politiikkatoimia täydentävä toimivalta, joten unionin toimenpiteitä ja päätöksiä voidaan kutsua niin sanotuksi pehmeäksi sääntelyksi.

Vuonna 2006 Suomessa aloitettiin yliopistouudistukseen johtavat valmistelut. Kansallinen keskustelu yliopistojen uudistamistarpeesta käytiin samaan aikaan kun EU:n neuvostossa keskusteltiin korkeakoulujen modernisaatiotarpeesta. Tämä tutkimus selvittää, mikä oli tämän kansallisen politiikan muodostuksen ja EU-tason keskustelun välinen yhteys korkeakoulujen uudistamisesta, ja millaisia ymmärryksiä Suomessa on EU-yhteistyöstä korkeakoulupolitiikassa.

Tutkimuksen ensisijainen aineisto koostui asiantuntijahaastatteluista (N=14) ja täydentävä aineisto laajasta kansallisesta ja eurooppalaisesta asiakirja-aineistosta. Suomalaisia korkeakoulupolitiikan asiantuntijoita pyydettiin kuvaamaan, kuinka he näkevät EU:n korkeakoulupoliittisen yhteistyön merkityksen kansallisesta näkökulmasta. Nämä ymmärrykset analysoitiin fenomenografisen metodin avulla ja tuloksiksi muodostui neljä ymmärryksien variaatioita kuvaavaa kategoriaa. Analyysissä otettiin huomioon myös Suomen kannat eduskunnan sivistysvaliokunnan lausunnoista. Teoreettinen tarkastelu täydensi tutkimuksen tuloksia. Tuloskategoriat avaavat, miten EU-yhteistyö onnistuu vaikuttamaan siihen, että poliittiset tavoitteet ja linjaukset siirtyvät poliittisesta järjestelmästä toiseen ns. pehmeällä sääntelysektorilla.

Ensimmäinen tulos oli, että viime vuosikymmenellä EU:n koulutuspolitiikan yhteistyö systematisoitui. Lissabonin strategian myötä koulutuspolitiikan merkitys

kasvoi, ja jäsenmaiden uudet yhteiset koulutussektorin tavoitteet jäsensivät yhteistyötä. Komission asema aloitteentekijänä koettiin erittäin tärkeäksi, jopa tärkeämmäksi kuin EU:n koulutusneuvoston asema päätöksentekijänä. Tässä ensimmäisessä kategoriassa esillä oleva monimutkainen eri politiikkaprosessien välinen riippuvuussuhde on mielenkiintoinen havainto. Asiantuntijoiden ymmärryksen mukaan jäsenmaat tarvitsevat tietoa toisiltaan ja komissio tarvitsee myös tukea jäsenmailta (neuvostolta) menestyäkseen aloitteiden kanssa. Uusi piirre tässä riippuvuussuhteessa verrattuna aiempaan tutkimukseen on ns. ”politiikan pyöräytystapa”, jonka mukaan jäsenmaat tarjoavat komissiolle politiikkaideoita saadakseen takaisin EU-tason tukea kansalliseen politiikan muodostukseen.

Toisessa tuloskategoriassa EU-yhteistyön vaikutus vaihtelee asiantuntijoiden mukaan ulkoisesta muutospaineesta kansallisen politiikan muodostuksen tukemiseen. Toisaalta kolmannessa tuloskategoriassa osa asiantuntijoista näki, että EU-keskustelu korkeakoulutuksen muutostarpeesta oli luultavasti vain yksi asia, joka vaikutti suomalaiseen politiikan muodostukseen: merkittäviä olivat myös aiempien keskustelujen vaikutus, OECD:n ja Bolognan prosessin kautta tapahtuva kehitys.

Neljännessä tuloskategoriassa osoitettiin joitakin epärelevantteja EU-yhteistyön muotoja. Tässä kategoriassa näkemys oli, että EU:n neuvoston päätöslauselmilla tai päätelmillä eli neuvoston ns. pehmeällä sääntelyllä voi olla hyvin vähän merkitystä tai vaikutusta politiikan siirtoon, koska se perustuu vapaaehtoisuuteen eikä se sisällä sanktioita, jos päätöstä ei toimeenpanna. Lisäksi hyvin laajasti ymmärrettiin, että ns. avoin koordinaatiometodi oli yhteistyömuotona korkeakoulupolitiikassa merkityksetön ja siihen liittyi myös epävarmuuksia politiikkaa siirtävänä keinona.

Näistä tuloskategorioista syntyy yhdessä tulosavaruus, jossa voidaan nähdä korkeakoulupoliittisen yhteistyön olevan heikoimmillaan täysin vapaaehtoista ja tällöin useimmiten myös epärelevanttia. Kuitenkin yhdessä sovittujen politiikkatavoitteiden kautta se tulee hyödylliseksi ja jopa puolipakottavaksi. Nämä ymmärrykset auttavat kuvaamaan uudella tapaa EU-tason keskustelun ja kansallisen politiikkavalmistelun välistä yhteyttä. Politiikan siirrettävyyden ja siirtämiskeinojen toimivuuden kautta on mahdollista tutkia myös yhteistyön merkitystä. EU-tason yhteistyöllä voi olla huomattava merkitys kansalliseen politiikan muodostukseen, jos niin halutaan tai tukea tarvitaan. Jatkotutkimuksessa olisi syytä tutkia miten paljon eri EU-maat käyttävät politiikan pyöräytysmahdollisuutta Brysselissä hyödyksi kansallisissa uudistuksissa.

Kiinnostus jäsenmaiden asemaan EU:n politiikan muodostuksessa on ollut politiikan tutkimuksessa aiemmin vähäistä. Nämä ymmärrykset jäsenmaiden ja komission välisestä riippuvuussuhteesta saattavat osaltaan vaikuttaa keskusteluun

ns. pehmeän sääntelyn merkityksestä, mutta myös vaikuttaa politiikkayhteistyön tutkimukseen muissa kansainvälisissä järjestöissä. Asiantuntijoiden ymmärryksistä kävi kuitenkin myös ilmi, että kaikki EU:n yhteistyötavat eivät ole olleet merkityksellisiä kansalliselle politiikan muodostukselle. Näinä rajallisten resurssien aikoina voidaan kysyä, onko voimavaroja kohdistettu oikein EU-yhteistyössä. Joka tapauksessa on syytä muistaa, että monet näistä yhteistyökeinoista ovat tukeneet jäsenmaita luottamaan toisiinsa ja toistensa koulutusjärjestelmiin, joka tietysti on korvaamatonta. Euroopan komission tulisikin kertoa nykyistä konkreettisemmin pehmeän politiikkasektorin yhteistyön hyödyistä eri jäsenmaissa.

Avainsanat: Euroopan unioni, korkeakoulu, politiikka, fenomenografia

1. INTRODUCTION

"Something is rotten in the state of Europe's research and education."
Barroso (2005)

1.1 Background

Finland's new Universities Act, passed in 2009, was praised as a historic event that would transform the Finnish higher education (HE) system and prepare it for the challenges of the new century (cf. OKM 2009). After university reform was finalised, polytechnic (Universities of Applied Sciences) reform commenced in 2011. These Finnish HE reforms are part of the ongoing European and international transformation of governance and steering of higher education institutions (HE 2009; Kohtamäki 2007; CHEPS 2010a), but it is noteworthy that Finland's commencement of university reform was concurrent with the Council of the European Union (EU) discussion of higher education modernisation during the last decade. There seems to be a connection between Finnish university reform and EU higher education policy cooperation, but this connection is not an obvious one.

Since the beginning of the Bologna process in 1998 and the launch of the Lisbon strategy in 2000 by EU heads of state, the European Commission (Commission) has paid closer attention to the role of universities than in earlier decades (e.g. van der Wende & Huisman 2003; Olsen & Maassen 2007; Gornitzka 2009; Maassen 2009; Maassen & Musselin 2009; Maassen & Stensaker 2011; Enders et al. 2011; van Vught 2011). The Lisbon Strategy recognised that knowledge is the EU's most valuable asset, particularly in light of increasing global competition. According to the European Council of Lisbon (2000), the EU was to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. The Commission recognised that there was "something rotten" (Barroso 2005) in the European (higher) education system, and that its potential had to be strengthened. Member States were to have

established EU higher education as a global quality example (Council 2005), and to have created a European Research and Innovation Area (Council 2007). Education, especially higher education, had never before been as high on the EU agenda (see section 2.3.5.) than during the last decade: political interest in universities grew, and university reforms were called for. According to the European University Association (EUA 2010), this decade was in many ways a turning point for European higher education institutions[1]. Since 2003, EU higher education policy cooperation has focused on the need to reform – or, subsequently, to "modernise" – higher education and higher education institutions (HEI). EU higher education policy has called for modernisation of universities, diversification of universities' finance and increase of university autonomy (see 2.3.6). Several authors have argued that EU higher education policy is an example of a weak EU policy that has moved from the margins to the centre (e.g. Trubek & Trubek 2005, 351; van Vught 2006; Maassen & Musselin 2009).

There are two overarching and ongoing political processes relating to higher education in Europe: the higher education modernisation agenda under the auspices of the EU institutions and the intergovernmental Bologna process, in which a total of 47 European countries participate. In looking to identify the driver of change in the European higher education landscape, most attention has focused on the Bologna process (Witte 2006; Heinze & Knill 2008; Muller & Ravinet 2008; Neave 2009; Ravinet 2009; Higher Education Policy 2010). It is, however, also relevant to consider the influence of EU cooperation and its impacts at Member State level. The EU Member States may adopt conclusions, resolutions or recommendations on education policies in the Council of the EU; decision-making usually follows an initiative of the European Commission. The EU has a complementary role to play in national higher education policy, and its actions and decisions can be called *soft law*, in contrast to those policy fields where EU competence is broader than in education (section 2.3.2). The EU level cooperation consists, however, also of informal cooperation methods outside of the Council. Implementation of the Lisbon strategy required coordination of policies in areas where the EU has little or no competence. To resolve this problem, the European Council (2000) adopted the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which includes short, medium and long-term objectives, fixed guidelines, indicators

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1. In the EU context, *"Universities"* refers to all higher education establishments according to national legislation, in line with the European Commission's definition. See COM(2003) 58 final: "In this Communication, the term "universities" is taken to mean all higher education establishments, including, for example, the "Fachhochschulen", the "polytechnics" and the "Grandes Ecoles". The Council of the EU uses the term "higher education institutions" (HEI), which is equally used in this research where appropriate. In the Finnish context, however, the term "polytechnic" is used where necessary to make the distinction between the two sides of the binary higher education system in Finland.

and benchmarks and mutual learning processes. According to the Commission, which oversees the process, the OMC means intergovernmental method, which provides a framework for cooperation between the Member States, whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives (COM(2011) 788). Its forms can be tailored to each particular area in which it is applied. In the field of education policy, the OMC is a Commission-run informal cooperation, decided on at the Stockholm European Council 2001. The Barcelona European Council that followed received a report detailing a work programme for the follow-up of national education systems and assessment of targets achieved by utilising the OMC (VNEUS 2002). In this way, according to Olsen and Maassen (2007, 8), education in the EU framework gradually came to be governed by standardisation, dialogue, benchmarking and exchange of good practice. In practical terms, this means identification of good practices, mutual learning and benchmarking between Member States and their higher education institutions.

Teichler (2004 and 2009) has argued that higher education debates usually concern one, or possibly two or three, issues at a time, over a period of about five years to at most a decade, shaping priorities and discourse during that time. When the debate ends, some concepts may have been successfully implemented, and some steps may have been taken, but the problems and issues usually persist and need further attention. This debate on the need to reform HE is still ongoing; the latest Commission initiatives on the topic were launched in 2011, and the European Commission's thematic or technical working group on the modernisation of higher education remains active within the OMC exercise. Both the Bologna process and the EU HE modernization agenda have become "the issues" not concluded during their first operating decade, and so their mission has continued into another decade. The EU has enlarged, and this process seems likely to continue, with new countries where the issue of modernising HE becomes topical and European level support may be needed.

1.2 Purpose of the research

The present research concentrates on the impacts of EU level cooperation in the field of higher education policy. Unlike the case of the intergovernmental Bologna process (see 3.2.1), there has been less research on the impacts of EU influence on higher education (HE) policies (3.2.3). In addition, the viewpoints of Member States on the significance of EU cooperation in higher education have attracted little attention.

The purpose of this research is to develop an understanding of the significance of EU higher education policy cooperation. Cooperation between EU Member States, and between Member States and the Commission, takes place within the Council of the EU as well as within different expert meetings and OMC peer learning activities. Policy is formed by the Commission and the Council in official documents and decisions. This research concentrates on EU level cooperation, and on how it is perceived and understood by Finnish experts. Since soft law in the higher education sector cannot have direct effects on the national education system (see 2.3.2), it seems relevant to observe what is (ir)relevant in cooperation in order to transfer policy ideas to Member States.

As Finland commenced university reform concurrently with the modernisation discourse in the Council of the EU, the research focuses on the perceptions of Finnish higher education experts. As mentioned at the beginning, there seems to be a connection between the EU level and national discussion, but the nature of this connection is not clear. The main research question asks what kinds of understandings exist among Finnish higher education experts in relation to EU cooperation in the field of higher education. In particular, the study explores the perceived connection between EU cooperation and national level policy formation in HE. The aim is to discover what kinds of cooperation methods are significant or insignificant from national actors' viewpoints, which should also reveal how, within EU HE cooperation, knowledge about policies and ideas from one political setting can be transferred to another. Analytical research may help to clarify the significance of EU cooperation at national level, improve understanding of EU policy-making and improve policy formation itself, as well as suggesting future forms of cooperation. Most importantly, it is hoped that this research may also open the European HE policy context to relevant actors in higher education.

In attempting to achieve an understanding of higher education policy cooperation under the auspices of the European Union, the focus here is on cooperation under articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TEU 2012). For this reason, the study does not include observations on the intergovernmental Bologna process. Also excluded from this work are EU research policy, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and construction of the European Research Area (ERA), since those policy actions take place within another Council formation, involving different competences in EU legislation than education policies.

The present research will examine the decade of the EU Lisbon strategy (2000–2010), which provides a relevant starting point as it highlighted at the highest level the

need for more coordinated policy actions in fields related to innovation. The strategy has already been identified as a significant turning point in European cooperation on higher education (see e.g. Zantout & Dabir-Alai 2007; Maassen 2009; Gornitzka 2009; Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg 2011; Capano & Piattoni 2011). Since the postulated influence of EU higher education policy on national decision-making is at the core of this study, the period of interest here extends to 2009, when the new Universities Act was passed by the Finnish Parliament. This timeframe (2000–2009) can also be justified by the dramatic change in EU policies since 2010. First, the Lisbon Treaty came into force in December 2009, changing the decision-making process and the roles of EU institutions (TEU 2012; TFEU 2012). Second, this was soon followed by a renewed EU strategy (EU2020), which strengthened the role of education policies in the Union's future strategy, as higher education was assigned its own benchmark, to be followed under EU2020[2]. Third, the financial crisis that followed the collapse of some leading investment banks in the United States and Europe in 2008 forced EU Member States to revise monetary policies. The EU changed the legal framework and EU competences through new six-pack and two-pack legislation launched to tighten control of Member States' spending, increasing EU control over national budgets and policy reforms (Vihriälä 2012; Tiilikainen 2014). Fourth, the emergent need to strengthen the European Monetary Union (EMU) and increasing levels of unemployment – especially youth unemployment – Europe-wide have, in recent times, raised the issue of the social dimension of the EMU. As László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, underlined in March 2013, "Deepening Economic and Monetary Union also means building up its social dimension" (European Commission 2013a). What this means in practice remains unclear, but it would seem that the increasing importance of EU social and employment policies brings new pressure to bear on the education policies that prepare people for working life. In summary, it is necessary to concentrate on the Lisbon decade because of the dramatic changes occurring at the end of that decade.

1.3 Method and theory

This research follows the methodology of phenomenography. Phenomenographic study is an inductive qualitative study, exploring phenomena through different descriptions

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2.   At least 40% of 30–34-year-olds completing tertiary education.

of ideas, understandings, and perceptions of them (Häkkinen 1996, 14). The purpose of phenomenography as a research method is to find and systematise forms of thought, typically represented in categories of description and analysed further with regard to their logical relations (Marton & Pong 2005, 335). The results of this research are presented in the form of an outcome space that clarifies the relationships between the main result categories (categories of description).

Empirically, this research relies on expert interviews (N=14) as a primary source of data, drawing on a range of national and EU policy documents as supplementary data. Interview data is the preferred source when the study is focused on understandings, since documentation cannot usually reveal such understandings (e.g. Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2011, 11–12). The outcome space provides a holistic presentation of the understandings of Finnish HE experts and how those understandings are connected to the framework. Expert interviews are valuable when the focus of the research is on a process taking place in recent history or time, and where critical turning points need to be identified. Expert interviews are also of central importance when the data is insufficient or dispersed due to the political or historical character of the process (Alastalo & Åkerman 2011, 372–376). The interviewees in this study were selected in light of the type of information sought (Cassell 2011, 504). It was clear that policy formation phase was relevant, since the purpose was to look for connections between EU level cooperation and national policy formation. Participants in a phenomenographic study must be selected according to their relevance to the study, meaning that they must have experience of the phenomenon being explored. On the other hand, the selection must avoid presuppositions about the nature of conceptions held by particular people, since the fundamental aim is to reveal variation (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 103). Interviewees included civil servants from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Prime Minister's Office, representatives from the higher education institutions, rectors' councils, student unions, industry, trade unions and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council. Only experts centrally involved with European higher education policy issues in Finland were interviewed, and the number of such people in Finland is quite limited. Supplementary data consisting of policy documents, however, completed the picture in the analysis.

Policy analysis may focus on evaluation of the effects of a certain policy (Hill 1997, 5). Dunn (1994) says that policy analysis produces information about specific policy problems, possible future policies, policy action, policy outcomes and policy performance. The policy analysis stage model will also help to identify how external influences may have impacted on phases of national HE policy processes (see 2.1).

Policy transfer method pays particular attention to the policy formation process and the possibility of transfer of ideas, policies and arrangements from one political setting to another setting or system (Radaelli 2000; Dolowitz & Marsh 2000). Policy transfer theory is tested here as an explanatory model for studying the success or failure of EU cooperation in higher education policy.

The chosen methodology (phenomenography) has been used to collect and analyse interview data. The purpose of the analysis is to form different categories of descriptions that will include all the differing understandings of the significance of EU higher education policy cooperation for Finnish HE policy formation. The final outcome space will attempt to align the result categories within the research framework of policy transfer theory, with a view to comprehending what kinds of EU soft law and policy cooperation seem relevant from a Member State's view, and what might be the implications for EU cooperation and national policy formation.

1.4 Rationale

Research on higher education is typically interdisciplinary. According to Teichler, the journal *Higher Education* divides higher education research into six thematic areas: (1) Quantitative and structural developments; (2) knowledge and curricula; (3) teaching and learning; (4) staff and students; (5) policy and administration and (6) international relations and contexts of higher education (Teichler 2005, 453). The present study contributes to higher education policy research that has its roots in the administrative and political sciences.

Huisman (2009) has observed that the deployment of frameworks rooted in public administration or political science is rare in the study of higher education because of the nature of higher education and the range of research questions. In the present case, the research questions clearly require theoretical and conceptual support from both of these disciplines. Huisman argues that there are obvious advantages in building bridges between higher education policy study and the above-mentioned disciplines. First, these disciplines have a long tradition of studying policy, politics and organisations. Second, higher education policy study results may strengthen or enrich the approach. And above all, higher education is a policy among other policies: because education is central to both social and economic governance, education research reflects in a unique way on the relationship between state, institutions and citizens (Huisman

2009). Maassen (2009) notes with regret that many recent studies have treated higher education as a sector isolated from issues of overall European integration. Furthermore, analytical frameworks from social sciences, or even from European studies, have rarely been used to study European integration in higher education (281). The present study will attempt to contribute to alleviating this deficit.

Policy research aims to understand how the state machinery and political actors interact in order to produce public actions or policies. According to John (1998), modern analysis of public policy is well placed to analyse the European Union's highly sectoral and fragmented decision-making process (5). Any investigation of decision-making across different policy sectors is clearly challenging: according to John, it may even be hard to explain the clear differences between policy outputs and outcomes. In this light, it may not be surprising that many such studies are descriptive. To offer an insight into the origins of a policy, it may well be enough to explain this complexity and the various relevant roles (John 1998, 9). In fact, quite extensive research already exists describing the history and development of EU higher education policy making and the varying roles of different institutions (see chapter 2.3.5). This provides grounds for looking at the impacts of EU cooperation in HE more closely than before.

Gornitzka, Kogan and Amaral (2005) call for more research on the relationship between policies and practice in higher education, and there is a clear need for further exploration of the significance of public policies in understanding the change process in higher education (13). According to Gornitzka, Kyvik and Stensaker (2005), there is, for some reason, a tendency to neglect analysis of government policies behind the transformation of higher education institutions, yet governments are far from silent in this process. National governments formulate policies to be translated into practice for higher education (35, 46, 53), and supranational organisations, such as the EU, have ambitions in the field. Huisman (2009) points out that the supranational steering approach has been neglected in the higher education literature. Granted that this interplay between national and supranational actors is fairly recent, there is still evidence of its increase, especially in the European context (2–3). Saarinen and Ursin (2012) also note that it is important to explore politics beyond the level of nation states, and the effects on national and local circumstances and practices (149). They argue for a need to examine what happens between the international and national levels, and to identify the contact points between these levels (154). One purpose of the present research is to elaborate the role of different national actors and EU institutions in national higher education policy formation, and to observe the different occasions

or contexts of cooperation in which interaction happens between the national and European levels.

Olsen and Maassen (2007) suggest that studies of the impact of European cooperation on universities and higher education as a policy sector are important, because such studies can also contribute to an improved understanding of the conditions for European cooperation and integration in general (22). There have been studies on the impact of globalisation and internationalisation on universities (see e.g. Dale 1999; Kehm 2003; Teichler 2003; 2004; 2007 and 2009), but there is less information on the process of *Europeanising* higher education policy, especially within the competence of the EU. Against this background, it is relevant to explore how EU initiatives interact with universities claiming intellectual (and institutional) autonomy, and with national governments that consider education as an element of national sovereignty. Both Corbett (2005, 5) and Enders (2004, 375) note that studies are needed of perceptions of European policies, and in particular of national responses to these policies, both on the systemic level and at the level of individual institutions.

As noted above, higher education is under reform in many European countries with respect to governance, structure, funding and organisation. The invasion of higher education by 'the market' and the effects of post-industrial society are often mentioned as forces behind these changes (Mora 2001, 108; García Garrido 2002, 54–58; Clark 1998), but it remains valid to ask about the influence of European integration. Enders (2004) points out that, although in modern societies universities are closely involved in a wide range of social and economic activities, there is no unifying model to respond to the needs of society, with too many diverse actors at national, regional and global levels. It is therefore of "great analytic interest to study the emerging new modes of co-ordination in the higher education sector, their underlying rationales and in particular the effects of internationalisation and globalisation…and also how these are being translated into institutional frameworks and responses" (363).

In particular, as already indicated, both EU2020 Strategy and the economic downturn changed the role of education policies in the EU. The effects of these changes remain unclear, but it seems timely and necessary to observe the impact of policy cooperation under prevailing practices in order to be able to consider future cooperation. This research is also timely because the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DGEAC) at the European Commission has initiated a survey on forms of EU cooperation in education policies in spring 2014, which will look for new cooperation methods after consultation.

1.5 Structure of the research

The research is divided into seven parts, each of which can be seen as a link in the chain of choices leading to conclusions about the research phenomenon (Figure 1). After the introduction and explanation of the research theme, and the study's restrictions and rationale, the second part establishes a context for the research topic—the relevance of analysis for policy, the central questions in higher education policy and its relation to European integration, as well as the main developments in Finnish HE policy over the last decade. The third part sets out the research framework and provides an introduction to the previous literature on external influences on national higher education policies, along with an explanation of the theories of policy learning and policy transfer. The fourth part of the research comprises methodological considerations from the perspective of phenomenography as well as introduction of the data and technique of analysis. Part four also discusses issues of validity and reliability of the present study. The concluding parts five and six present the results in the form of categories of description and theoretical considerations of alignment to the framework. The last part includes presentation of findings and discussion of the contribution to research, as well as consideration of any implications for EU cooperation and national policy formation, and suggestions for further research.

1. Introduction

Introduction of the research outline and arguments for the research phenomena

Presents background, objective, method and theory, rationale, structure.

2. The Context

Description of the research phenomenon

Provides an understanding of how policy analysis explains stages in the policy process; the role of higher education policies in modern societies; the role of EU higher education policies; and the key features of Finnish HE policy in the last decade.

3. The Framework

Theoretical underpinnings

Outlines previous literature on external influences on national (higher) education policies; presents the concept of Europeanization of education policies; introduces the arguments of policy transfer theory as a possible explanation model.

4. The Methodological Choices

Arguments for phenomenography as a qualitative approach to research and data analysis

Presents phenomenography, its limitations, researcher's position and the research strategy; describes data analysis and evaluation.

5. The Categories of Description

Presents the main findings of the analysis

Represents results of phenomenographic research in general categories that describe conceptions found.

6. Alignment to the framework

Policy transfer theory as explanatory model

Establishes how policy transfer can explain the variety of understandings found in the analysis; provides analytical outcome space as a result.

7. Conclusions

Provides a direction for future work

Presents the results in brief; explains the contribution to research; discusses the implications for EU cooperation and national policy formation; makes suggestions for further research.

Figure 1. Dissertation plan as a chain of choices made in the research.

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

This section explains how policy analysis provides an understanding of the stages of policy development; how higher education policies are part of modern societies; the role of EU higher education policies; and the key features in the Finnish HE policy of the last decade. The first section (2.1) provides an understanding of policy processes and their different stages in order to establish at what stage(s) EU influence can be discerned. Qualitative research takes account of contexts, which are important as a means of situating action. Context description makes it possible to comprehend the wide and historical background of the phenomenon at hand (Dey 1993, 32).

The second section (2.2) describes the key characteristics of higher education policies in modern societies by comparison with earlier developments. The third section (2.3) focuses on describing EU higher education policy, which is the phenomenon under observation. As well as presenting ways of conceptualising EU and European integration, this section explains EU competence in relation to education policies, as well as the concept of soft law. This section also introduces EU decision-making procedures and the development of EU level decision-making in higher education policies. The last section of the context description (2.4) provides a general picture of the key characteristics of Finnish HE policy developments in the last decade.

2.1 Policy analysis

Hill (1997) argues that policy analysis has a twofold purpose, in that it may be directed either to the understanding of policy (analysis *of* policy) or to improving the quality of

policy (analysis *for* policy). The analysis of policy seeks to study the content of a policy, its genesis and development. Analysis for policy focuses more on the evaluation of and information about the effects of a given policy. It may also study 'what works' and the processes involved in order to improve policy-making systems (5). The present research focuses on analysis *for* policy and aims to establish where, according to experts, EU policy cooperation may have an impact on national policy formation. Dunn (1994) says that policy analysis produces information about defined policy problems, policy future, policy action, policy outcomes and policy performance. A "policy problem" is something that can be managed once identified; a "policy future", on the other hand, is a course of action that may resolve that problem. A policy action consists of a move or moves designed for the outcomes needed, while a policy outcome is an observed consequence of policy actions. Policy performance describes the degree to which a policy outcome contributes to the attainment of desired objectives. Dunn, however, notes that, in reality, policy problems are seldom "solved" in any total sense (70).

John (1998) argues that policy research can provide an understanding of how the state machinery and political actors interact when producing public actions or policies. The focus of this research is on the cooperation that may influence decisions that generate the outputs of a political system – that is, policies – and different kinds of political system. Even though research on the EU in particular often focuses on explaining how policy-making works, it is equally important to study how these decisions cause change in the surrounding society. Different actors use the word "policy" in different ways; it may sometimes be identified with a decision, but it often relates to a group of (interrelated) decisions or different orientations. In practice, it may be difficult to identify specific occasions when policy is made, as policy can refer to intention as well as to behaviour. It may involve action as well as inaction, but usually includes deliberative choice of either one. Some argue that a policy is something that evolves over time and is defined by an observer (cf. Hill 1997; Hill & Hupe 2002).

The concept of policy can also be understood as entailing the variability of policy-making. As they occur, the whole variety of political processes surrounding each policy area can be seen as complex. In other words, each policy sector creates its own patterns of bargain and structures, and the relative power of politicians, civil servants and interest groups differs according to the traditions of the sector. Policy sectors also differ in how decision-makers may achieve outcomes. Policies make diverse instruments and resources available to decision-makers; instruments can be legal, financial, organisational (applying bureaucratic power to solve problems) or even personal (persuasion). The differentiation of decision-making across various sectors

can be described by the aphorism 'policy determines politics' (John 1998, 5-6, 8). The relationships, traditions and instruments within a policy influence the extent to which civil servants or ministers have power. The policy instruments utilised by the EU are set out in a subsequent section explaining EU policy-making.

On the other hand, public policy can simply be understood as a choice made by a government, party, ruler or statesman to undertake some course of action, which may be regulative, financial or communicative in nature. Huisman (2009) further argues that public policy is also about the division of responsibilities between the state and public and private institutions as well as individual citizens (2); but in the modern world, public policy can be more complex than that. One question that arises concerns the nature of the state. A basic definition would be that the state is a set of institutions with power over a territory. But the increasing blurring of boundaries between public and private commodities and the role of international organisations as supra-national law makers challenges the public policy definition. For this reason, it may be more useful to say that effective action depends on many different activities that may involve different governments, whose actions may or may not be consistent with each other. (Hill 1997, 19–21.) One way of describing the challenges for policy analysis in representing the development of policy processes is to compare the Weberian state to the postmodern state. The former was based on government, hierarchy, elite and state central control, while the postmodern state is grounded on governance, heterarchy (networks etc.), pluralism and state central steering (Hill 1997, 21). Whether this definition is plausible or not, it is evident that public policy processes have evolved over time and have become more complex in nature, so that it is again worth unpacking them by means of analytical research.

Policy processes vary according to the problem and the available tools, but some key characteristics of policy processes have been identified. Dunn's (1994) analysis suggests that the policy-making process consists of a series of independent phases: agenda-setting, policy formation, policy adoption, policy implementation and policy assessment (15). Hoogerwerf (1981) points out that one of the contributions social science research makes to public policy is an analysis of such phases of policy development as preparation, determination, implementation, evaluation and adaptation. Furthermore, research can evaluate both policy processes and effects, focusing for instance on the extent to which different policy instruments contribute to the achievement of a certain goal (31). On the other hand, it is interesting to study what factors affect the policy process itself. Focusing on the relationship between structures and actual decisions, Egeberg (2007) has examined in detail how the organisational structure of a government bureaucracy

can intervene in the policy process and may even shape its outputs. Politicians working in an information-rich environment must base their choices on highly simplified models of the world, and it is crucial to understand the selection mechanisms and filters that precede the actual decision-making (77–87).

According to John (1998), policy processes have commonly been characterised in terms of "a sequential model" arguing that policy begins with initiation and formulation, is modified by negotiation and law-making and is then carried out by implementation decisions (23). Hill (1997) points out that the idea behind different policy stages or cycles is that citizens should be able to predict the impact of the actions of the state. A coherent law-making process also requires subsequent actions by state officials. In a democracy, expressions of political will can be seen as 'inputs' into the political system, working through various stages to a desired policy outcome or 'output' with effects on citizens (142).

Initiation		Deciding to decide
Information		Deciding how to decide
Consideration	Policy	Issue definition
Decision	formation	Forecasting
Implementation		Setting objectives and priorities
Evaluation		Options analysis
Termination		Policy implementation, monitoring and control
		Evaluation and review
		Policy maintenance, succession and termination
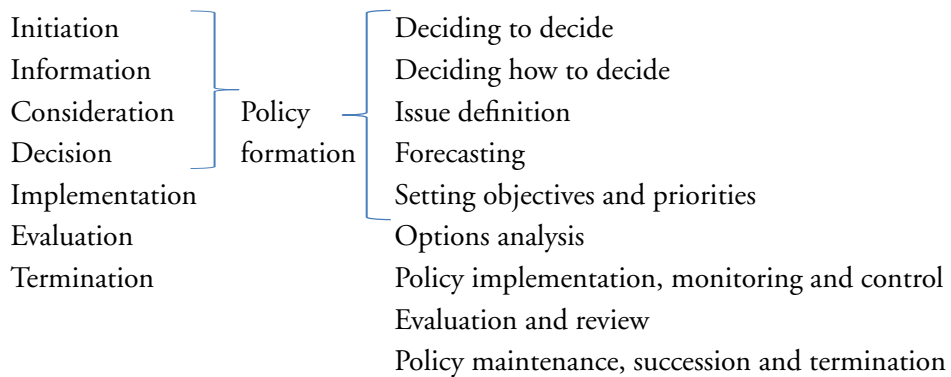
Figure 2. Stages in a policy process. Adapted from Hill 1997, 142.

This stages model can be useful as a heuristic device, but it may also be potentially misleading about what really happens. Some stages do not necessarily occur in fixed order as policies can be developed in advance and pushed onto the agenda afterwards (Young 2010, 47). This model is needed here, however, in order to indicate which stage of the model is at issue in this research. The focus here is on the policy formation process—the extent to which EU higher education policy affects national policy formation through information collection, consideration and options analysis among other stages, indicated in Figure 2 above.

2.2 Higher education policy

European universities have a history dating back hundreds of years. This section describes the key challenges identified by HE policy research for modern universities and the context in which the European HE policy discussion about the importance of universities took place at the turn of the present century. It is widely understood that the role and position of higher education institutions in society have significantly changed over time, especially over the last thirty years (see e.g. Clark 1998; Mora 2001; García Garrido 2002; Teichler 2004; Neave 2009; Maassen & Musselin 2009).

Mora (2001) broadly divides the development of universities into three periods. The first of these begins in the Middle Ages, ending in the late 18th century when the Enlightenment and the French Revolution gave rise to the modern university system. According to Mora, we are only now experiencing the birth of a third model, described as the universal university model (95–96). Mora argues that, in the era of the knowledge economy, the relationship between government and universities has changed. Universities have become service providers and therefore need new forms of governance and management. States have promoted university autonomy but, in return, they demand greater accountability and performance, introducing market mechanisms to higher education (108).

García Garrido (2002) presents three tendencies that characterise the role of universities in the industrialised era: democratic development, scientific development and development of the state. He points out, for instance, that one of the main effects of democratic development is the phenomenon of massification or 'generalisation' of higher education. Connected to this, García Garrido argues, is a tendency towards the increasing participation of women in higher education, and greater mass participation has forced universities to reform their teaching methods in order to respond to the needs of the growing student population. Furthermore, García Garrido argues that, as part of the decline of state control, higher education institutions have assumed greater autonomy and responsibility, which in turn supports the growing tendency toward social (rather than state) control over higher education (54–58).

Neave (2009) notes that the past quarter century has been characterised by remarkable reforms in higher education. Students have, to an extent, become customers, and the diversification of sources of funding has led to closer collaboration with stakeholders. Ministries have placed increasing emphasis on neoliberal values such as quality, efficiency and entrepreneurship in higher education. Neave argues that an important impetus in this changing relationship between higher education, government

and society was the dramatic development in Eastern Europe from 1990 onwards, as the establishment of hundreds of new private universities brought renewed visibility in Western Europe to sensitive issues such as privatisation, self-management, models of governance, competition and quality assurance (23–25).

Enders (2004) describes universities as multi-purpose and multi-product institutions that "contribute to the generation and transmission of ideology, the selection and formation of elites, the social development and educational upgrading of societies, the production and application of knowledge and the training of the highly skilled labour force" (362). This wide range of important tasks means that universities are heavily involved across all sectors in dynamic societies. Teichler (2004) notes a number of trends in the structural change of higher education in Europe over the last three or four decades. Higher education was opened up to students from various types of secondary education, vocationally oriented colleges were established and short study programmes were introduced. Several non-university programmes and institutions upgraded to university level, tuition fees were either introduced or abolished and university budgets became more dependent on additional income than before. These reform paradigms were driven mainly by national purposes, but international ideas of "modernity" in higher education also played a role (18).

Experts also agree that, since the 1980s, there have been significant changes in the steering of higher education institutions, as well as in the administration of HEIs (Teichler 2004, 19). Along with the changing functions of universities, the surrounding society and political means have also changed over time. Huisman (2009) describes the change in governments' role, arguing that the government is no longer the "lone coordinator", but rather its steering role has been opened up for other "coordinators" and new steering principles and governance modes: quasi-markets, network steering, new public management and multi-level governance are among these new perspectives. All of these modes have been proposed to understand better the actors that control public sector, and the concept of governance has evolved to conduct, supervise and control the implementation of policies. Allocation of resources to attain certain goals is one form of governing, but governance is the management, implementation and evaluation of this allocation at various levels (Huisman 2009, 2–3; Magalhaes & Amaral 2009, 183). In other words, national higher education policies today focus mainly on the allocation, distribution and usage of national resources. Since higher education and universities are mainly publicly funded, especially in Northern Europe[1], the efficient use of taxpayers' money is in the interests of policy makers in this region.

1. See more on the levels of public and private expenditure of HE in Europe at SEC(2011a), pp. 42–48.

To conclude, it is possible to argue that universities have become universal, their objectives have changed and they are forced to reform their systems of governance and management. There has been a shift from internal to external control, and a growing pressure to be accountable to society (Maassen & Musselin 2009, 3). As a whole, universities must deal with greater expectations, which is why HE policy processes have also changed. Huisman (2009) observes that the supranational steering approach has for some reason been neglected in the higher education literature. He argues that although the interplay between national and supranational actors in higher education policy is a relatively recent development, there is evidence that it is on the increase, especially in the European context (2–3). The purpose of the next section is to examine the intensification of higher education cooperation in the EU.

2.3 European integration and higher education policy

This section describes the main characteristics of the EU as an institution and EU decision-making in relation to education policies, as well as the most recent development and key characteristics of EU cooperation in higher education. According to Raunio and Saari (2006), the influence of the EU has reached policy areas where the Union has traditionally had little competence (11). Previous research has witnessed that, in practice, the Union has had more impact on policies than on political systems in EU Member States (Member States of the European Union 2014). Raunio and Saari argue that, when analysing the Union's influence or impact on national policies, the rules of decision-making and the division of power are important factors affecting the outcomes: "The more the decisions ground on the intergovernmental agreements based on unanimity, the more important is the national dimension of the policy."[2]

Enders (2004) offers a twofold description of European governance in higher education. The first model can be comprehended as 'intergovernmental negotiations', based on coordination of national policies at the European level but limited by national governments' attempts to remain in full control of the decision process, transformation into national contexts and implementation. The Bologna process can be considered as one such form of governance as it is a voluntary process with no direct legal consequences on participating countries, institutions or students. The second

2. Raunio and Saari 2006, 16: "Mitä enemmän päätökset perustuvat hallitusten välisiin yksimielisyyttä edellyttäviin sopimuksiin, sitä tärkeämpi on politiikan kansallinen ulottuvuus."

model may be called 'joint decisions', combining intergovernmental negotiations and supranational direction as entailed by the EU process, with European legislation, initiatives from the European Commission and negotiations at the Council of the EU and the European Parliament (374–375). To begin, it is useful to consider the nature of European integration and governance.

There are at least two different ways to conceptualise the EU. The first of these considers the Union as a political system, and the second assesses its political character. As a political system, the Union can be compared to two other established systems: a state and an intergovernmental organisation (IGO). The Union is *sui generis*, one of a kind – clearly less than a sovereign state but somewhat more than an IGO. It differs from a state in a sense that, although it has a geographically defined territory and some level of sovereignty, it does not have a monopoly of governance and is highly dependent on its Member States for policy enforcement. The EU is, however, much more than an IGO because it has clear policy responsibilities (external trade, agriculture, competition policy) and established independent institutions, such as the European Parliament.

Theories of European integration have systematically observed the process of intensifying political cooperation in Europe and the development of common political institutions, as well as the outcomes of integration (Wiener & Diez 2004, 3). Integration theories aim to explain the reasons behind integration and how it functions. Since neither the integration process nor the functions of the EU institutions are central to this research, it will suffice to briefly introduce some key ideas from integration theories that may provide a useful background when considering the functionality of EU actions at Member State level.

The concept of *federalism* is often associated with the Union, although the interpretations of federalism vary (see for instance Haas 1948). Although power in EU politics is divided between the central and regional levels as the federalist concept presupposes, the central idea of the Union depends heavily on the regional units. Member States still control most of the public decision-making, at least in the areas of significant public spending such as education, social protection and health (Nugent 2010, 424). In juridical or functional terms, however, the EU is not a federation with its own constitution. Nevertheless, Mäenpää (2011) argues that it is possible to speak about the federal characteristics of European integration (74).

According to the *multi-level governance* model, the EU's decision-making competence does not rest only with national governments, but is also exercised by institutions and actors at higher and lower levels. Supranational actors such as the

Commission, the European Parliament and the EU courts have an independent influence on policy processes and policy outcomes. According to this model, collective decision-making leads to significant loss of national sovereignty, and in consequence, the model is quite opposite to the intergovernmental view, which holds that states will always retain ultimate decision-making power. (Nugent 2010, 427.)

The liberal intergovernmentalist approach is based on the explanations by Moravcsik (1991, 1998) of major reforms aimed at European integration. According to Schimmelfennig (2004), there is widespread agreement that liberal intergovernmentalism explains state behaviour in the EU (75). The central argument is that "European integration can best be explained as a series of rational choices made by national leaders" (Moravcsik 1998, 18). States have their own national interests, which they defend, and behind this is a logic of diversity rather than a logic of integration. Moravcsik's model explains the logic behind integration and the bargaining among states for the best solutions. The preferences of the national governments have been rather issue-specific, and since European integration has predominantly been economic integration, states' preferences have related mainly to economic interests (Schimmelfenning 2004, 78). One main criticism suggests that Moravcsik's evidence is founded on historical decisions (such as the Single European Act of 1986; see Moravcsik 1991) rather than on routine decisions made daily in the Council and the European Parliament. This overemphasises the role of states, as these historical decisions are channelled through the European Council. Second, it has been argued that the liberal intergovernmentalist approach focuses too much on the formal and final stages of decision-making and neglects the informal integration. Third, rationalist perceptions filter out the disorder of politics and the ideologies and beliefs behind decisions. Finally, this approach has been criticised for overlooking the influence of supranational actors such as the Commission and the EU Courts. Nugent (2010) continues that it should not be forgotten that, although the weaknesses of Moravcsik's theory can readily be identified, the model's strengths are considerable. The theory is a good reminder of the role of states and governments in the EU. (434).

Another concept attempting to explain integration is *spillover*. This concept is a *neofunctionalist* attempt to explain gradual integration where integration proceeds even in the absence of an explicit proactive choice by Member States to add to the Union's competence. Once sovereignty has already been pooled in some sectors, further integration in new areas will be beneficial, not only to the success of the policy, but also to the surrounding society. It follows that various (private sector) actors would seek to exploit every advantage by pushing for further integration (Warleigh-

Lack & Drachenberg 2011, 1001). Spillover represents an increase in both power (greater capacity to allocate values authoritatively) and in the powers of the EU (new competences). On the other hand, *spill-around* means that the EU receives new competences but without an increase in the EU's formal powers vis-à-vis the Member States. *Build-up* represents the contrary – an increase in EU power, but preventing its entrance into new issue areas (1002). Warleigh-Lack and Drachenberg observe unanticipated spillover (or spill-around) in EU education policy. They argue that certain neofunctionalist concepts, such as spillover, may have greater application in the EU today than is often thought, and argue that in fact those areas of cooperation with less binding legislation may be even more vulnerable to spillover (1000). Based on interviews conducted in the Commission, they argue that the application of Open Method of Coordination (OMC, see more at 2.3.5.1) to education policies gave the Commission new influence in this field, even in areas where this was not formally legitimised. In other words, the Commission was able to make remarks on issues and details in national education policies that it probably could not have referred to without the OMC (1009). Whether these remarks had any real impact at Member State level is another question, which again will be addressed by the present study.

Since EU cooperation is, however, international cooperation between sovereign states – although done within a structure that is sui generis – it is worth noting some key aspects of international cooperation as outlined by Robert Keohane, an eminent international relations theorist. Keohane (1988) argues that efforts at international cooperation usually do occur within an institutional framework. This may or may not facilitate cooperation efforts, but an institutional setting is still the most likely context for international cooperation. Keohane insists that the term "cooperation" must be distinguished from both harmony and discord. When in harmony, policies automatically facilitate the attainment of each others' goals. In discord, however, actors' policies prevent the realisation of other's goals, and the policies of both parties remain disparate. Cooperation, in turn, arises where the actions of separate individuals or organisations are brought into conformity with one another through a process of policy coordination. In reality, this means that each participant in cooperation changes his or her behaviour according to changes in the behaviour of others. The level of change can be assessed by measuring the outcome against the situation before cooperative coordination. This definition does not claim, however, that cooperation is desirable in all cases or that this course of action should be carried out in all circumstances. Cooperation must in fact, according to Keohane, be understood together with the occasion of discord; in order to understand the nature of cooperation, one must

understand the absence or even failure of cooperation as a realist explanation would argue (280–281).

Another important point made by Keohane (1988) concerning the institutional form of cooperation is based on references to the *intersubjective meanings* of international institutional activity, which a number of world politics scholars emphasise are developed by actors (individuals, local organisations and even states) within the context of overarching institutions: "Institutions do not merely reflect the preferences and power of the units constituting them; the institutions themselves shape those preferences and that power. Institutions are therefore *constitutive* of actors as well as vice versa." (283, emphasis by Keohane) On this account, it is not sufficient to treat the preferences of actors as given exogenously, from outside: rather, these preferences are affected by institutional arrangements, norms and discourse among the involved parties (ibid).

2.3.1 EU competence

When considering the EU's power in policy matters vis-à-vis Member States, the central questions relate to the Union's level of competence and to the tools it can apply. Over time, the EU has extended its activities by adopting both budgetary and regulatory policies on a broad range of issues in agreement with the Member States. According to Pollack (2000), the level of EU competence in education and research (combined) has increased substantially from 1950 to 2001: While earlier all policy decisions were made at national level, such decisions are now made at both national and EU levels (522).

In respect of EU higher education policy, as implemented under Articles 165 and 166[3] of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), the central plank of cooperation is the subsidiarity principle,[4] which includes the notion that decisions should always be made as close to the citizens as possible (Mäenpää 2011, 295). In education policy, this means that the Union must "fully respect the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems

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3. Article 166 defines EU cooperation in vocational training, but in ECJ 293/83 *Gravier vs. City of Liége*, the Court ruled that "vocational training includes…provided by an institutions of higher art education…". And ECJ case 24/86 *Blaizot v. University of Liege* in 1988 clarified that "also university education could qualify as vocational training, as long as the course was intended to prepare the student for an occupation" (in Garben 2011, 60).
4. Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states that in areas which do not fall within the Union's exclusive competence, the principle of subsidiarity defines the circumstances in which it is preferable for action to be taken by the Union, rather than by the Member States.

and their cultural and linguistic diversity" (TFEU 2012). According to Article 165 of the TFEU (2012), Union action in the field of education policy shall be aimed at:

- developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of Member States;
- encouraging mobility of students and teachers by encouraging, inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study;
- promoting cooperation between educational establishments;
- developing exchanges of information and experience relating to issues common to the education systems of Member States;
- encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors, and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe;
- encouraging the development of distance education.

Article 166 provides a set of possible actions for vocational training policy, including an emphasis on cooperation with the labour market (TFEU 2012). To contribute to the achievement of objectives referred to in this Article, "the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt *incentive measures*, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States, and the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt *recommendations*." The Council acts by a qualified majority vote (QMV) except where otherwise provided by the Treaties.[5]

The EU can use a range of tools for making legislation and policies, both binding and non-binding, including regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations and opinions (Garben 2011, 65). The resolutions, conclusions and recommendations are non-binding, soft law decisions (see 2.3.2), even though the implementation of these decisions is followed by the Commission. To this extent, the European Union plays a complementary role in national higher education policy. There are three exceptions, however, that render EU power in respect of EU education policy more intense than the Treaties suggest. Garben (2011) notes that

Article 165 TFEU is one very deceptive provision, as it does not tell one that there are several important complicating factors – other Treaty provisions to be precise

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5. "A qualified majority is defined as at least 55 % of the members of the Council, comprising at least fifteen of them and representing Member States comprising at least 65 % of the population of the Union." TEU 2012 Article 16.

– that need to be taken into account when determining the EU's competence in education (62).

The first of the three exceptions is EU research and innovation policy, with a different mandate for EU policy in the Competitiveness Council and a substantial budget for cooperation (Horizon 2020, The EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation). The challenge is that while the education policy sector and policies on higher education are handled by the Education Council and the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DGEAC), research policy – a large part of HEI functions – is separately dealt with. From the viewpoint of the Education Council, the work at the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation is often a remote issue.[6]

The second exception involves the recognition of qualifications in the Directive on Professional Qualifications (2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EU). The directive is given under Articles 46, 53 and 62 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU that governs the functioning of the Single Market, rather than under the education provisions. The Directive's purpose is to make labour markets more flexible and to liberalise the provision of services. This can be achieved by encouraging more automatic recognition of qualifications and by simplifying administrative procedures related to recognition. The Directive entails automatic recognition of professional qualifications in the Union for seven professions that require mainly higher education degrees and are highly regulated in the Member States (e.g. dentists, doctors, midwives). The Directive also sets out the general system for recognition of evidence of training for the purposes of establishment in the host country, and as such it is an important tool for labour market mobility as mutual recognition of training, diplomas and qualifications is a condition for ensuring the mobility of skilled people. Many countries have national restrictions for working in certain professions without the relevant qualification; the Directive on Professional Qualifications aims to remove those barriers.

The third exception is education's share of the EU budget. The EU programme for all forms of education cooperation, varying from mobility to policy support, previously fell within the Lifelong Learning Programme (1720/2006/EC), which had a budget of € 7 billion from 2007 to 2013. The new seven-year programme, launched in 2014, is called Erasmus+ and has a budget of €14.7 billion (EU programmes 2014), which means that the EU contribution to education has doubled. The Erasmus + and Horizon programmes together represent a huge proportion of the EU budget, affording significant opportunities to HEIs for EU funding. The EU's education

6. Remark made in the interviews, which is also the understanding of the researcher.

programmes fund a range of actions that include study and training exchanges, study visits and networking activities, both for individual students and learners and for teachers, trainers and anyone else involved in education and training. The Union has considerable financial power, and its influence in the field of education is in fact greater than the Treaties suggest (e.g. Ertl 2003; Dahl 2003; Ertl & Phillips 2006; Sigalas 2010; Beerkens & Vossensteyn 2011), not least because the Commission, as the executive institution, has extensive distributive rights in respect of EU funding.

This research, however, focuses on policy cooperation rather than on the functioning of these instruments. Policy statements, guidelines and decisions pave the way for policy instruments such as directives and financial decisions that implement them. In the field of education, EU policy formulation is a matter of soft law, to be discussed next.

2.3.2 Soft law

Since the competence of the Union is restricted in the field of higher education, it is justifiable to ask whether the EU even affects national policy in the absence of directives and regulation. One way to address this question is by studying the forms of EU decisions and methods of cooperation. The Union has a wide range of decision-making instruments, varying from acts to resolutions; different instruments have different levels of intended impact. In policy areas where international organisation has minimal or no competence at all, decisions are a matter of *soft law*. Vihma (2012) defines the concept as follows: "Soft laws are not legally binding by themselves, they are not in treaty form, and they do not belong to the category of customary law" (29). In international relations, the concept is keenly debated, especially from a legal point of view, since it is possible to argue that soft law is not law at all because of its non-legally binding effect. However, soft law often has practical effects in the form of guidelines, standards or recommendations (Tallacchini 2009, 283).

Mäenpää (2011) notes that in the application of EU legislation, different kinds of non-legislative measures (soft law) may also have an impact on Member States. Recommendations and resolutions may, for instance, direct the application of statutes. Furthermore, communications of the Commission (initiatives) may also include information that directs implementation (49). This can be regarded as a method, including as it does all soft means of the Union to direct the policies of Member States. This includes Council and Parliament decisions as well as the Commission's intentions and Open Method of Coordination (OMC, see 2.3.5.1; Alexiadou 2007; Lange and

Alexiadou 2007). Lange and Alexiadou (2007) define soft law by comparing it to 'hard law': EC and EU Treaties, directives and regulations create legally binding obligations for Member States and individuals. Soft law, on the other hand, taking the form of "recommendations, opinions, reports, joint communications of the Commission and the Education Council, and action plans, is only persuasive." (323).

The European Parliament (EP) made a resolution (soft law) in 2007 in which it expressed criticism of the whole concept of soft law as well as of its use. The EP considered that

> (…) soft law all too often constitutes an ambiguous and ineffective instrument which is liable to have a detrimental effect on Community legislation and institutional balance and should be used with caution, even where it is provided for in the Treaty.

The Parliament noted the particular position of education and culture policies, declaring that "so-called soft law cannot be a substitute for legal acts and instruments, which are available to ensure the continuity of the legislative process, especially in the field of culture and education." The EP stated in its resolution that the Open Method of Coordination is "legally dubious" (European Parliament 2007, including all quotations). But as is usually the case with soft law, this resolution was non-binding for EU institutions.

López-Santana (2006) has studied the implications of EU soft law for employment policies (the European Employment Strategy) in Spain, Belgium and Sweden. She argues that soft law has a "framing effect" in policy-making across countries – in other words, soft law is linked to indirect transfer of policies from the supranational to the domestic level in respect of employment policy. Lopez-Santana's research has particular relevance here as the results are based on interviews of elite and expert individuals in these countries. The research topic, however, is different, because the EU's competence is stronger in employment policy than in education policy, with special competences in the coordination of economic and employment policies due to the functioning of the internal market (Article 3 and 5 of the TFEU), which makes the EU responsible for ensuring the coordination of these policies. For instance, it is required to define the broad direction and guidelines to be followed by Member States in relation to employment policies (Council 2010b). It may therefore be relevant to ask whether the European Employment Strategy meets the criteria of soft law at all, since the Treaty includes promotion of a high level of employment by developing a co-ordinated

strategy for employment and the Amsterdam Treaty introduced co-ordinated actions in employment policy. That said, it must be pointed out that the general competence for combating unemployment still remains within the competences of the Member States (see e.g. European Parliament 2013).

To conclude, EU soft law creates practical and normative effects rather than direct rights or obligations for EU institutions or Member States. It is, however, worth noting the role of institutions involved in formulating soft law. One might suppose that those institutions involved in the decision-making process would follow the guidelines they agree on when formulating soft law. It follows that soft law made in the Council should at least create soft obligations for Member States since they have jointly agreed on them. The following sections describe how the decision-making functions in EU affairs.

2.3.3 Policy coordination and decision-making in EU affairs

Raunio and Saari (2006) argue that European integration often leads to the strengthening of sectoral policies and decision-making processes, which means that policies are made through detailed sectoral legislation more often than through general decisions. Integration strengthens the bureaucracy in terms of preparation as well as of coordination, and this will eventually diminish parliamentary power. *Europeanization* also means the gradual integration of organisations, political institutions and structures needed for coherent EU policies to begin to resemble one another in the various Member States.

As described in section 2.1, policy formulation is likely to entail at least the following phases: initiation, information, consideration, decision, implementation, evaluation and termination. It has been argued that international organisations, with their soft law practices, have mainly an agenda-setting function in national debates (Tervonen-Gonçalves 2013). In EU affairs, the agenda-setter is the Commission, which has the power in respect of initiatives. The EU, and in particular the Commission, has an important role as a mediator of trends for global reform, but at the same time it delivers its own agenda, which is intended for the benefit of the Union (Elken and Stensaker 2011, 298). It has been noted that the Commission also uses informal power or steering. The Commission does not have legal competence to give binding directions to national authorities on all kinds of issues, but Mäenpää (2010) notes that it constantly uses different forms of informal steering and guidance. This kind of soft law guidance is not legally binding, but "it has unquestionable actual significance in

national administration"[7]. As it also monitors implementation, the Commission is also the guardian of the treaties and may challenge a Member State for not implementing a directive in national legislation.

Wallace (2010) describes the Commission's technique of developing cooperation and coordination, used for sectors in "adjacent to core EU economic competences in order to make the case for clearly assigned policy powers" (Wallace 2010, 99), as a form of policy coordination that may have been adopted from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Policy coordination works as a mechanism of transition from decision-making that was traditionally done entirely nationally to a collectively formed EU regime. Wallace argues that education policy is among those sectoral policies included in policy coordination, which includes the following techniques:

1. The Commission develops networks of experts or epistemic communities and gathers technical arguments for developing a shared approach to promote modernisation and innovation;
2. Inclusion of independent experts as promoters of ideas and techniques;
3. Calling together high-level groups of national experts and sometimes ministers at the Council and occasionally the European Council, in brainstorming rather than negotiating mode;
4. Developing peer pressure, benchmarking and usage of systematic policy comparison in order to encourage policy learning;
5. Dialogue sometimes with specialist committees in the European Parliament, as advocates of particular approaches;
6. Creation of outputs in the form of soft law and declarations rather than hard law and binding commitments, oriented at gradual changes in behaviour within the Member States.
(Wallace 2010, 99.)

Wallace notes that this new form of 'post-modern governance' has become a policy mode in its own right, due in part to the Lisbon Strategy adopted by the Heads of State in March 2000 and the elevation of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) as a policy technique. Wallace argues that there are hugely varying assessments of OMC's effectiveness (100). This is a good description of policy coordination, describing concretely the different methods in EU coordination of higher education policy.

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7.   Mäenpää 2011, 220: "sillä on kiistaton tosiasiallinen merkitys kansallisessa hallintotoiminnassa."

The present study aims to describe understandings of the significance of this kind of policy coordination.

The EU can be defined as a negotiation system that is seeking problem-solving strategies (Elken & Stensaker 2011, 300) acceptable to most of the Member States. Previously, the main legislative body for EU policies was the Council of the EU, comprising representatives of the Member States (EU28), but the European Parliament now has new powers over legislation, and decision-making has become more bicameral in many sectors. In some policy domains, including most cases in education, the Council remains the decision-maker of last resort (Wallace 2010, 80).

The work of the Council of the EU is based on consensus building, grounded on shared goals, instruments and actions. The Council meets in ten different configurations, the list of which shall be adopted in accordance with Article 236 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TEU 2012, Article 16). Work at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council (EYC, Education Council) is less about compliance between different systems than about engagement with commonly shared ideas. An example of this would be Council conclusions that are political declarations of a joint idea for future development. The work of the Council is run by the current presidency of the Council of the EU, drawn from each Member State in turn for six months at a time and assisted by the Council Secretariat. The Presidency of the EU formulates the agenda of the different Council configurations together with the Commission and the troika (previous and following presidencies). The Presidency can, however, do much to influence the advancement of the Commission's agenda, even prioritising issues that are favourable to it (see for instance Åkerblom 2000).

Council policy formulation is conducted by national education ministries representing Member States in the Council formations. Policies are confirmed there by national ministries and then implemented, where needed, by national public administrations and agencies (Walkenhorst 2008, 571) or by universities, for instance. Lawn and Lingard (2002) describe the transnational system of actors in education as

> working on problems of harmonisation, competition and exchange in European committees, in task force groups and other supranational bodies, showed them to be simultaneously observers, agents, translators, evaluators and even oppositionalists. They are crucial actors in the construction of this extranational policy sphere. (Lawn and Lingard 2002, 302.)

This description is quite accurate and describes well the work of the national representatives of Member States in the working groups of the EU. The national

participants in EU cooperation must deliver both national priorities to the EU collective and EU messages to national decision-making, and they also supervise the Commission and implementation of policies. Most of any negotiations in the Council of the EU take place at the working group level. In the field of higher education, the working group preparing the Council meeting of ministers of education is called the Education Committee. The Council secretariat assists the committee, and the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER) has a role as final political controller before each Education Council meeting.

There are over 200 committees and working groups preparing the various Council meetings as well as the European Council meetings. It is a popular argument in EU studies text books that most of the decision-making takes place at working group level, but it is difficult to conclusively prove this argument because of the complexity of the decision-making process. It is evident, however, that negotiation of the content of decisions is done at working group level, usually to such an extent that there is no discussion at all of the decision item at Council, which only approves the work done by the relevant working group, with no further ministerial discussion needed. This is especially common in the Education Council, where Ministers first accept without discussion the conclusions or recommendations prepared by the Education Committee and then concentrate on a specific discussion issue on a theme chosen by the Presidency.[8]

The work of the Education Committee has mostly been based on the idea of consensus (unanimity in EU terms) as the soft law formed usually takes the form of a commonly agreed understanding for further action (conclusions, resolutions). Pépin (2006) calls this the tendency for negotiations to be limited to the lowest common denominator (89). As already mentioned, recommendations, decisions or acts of the Council are decided by a qualified majority vote (QMV).[9] Through discussions in the Committee, the Member States and the Commission have formed a common platform for further cooperation in the field of education.

The European Parliament (EP) is the only directly-elected EU institution, in which the Members of the EP (MEP) represent their voters. The Lisbon Treaty gave the EP new lawmaking powers: together with the Council, it now decides on the

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8. See for instance Council 2013a and the agenda of the 3239th Council meeting, Education, Youth, Culture and Sport. The ministers only adopted the conclusions on the social dimension of higher education, but had a policy debate on the link between teaching professions of the highest quality and achieving better learning outcomes.
9. "A qualified majority is defined as at least 55 % of the members of the Council, comprising at least fifteen of them and representing Member States comprising at least 65 % of the population of the Union." TEU 2012 Article 16.

vast majority of EU legislation. The Treaty brought more than forty new fields under the procedure for co-decision by EP and the Council, including agriculture, energy policy, immigration and EU funds. In respect of the last item, the EP also gets a say in education policies because EU education programs are decided by a process of co-decision. Parliament has final discretion on the EU budget as a whole. Since the Lisbon Treaty changes, soft law formulated in the Commission or the Council is not decided by the EP anymore, but it can formulate its own soft law, with resolutions on the same topics as other EU institutions.[10]

2.3.4 National decision-making in EU affairs

The Member States' systems for responding to EU policies and demands vary across Europe. There are, however, similarities since all Member States have put in place specific arrangements for coordinating EU policy-making. First, the Heads of State often have specialist expertise and institutional support at their disposal for EU affairs (Kassim 2003, 91; Fink-Hafner 2007, 805). This enables EU decision making routines to be carried out, and as well as having a role in early warning and crisis management, the EU has become a salient domestic actor that Heads of State must follow constantly. Second, because of the role of the prime ministers in EU matters, the role of foreign affairs ministries has changed, as well as the direct role of other ministries in their relevant domains. Third, interdepartmental coordination is needed in horizontal matters, and fourth, ministries have reorganised their internal structures and trained staff to respond to the needs of EU coordination. The fifth issue, similar to EU coordination in Member States, is "deparliamentarization", meaning that national parliaments usually have a formal role in EU policy-making, but are rarely influential. The volume of EU affairs and their rather technical nature, as well as the speed at which negotiations advance at the Council, limit the Parliament's opportunities to intervene. The final characteristic is the important role of the permanent representations in Brussels, which are the centrepieces of national EU coordination and serve as the main contact points for other delegations (Kassim 2003, 91). These characteristics of typical EU coordination in a Member State are largely reflected in Finland (see Figure 3 below).

Unlike in some other countries (see for instance Štremfel & Lajh 2010), EU coordination in Finland also entails soft law sectors such as education. Furthermore,

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10. European Parliament 2014. Previously, the recommendations were made by a co-decision proce- dure.

there is a connection between national and EU policy-making processes since the overall responsibility for both preparation and monitoring of EU affairs and "the determination of Finland's positions on EU issues rests with competent ministries" (The Constitution of Finland, Chapter 8). According to Raunio and Saari (2006), EU policies were transformed from foreign relations to national policies in Finland in 2000 when the EU Secretariat was moved from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister's Office (236). This had a significant impact on national policy-making because, at least on paper, EU affairs are now handled in close connection with national policy making, often by the same state officials responsible for similar national questions. Since EU and national processes are so closely linked, one might assume that their interconnectedness is evident in Finland.

There are, however, currently twelve ministries in Finland and most EU matters are overlapping or do not follow the logics of Finnish government, and efficient national coordination is needed before determining the Finnish position. This is in the responsibility of Prime Minister's office, but the coordination system has various preparatory levels. The lowest of these is the EU sub-committee system, consisting of all relevant stakeholders, and the highest is the Cabinet Committee on European Union Affairs, whose membership consists exclusively of Ministers.

The Committee for EU Affairs has appointed 37 sector-specific preparative *EU sub-committees* for preparing the Finnish position on issues ranging from foreign and trade policy to education and youth affairs. These sub-committees have an important position in the preparation of EU affairs at civil servant level, and the committees assemble in either restricted or extended composition. The restricted composition comprises civil servants from ministries and governmental offices, but an extended composition also includes representatives from various interest groups and other concerned parties (Handling of EU affairs in Finland, 2012). In fields where EU competence is low, the sub-committees use only extended composition in order to provide as much transparency as possible. In Finland, the participation of stakeholders in policy formulation is one of the characteristics of the political system, and, in respect of EU affairs, participation is even more structured than in other fields. The extended composition of sub-committee EU30 for education consists of all relevant stakeholders in education, including different ministries and social partners (employer and employee organisations) as well as student associations and rectors' conferences (Appendix 1. Sub-committee EU30 (education) in Finland**.**). This means that the main stakeholders in higher education should, at least in principle, be aware of topical EU issues. In practice, the experience of this researcher is that stakeholders value the

sub-committee as a forum that keeps them in touch with horizontal education policy issues. The Finnish EU sub-committee system is rare in the Union, in the sense that all relevant stakeholders are included in EU position formation from the launch of any debate, at the initiative phase of policy formation. Stremfel and Lajh (2010), for instance, indicate that in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, none of the Council documents are consulted with the wider range of stakeholders (74).

The decision-making in EU policies works as follows in Finland. After the preliminary national position on an EU initiative has been prepared by the civil servant in charge of the issue at the ministry, it is presented to the subcommittee for approval. The position is then presented by the relevant ministry to Parliament through the respective parliamentary committee, which prepares a statement on the proposal where necessary. These committees also hear stakeholders and experts while preparing their statements. Parliament's position on EU affairs is finally expressed by the Grand Committee, where the minister has to present all current items and positions before attending Council meetings. According to the Constitution, the Government must keep Parliament informed on the preparation of matters relating to the European Union, and according to the Constitution, the Government and each minister must enjoy the confidence of Parliament in all of their activities (The Constitution of Finland, section 97). Before the Minister can attend the Council meeting, national coordination is finalised by the Prime Minister's office at the Cabinet Committee on European Union Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, and the preparatory Committee for EU Affairs, chaired by the State Secretary for EU Affairs.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which is in charge of EU coordination, has paid particular attention to the preparatory stage of national positions. In a report published in 2009, the PMO drew attention to the fact that the Finns take EU decision-making very much as given – especially at the proposal phase – and that Finland does not exert enough influence in the preparatory phase of Commission proposals. Council processes are seen as central, but the reality is that, for such a small country as Finland, it is often too late to get support from other countries in the Council for national ideas. According to the PMO, Finnish standpoints should be delivered both to the Commission and to other Member States in the preparatory phase of any proposals. (VNK 2009).

From a communication to a
resolution

EU sub-committee   National Parliament

Prime Minister's
Office

Member States
/ Ministry of Education   Presidency
and Culture

European Commission
(a communication
or a proposal)

Council of the EU

Coreper

Education
Committee

European
Parliament
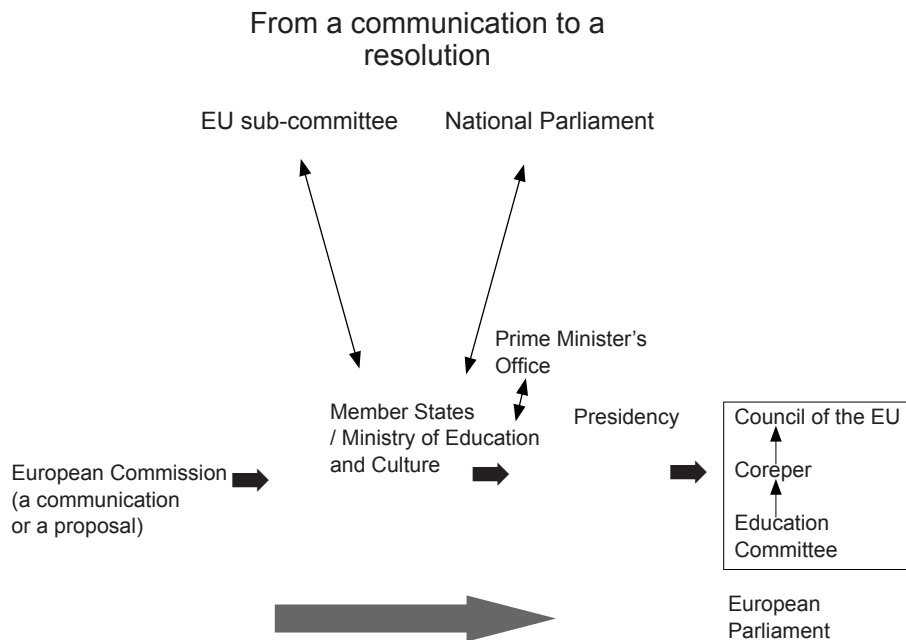
Figure 3. Policy formation in EU education policy in Finland.

The question of legitimacy is always an important issue in EU politics. Radaelli (2000) argues that the EU is essentially vulnerable in terms of legitimacy, given its democratic deficit (31). Furthermore, the concept of "legitimacy deficit" has been used to describe "the gap between the principles and practice of decision making" (Bache & Olsson 2001, 219). The legitimacy of international institutions is recognised by the Member States, but the EU is *sui generis* in that it resembles a political system more than an international organisation, and therefore requires a wider legitimacy than that conferred by national elites. However, the debate around democratic legitimacy in the EU focuses more on policy decisions at EU level than on policy implementation at national level (Bache & Olsson 2001, 220). For this reason, Finland has attempted to make EU policy-making a matter of soft law that is transparent to the public at large. This approach has been concretely implemented through the extended composition of the EU30 sub-committee, although it must be noted that higher education institutions are represented at the EU30 by rectors' conferences only.

2.3.5 The development of EU cooperation in education policies

Several authors have written comprehensively on the evolution of higher education policy cooperation, first in the European Community (EC) and subsequently in the European Union (Blitz 2003; Corbett 2003, 2005, 2011; Neave 1985; Huisman & Wende 2004; Keeling 2006; Pépin 2006; Walter 2007; Gavari Starkie 2008; Grek & Lawn 2009; Välimaa 2011.) And Phillips and Ertl (2003) offer an insight into the development of education and training cooperation from the perspective of Member States. Because of this range and variety of sources, and because the focus is on the post-Lisbon era since 2000, the development of EC/EU education policy cooperation is not described in detail here. An overview of the main characteristics of the evolution of the education policy cooperation may, however, help to clarify the situation during the decade under observation.

Higher education, like other education sectors, has always been a nationally sensitive area, and as Maassen notes (2009, 284), the Commission's influence on national arrangements has therefore met largely with suspicion and rejection by Member States. The European Community took no interest in education in its early years, and so the Council of Europe was the main actor in European cooperation in education for more than 20 years. In fact, it was within the Council of Europe that the first European conventions on the equivalence of university diplomas and of study periods were developed (Pépin 2006, 50–51).

In the EC, the years 1951 to 1957 saw the creation of the European Communities (the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community). The EEC and the Treaty of Rome produced the Common Market and the principles of freedom of movement and establishment. The Treaty of Rome foresaw a common vocational training policy (Article 128) but made no reference to other forms of education, and the subject was taboo at Community level (Pépin 2006, 22.) Since the Community was to guarantee freedom of movement, non-discrimination and the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications (Article 57 in Pépin 2006), it was impossible to avoid cooperation in the field of education. Corbett (2005, 5) argues that the founding of the EEC also directly affected the universities, as freedom of commitment and of establishment had implications for higher education. In the 1960s, with increased interest in the relationship between education and the economy, it was felt that education policy, due to its connections to employment and social policies, should not be left to educators alone – not least because education was also

understood as an expensive investment, and it needed to be asked whether this was a fruitful investment or simply an expense (Simons, Haverhals & Biesta 2007, 396; see also chapter 2.2). At the 1969 Hague summit, the theme of education was cautiously raised, and the final communique produced a vague phrase about Europe as an exceptional source of development, progress and culture. Blitz (2003) notes that, for some reason, this humanistic message was interpreted as introducing education as a theme for discussion, and the communique became a preamble in "every educational policy statement" in the EC/EU from then on (200).

The ministers for education of the six EC Member States met for the first time at Community level in 1971, although the meeting remained intergovernmental as it had no recognised configuration within the Council of the European Communities (Pépin 2006, 63). The first appointed Commissioner for education matters (1970-1973) was the Italian Altiero Spinelli, then Commissioner for Industry and Technology. History knows Spinelli better as an advocate of European federalism, so it is interesting that he, rather than the Commissioner for Youth and Information, was chosen to be the first Commissioner responsible for so delicate an area as education. According to Corbett (2005), Spinelli believed higher education to be a strategic and interesting domain for the EC and that education should have a real Community dimension (66, 77). These visions from the 1970s sound very similar to those of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000.

The first EU action programme on education was launched in 1976. Although the sums allocated to education represented only 0.1 % of the Community budget, this was the founding act for Community cooperation in education. The programme was not limited to higher education but included schools as well. The key functions of the programme were "a continuous comparison of policies, experience and ideas in the Member States and the addition of a European dimension to education systems" (Pépin 2006, 69). Actions included pilot projects, studies, visits and so on that fostered greater mutual understanding and connections. Areas of cooperation extended to migrant workers and their children, higher education cooperation and languages, but also included horizontal themes such as relations between educational systems and the development of statistical records (Pépin 2006, 69-71).

From 1986 to the 1990s, the Commission established 14 different education programmes that aimed to provide support for European cooperation. The largest and the most successful of these was Erasmus, widely viewed as a major driver of qualitative improvement in international activities (Teichler 2009, 16).[11] The programme provided scholarships for student mobility and financial support for various

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11. In Teichler 2007, the effects of EU education and mobility programmes are discussed more extensively.

cooperating networks for curricular coordination at departmental level, as well as for organisational development. Support was also provided for curricular innovation, staff exchange and information activities. In the mid-1990s, the Socrates programme – a larger umbrella for education activities – was launched, and Erasmus became a sub-programme under its auspices. Institutional support was now channelled directly to higher education institutions. As early as 1989, the EC and the Socrates programme had already supported the establishment of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (Teichler 2009, 8). In January 2000, Socrates was replaced by Socrates II, which was replaced in turn by the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013). At the time of writing, the new Erasmus + programme has just commenced. It is already clear that this constitutes the largest-ever EU education cooperation programme, including all sectors of education and mobility within and outside of the Union as well as youth and sport actions. It might be said that Erasmus has grown from a young and enthusiastic boy to a grown-up man, with his own views and ideas for improving higher education policies.

Developments in EU policy cooperation during the 1980s and 1990s followed the now familiar expansion of European integration. The Single European Act of 1986 and the completion of the Single Market meant that research became a partial Community competence; the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 set the conditions on which the Community could intervene to support education; and the Community's subsidiary competence in education was also defined for the first time in this Treaty (Corbett 2005, 8–9, 11; Maassen 2009, 284; see also 2.3.1.) The addition of the education articles 126 and 127 in the Maastricht Treaty ended the policy competence creep, as education was finally recognised in the Treaty. But although the Treaty formalised EC/EU education policy, it did not entail any radical policy change. The aims of European education policy were still the same: to facilitate the functioning of the Single Market (Walkenhorst 2008, 571). Interestingly, Blitz (2003) has argued that

> one vague statement made at the Hague conference was used as a pretext for expanding the Community's claim over education…The Commission used early resolutions as a base upon which the Community's interest in education could be further grounded and lead to further proposals (211).

The Commission has always been good at finding grounds for its proposals and actions. Since the Maastricht Treaty, there has been a gradual strengthening of education policy in Europe. Most of the emphasis in the Europeanization of education has been

placed on skills and training, but it has been suggested that it is difficult in practice to distinguish clearly between initiatives in various sectors of education (Lawn & Lingard 2002, 291.) In fact, many of the questions dealt with in the EU context are described as "horizontal" issues. Multilingualism and language skills, entrepreneurship and connections with work life, lifelong learning, innovation and mobility are good examples of themes that resonate across all sectors of education and training. Beyond these horizontal issues, however, there is a tradition of sector specific discussions about, for example, quality assurance and credit systems in vocational education and training, as well as about early school leaving. Maassen and Musselin (2009, 6) have also argued that the Maastricht Treaty was a backward step in the development of a common European higher education policy space, as Member States became more concerned about possible EU influence and therefore they launched the intergovernmental Bologna process in the turn of the century.

The Lisbon Strategy

According to several authors, 1999 marked a new stage in EU education policy (see for instance Dale 2008; Pépin 2011; Walkenhorst 2008; Walker 2005), characterised by particular attention to higher education and a new approach to policy-making. Walkenhorst (2008) argues that, in order to avoid any further disputes about legal competences, Member States adopted a new cooperation strategy and a form of intensified transgovernmentalism, seen in the extension of cooperation in the intergovernmental Bologna process and the introduction of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) to the EU education sector. (573.)

The Lisbon Strategy, created as the EU's overarching program focusing on growth and jobs, recognised that knowledge is the EU's most valuable asset, particularly in light of increasing global competition. According to the European Council of Lisbon in 2000 and the European Council of Barcelona in 2002, the EU should, by 2010, become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. The EU higher education sector emphasised that this would require Member States to make the education and training systems of the EU a world quality reference standard by 2010, and created a European Research and Innovation Area (Council 2007, 7). The competitiveness of Europe had been of concern to the Commission since the early 1990s, and the president of the Commission, Jacques Delors, was among

those who insisted that the cause of high level of unemployment in Europe was low competitiveness as compared to the United States and Japan (Krugman 1994, 28-29).

Van Vught (2011) argues that the emergence of innovation policy had been promoted by international organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank since the early 1980s. He further argues that, in recent decades, the innovation systems' approach – which holds that the key to international competitiveness is in national factors that influence the development, diffusion and use of innovation – has clearly influenced higher education policies. In Europe, HE and research became cornerstones of the larger overall European innovation strategy (63–64) as it seemed that, in order to create stronger and more sustainable growth and more jobs for Europeans, HEIs and research organisations needed to contribute to innovation policy.

In 2004, the early implementation of the Lisbon Strategy was analysed in the so-called Kok report (2004), which identified incoherence and inconsistency both between participants and between policies. Kok's report recommended that the EU needed to continue to find ways of attracting more of the world's best and brightest researchers by, for instance, reducing administrative obstacles (21). A further proposal was that opportunities for lifelong learning should be increased by strategic decisions at Member State level (33). Knowledge and innovation for growth were identified as main areas for action, the "Lisbon agenda" was born, and for the second half of the decade, the Lisbon Strategy focused on growth and employment in Europe (cf. Enders et al. 2011, 3; Van Vught 2011; COM 2005a).[12] Concurrently, the Commission became active in the field of higher education, making several proposals on the modernisation of higher education systems (Appendix 2). This was supported by the so-called Sapir (2004) report, *An Agenda for a Growing Europe* – emphasising the importance of investment in knowledge, the discussion about university reform and the university sector in Europe at the informal European Council in Hampton Court 2005[13] – and by the report of an expert group chaired by former the prime minister of Finland, Mr Esko Aho, entitled *Creating an Innovative Europe* (Aho 2006).

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12. COM(2005a) on mid-term review of the Lisbon Process, page 9: "Spreading knowledge through high quality education system is the best way of guaranteeing the long-term competitiveness of the Union. In particular, the Union must ensure that our universities can compete with the best in the World through the completion of the European Higher Education Area. The Commission will propose the creation of a 'European Institute of Technology'".

13. Blair 2005: "Secondly and specifically, there was a discussion about university reform and the university sector in Europe, and the need to develop strong centers of excellence across the European Union, able to compete, not just with the United States of America, but also with the emerging economies of China and India and elsewhere."

The Open Method of Coordination

Implementation of the Lisbon Strategy required coordination of policies in areas where the EU has little or no competence. To solve this problem, the European Council had adopted the OMC in education policy, a method that includes short, medium and long term objectives, fixed guidelines, indicators and benchmarks and mutual learning processes (European Council 2000 § 37). In the field of education policy, the OMC became a Commission-run intergovernmental cooperation, decided upon at the Stockholm European Council of 2001. The Barcelona European Council that followed received a report outlining a work programme for follow-up of national education systems and assessment of targets achieved by utilising the OMC (VNEUS 2002). By the end of the 1990s, the Education Council had addressed the need to create new working methods and greater continuity in education policy cooperation (Council 2000), and so the idea of a cooperation framework, finally presented in 2003 as Education and Training 2010, was not that novel.

The Education and Training 2010 work programme (ET2010) concentrated on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems across Europe. ET2010 was envisaged as a comprehensive programme, entailing all sectors of education and comprising different forms of cooperation, as set out below. In the last decade, it became the main tool for cooperation in the field of education, using the OMC. Although there is a body of existing research and literature on the OMC as a process, and on its impact on policy processes in the field of education (see for instance Ertl 2006; Blomqvist 2007; Grek and Lawn 2009; Pépin 2011 and chapter 3.2.3), it will be useful at this point to outline the central elements of the OMC in education.

According to the Commission, who was the conductor of the process, the OMC is an intergovernmental/EU method that provides a framework for cooperation between the Member States, whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives (COM 2011, 788). Its forms can be tailored to each particular area in which it is used. Veiga and Amaral (2009, 137) have argued that the major aim of the OMC may simply be to encourage national reforms, and that convergence is only a by-product of the implementation of commonly defined policies. Olsen and Maassen (2007, 8) suggest that, by this means, education in the EU framework gradually came to be governed by standardisation, dialogue, benchmarking and exchange of good practice. According to Garben (2012, 13), although the OMC

exercises are not legally binding, this does increase the Commission's political power in the field of education.

There may be different interpretations of the level of influence of the OMC, but in practical terms, the Method offered Member States new tools for identification of good practices, mutual learning and benchmarking between countries and their higher education institutions. The idea of the OMC is to provide a policy transfer platform for the exchange of information, rather than using the normal law-making system in the Council (see more on policy transfer in 3.4.2). The OMC assists Member States to develop their own policies, within the guidelines and following the benchmarks agreed on together (Featherstone & Radaelli 2003, 43). Run by the Commission, the OMC has been characterised as a "naming and shaming" tool (Veiga & Amaral 2009, 141), but the term soft law may describe it just as well, since as an outcome, the Commission aims to steer the policy of Member States in the desired direction by producing reports on their success in moving towards common goals.

Several researchers have pointed out that the OMC has substantially changed EU higher education policy (cf. Corbett 2005; Pepin 2006; Blomqvist 2007; Maassen & Musselin 2009). First, argues Pépin, the OMC improved monitoring of the implementation of agreed objectives (2011, 28). As part of the ET2010 framework, the progress of Member States was followed by reporting to the Commission, which prepared a proposal for a joint report to the Council every two years. This joint report received by the Council provided an overall description of education and training across the EU and assessed progress towards common objectives. Its key messages then contributed to the Spring European Council, which took these messages on board in reaching its own conclusions, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. The Education and Training 2010 reporting process.

The ET2010 reporting process
1. The Commission and the Council produced a joint report (2004, 2006, 2008, 2010)
2. based on the National Reports (2005, 2007, 2009)
3. to the Spring European Council (key messages)
4. which contributed to the follow-up of the Lisbon Strategy

The cycle of the follow-up process was lengthy, and it was seen as burdensome and even inefficient from the point of view of contributing to national reforms (Pépin

2011, 28). Lajh and Stremfel (2011, 523) point out that the national group preparing the national report played an important role. Usually, it consisted only of government officials, with other stakeholders excluded from the process. The authors recommended that a complete evaluation should be done in collaboration with various stakeholders to ensure that results and comparisons arising from the Progress Reports would reach relevant groups. In Finland, the reports have also been presented at sub-committee EU30, so stakeholders should at least know what has been reported to the EU level.

Second, in 2003, the Education Ministers adopted five benchmarks as reference levels of European average performance[14] that were first supported with 29 indicators and later with 16 indicators. Most of the benchmarked domains related to school education, and the Council emphasised that these benchmarks do not define national targets or prescribe decisions to be taken by national governments (Council 2003). The quality and use of education statistics at EU level did start to develop, however, and the role of monitoring clearly changed the position of the Commission (Pépin 2011, 28–29). The benchmarking activities were first met with some resistance because Member States felt that national differences and diversity were not necessarily taken into consideration in reporting only outputs and processes but not inputs (Veiga & Amaral 2009, 141; SiVL15/2002).[15]

Third part of the OMC process has been the system of clusters or later Thematic Working Groups (TWG) and Peer Learning Activities since 2005. The Commission defines their work as follows:

> The work of the clusters and PLAs is intended to contribute, on the one hand, to the initiation of the policy development process at the European level (reflection, ideas) and, on the other hand, to support national policy development and implementation of agreed European objectives and principles through mutual learning and exchange of good practice.

> Peer learning is a process of cooperation at European level whereby policy makers and practitioners from one country learn, through direct contact and practical

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14. Council (2003) stated that the Member States should reduce to no more than 10% the average proportion of young people leaving school early; increase by at least 15% the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology, while at the same time decreasing the level of gender imbalance; ensure that at least 85 % of 22-year-olds have completed upper secondary education; decrease by at least 20 % compared to the year 2000 the percentage of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading literacy; ensure that at least 12.5 % of the adult working age population (aged 25–64) have taken part in lifelong learning.
15. In SiVL15/2002, the Finnish Parliament emphasised that the measures that will be taken in order to reach common goals had to be decided at national level, and those measures had to be suitable for national cultural conditions.

cooperation, from experiences of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe in implementing reforms in areas of shared interest and concern.

The word "cluster" is used to mean the regrouping of interested countries around a specific theme, corresponding to their national policy priorities, and on which they have expressed a desire to learn from other interested countries, or to share with others their successful or unsuccessful experiences. (SEC 2009, 10.)

Clusters during the ET2010 implementation, then, were working groups in which national delegates (usually government officials or experts appointed by the government), Commission staff and other relevant stakeholders exchanged information on good (and bad) practices and policy options, according to participating countries' interests, with a view to helping to advance reforms nationally. As part of their work programme, clusters identified the need for Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), to take place in a Member State where policy makers and practitioners could learn from other countries' experience. The following were clusters or working groups within the ET2010 process, all functioning in different ways and on different terms: Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Access and Social Inclusion; Key Competences; Making Best Use of Resources; Math, Science and Technology (MST); Modernization of Higher Education; Recognition of Learning Outcomes; Teachers and Trainers; and the Working Group on the Adult Learning Action Plan. At the time of writing, a new generation of OMC groups (now called Thematic Working Groups or TWGs) has just commenced work, including one on higher education.[16]

Participation in the OMC exercises seems to be problematic. The connection between participation and influence on national policy has been identified as unsatisfactory. The participants are civil servants, who are not necessarily in a position to influence national policy formation. As the Commission put it in 2007:

> Several participants in clusters have identified that they lack the position, or the networks, or the time, to ensure effective use of their cluster's policy conclusions in policy making in their home countries. The impact of peer learning activities is greatest on the individuals who participate in them, but these are not always the people who are involved in making policy decisions.

The impact of the outcomes of the clusters on national policy development and policy implementation needs to be strengthened, the exchange of best practices should

16. See European Commission (2014): TWG on School policy, TWG on Vocational education and Training, TWG on Adult Learning, TWG on Higher Education, TWG on Transversal Skills.

concentrate more on policies which have been properly evaluated (evidence-based) and clusters would need to intensify the dissemination of their outcomes. (SEC 2007, 121).

The OMC aims to impact especially on the cognitive level of public policy, and especially on policy concepts and the discourse of civil servants. In support of the OMC, Radaelli (2003) argued that it stimulates national debates and provides various interests with arguments, and consequently offers arguments that legitimate national reforms (in Lajh & Stremfel 2011, 519). Lajh and Stremfel (2011) argue that the OMC may also change the behaviour of Member State officials and their willingness to improve information for comparison, learning and adaptation. It is natural for Member States to seek positive results, and governments are generally sympathetic to new approaches and instruments (519). The OMC may therefore assist in delivering ideas and thinking as well as comparative information from other Member States.

2.3.6 EU higher education policy since 2000

Lisbon strategy and its follow-up stressed the importance of innovation policy and HEIs and research organisations as key players. Over the last decade, political interest in universities has grown, and university reforms were called for across Europe. It has been argued, for instance, that in Ireland, the OECD review of the knowledge society and the Lisbon Strategy were the two most influential documents of the last decade in Irish higher education (Coate & McLabhrainn 2009).[17] In many countries, change in higher education governance and steering was influenced by the Lisbon Strategy goals (Capano & Piattoni 2011), but there were undoubtedly other factors – such as HE massification and the demand for increasing efficiency – that also contributed to the call for reforms, as discussed in section 2.2.

The purpose of this section is to describe the content of EU emphasis on HE. Between 2000 and 2010, the Commission launched six initiatives that touched upon the role of European universities in relation to global competition. The Commission claimed that European universities were failing to use their full potential and that they should be participating more fully in the creation of economic growth, social cohesion, and improvements in the quality and quantity of jobs. The Commission identified a need for modernisation of university structures, diversification of universities' sources of finance and an increase in university autonomy. The Commission suggested there was

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17. Coate & Mc Labhrainn (2009, 206) add that "It is difficult to find any policy or strategy documents about higher education in Ireland that do not emphasize the importance of higher education in contributing to the knowledge society."

a deficit of world-class excellence and too much emphasis on mono-disciplinary and traditional learning and learners.[18] Enders et al. (2011, 4) argue that the Commission envisaged greater diversity in the European higher education system in combination with increased compatibility, and in its decisions, the Education Council supported these ideas to some extent (Council 2005; Council 2007).

In order to understand the context of the Commission's emphasis on higher education, it will be useful to examine a framework that was topical in higher education research at the turn of the century. As discussed below, it has been argued by Shattock (2010) that Burton R. Clark's concept of an entrepreneurial university may have influenced the Commission's argument. Clark sought to answer the question of whether universities are under increasing pressure to reshape their functions – and if so, why. His main argument is that universities have been pressured by a deepening asymmetry between environmental demand and institutional capacity to respond to this demand. The traditional ways of meeting this demand have been shown to be inefficient. Based on evidence collected from five different European universities (Warwick, Twente, Strathclyde, Chalmers and Joensuu), Clark (1998) argues that the rapidly changing university world forces individual institutions in many nations to become more enterprising.

According to Clark, the demand-response imbalance follows from the increasing number of students in the shift from elite to mass higher education, and this creation of endless demand by new student bodies has not been fully understood. As well as the increasing number of young degree students, the introduction of adult education further diversifies the student population and its needs. Second, Clark points out that labour force training demands have also become endless. University students must be trained for highly specialised professions, but they also need retraining throughout their professional careers. Third, there is a requirement for greater efficiency – government expects more to be done at lower unit cost. Diversification of funding has also created new patrons, particularly from industry. These interest groups also want to have their say and express their concerns on university boards, committees and so on.

But the most important demand on universities, as Clark indicates, is the knowledge expansion that will inevitably outrun available resources. The constant growth of knowledge – new research results, articles, literature and so on – has become an uncontrollable force that creates an inexhaustible appetite at the organisational level for expansion of funding, personnel, space and students. For instance, the biological

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18. COM (2003), COM (2005b), COM (2006a), COM (2006b), COM (2009) and other initiatives on the European Institute of Technology.

sciences produce new knowledge at a speed that requires curricular revision of teaching materials every two or three years. (129–131).

All of these demands have created excessive expectations for universities. The question of underfunding has become topical, and the old governance model appears insufficient in tackling these demands. One of the solutions introduced at national and provincial level is differentiation, in which higher education and research tasks are distributed to different kinds of universities, colleges, polytechnics and research institutions. Access to higher education is differentiated and labour market relations are divided, but the patrons of the system will have different expectations of different kind of HEIs. Clark highlights the fact that the capacity to balance demand and response varies between one-faculty and multi-faculty universities: in the first place, specialised universities are better positioned than comprehensive institutions to manage demands around their subject specialisation, and second, to respond in an entrepreneurial way. (132–135). University departments have to make a clear decision that they cannot address all questions and demands but instead need to be selective and to focus. When this is done effectively, entrepreneurship will appear and "strengthen selective substantive growth in its basic units" (142).

Clark argues that demand overload and student growth, along with knowledge growth, increase the costs of higher education and create pressure on university budgets, causing change in the relationship between universities and funding ministries. However, this is not the only consequence. University spending becomes one of the key concerns of government, and this puts universities on the agenda of politicians and parties (140). The entrepreneurial response requires a strengthening of autonomy at institutional level and a reduction of governmental dependency. Financial resources may be increased by diversifying the income, and new units beyond traditional departments offer new approaches to the surrounding environment as well as new modes of thought and training. As part of the entrepreneurial response, centralised steering capacity may help to focus the functions of the institution. As entrepreneurial responses increase, universities become more individualised (147).

Clark's model of an entrepreneurial university had an immediate impact on universities and higher education policies, particularly in Europe. In the UK, a call for universities to be more entrepreneurial and less reliant on the state could not have been timelier. In continental Europe, on the other hand, funding shortfalls, massification and an increasing interest in neo-liberal policies had opened eyes to alternative funding strategies other than the old university models that were highly dependent on state support.

It is of interest for present purposes that Shattock (2010) believes Clark's work was probably most influential within the European Union, where the Commission saw the concept as encapsulating the problems of state-dominated university systems in continental Europe. As will be discussed in the following sections, the Commission's higher education communications of 2003, 2005 and 2006 broadly aligned with Clark in identifying the main challenges for European universities: internationalisation, relations with industry, the reorganisation of knowledge and the emergence of new expectations, as well as the need for a diversified income base (267). On further reflection, one criticism is that Clark may have underestimated the state's role as an institution imposing limitations on institutional freedom in Europe. This becomes particularly striking, says Shattock, in the sustained criticism of state influence in the first of the European Commission's communications, which asserts that over-regulation hinders universities' ability to react to the surrounding world. Shattock argues that few universities in Europe can transform themselves "to the entrepreneurial model without a loosening of state over-regulation" (269–270). Although Shattock was the only author found during present research arguing for the connection between the Commission's proposals and Clark's ideas, this connection between Clark's ideas and the Commission's work was useful in considering the research phenomenon. Shattock's findings, and the content analysis of the communications below, reveal that the Commission uses external expertise in its formulation of initiatives. This will be further discussed in the later analysis. The following sections introduce the key elements of the Commission's communications on higher education.

The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge

The communication entitled *The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (COM 2003) launched the debate on the importance of European universities in 2003. Van Vught (2011) argues that the Commission's analysis was that the traditional model of Humboldtian universities – as communities of scholars and students and the union of teaching and research – no longer serves the current international context, and the high degree of fragmentation of the European university landscape has prevented Europe from responding to new global challenges (67). The Member States needed to address these problems together at European level, and they were supported in this by the EU.

The 2003 communication was preceded by a Recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (Council 1998), an initiative for cooperation with third countries (COM 2001) and by the launch of the Bologna process. In previous decades, higher education had been a sensitive topic in EU cooperation, and the launch of the Bologna process as an intergovernmental process focusing on degrees and higher *education* – at first without the Commission's official involvement – solved the questions of subsidiarity (see more in 2.3.1). But the launch of the Lisbon process and the increased interest in the efficiency of higher education *systems* encouraged the Commission to bring the universities onto the agenda in a Europe-wide consultation on HEIs with this communication.

In the communication the European Commission raised questions about the conditions under which universities (broadly understood to include all HE establishments) could meet the needs of the knowledge society and economy. The debate was open and was directed mainly to the Member States, but it also engaged the universities and their representatives (European Commission 2004; EUA 2003). The Commission sought answers to a set of questions in the communication in order to identify suitable further initiatives on the topic, for examination by either the Education Council or the Competitiveness Council, or following the Bologna summit in 2003. The Commission noted that European universities had not been properly on the EU agenda since 1991 (European Commission 1991), but the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 and the subsequent Councils in Stockholm (2001) and Barcelona (2002) stressed the creation of a Europe of knowledge, which drastically changed the situation from the universities' perspective.[19]

In its communication, the Commission (2003) stressed the needs of society. The European universities, it said, must reconsider how they were organised in order to retain their place in society and in the world. The European universities did not appear as globally competitive enough, especially by comparison with universities in the United States of America. The "European university landscape", according to the communication, consisted of more than 3,300 different higher education establishments, organised at national and regional levels and characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity. And although the Bologna process aspired to increasing the comparability of HEIs, the trend was still towards greater differentiation in the emergence of more specialised institutions in teaching and research. The Commission identified five challenges for the European universities: increasing demand for higher

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19. All following ideas from the Commission are from COM (2003) unless otherwise indicated.

education, internationalisation, university and industry co-operation, explosion of knowledge and the emergence of new expectations in education.

The Commission (2003) also identified three tasks for European universities to the Member States, to be pursued simultaneously in order to enhance the role of universities in the creation of a Europe of knowledge. The first objective was *to ensure sufficient and sustainable resources as well as efficient use of those resources*. The Commission pointed out that the total expenditure on HE alone had not increased in proportion to the growth in the number of students, substantially behind the United States of America: 1.1% of GDP in the EU as compared with 2.3% for the USA. American universities were found to have wider sources for funding, mainly from the private sector, than their European counterparts. It was noted that the universities also had a duty to their stakeholders to use resources efficiently, but dropout rates and mismatches between qualifications and demand, as well as the duration of studies, proved this mission had failed. The Commission underlined the need to find new funding sources in order to supplement public funding. Private donations, selling of services and contributions from students were mentioned, as national regulatory frameworks often limited the use of these sources.

The second task identified by the Commission was the creation of *excellence*. There were, it said, two kinds of obstacle to excellence: "structures of the universities themselves, but also structures of regulation within which they operate" (COM 2003, 16). Again, the Commission brought up the issue of national regulation, for which Member States were responsible. Excellence was not achievable without long term planning and good financing opportunities. In the steering of the universities, multi-annual contracts should be prioritised and the management structures of universities should respond to the needs of society: "the system should be designed with issues of *accountability* clearly in mind" (17). The need for increasing interdisciplinary capability was also highlighted in the communication, as well as the need for increasing specialisation in universities. The need for excellence, unstable resources and competition was said to force universities and Member States to make choices. Excellence entailed a need to attract top-level researchers and teachers but also to increase the number of women in technical and scientific careers, seen to be connected to the problem of recognition of studies and qualifications, which was still an issue in Europe.

The third task was to increase the *attractiveness* of European universities and broaden their perspective on international, local and regional levels. The Commission's analysis of the competitiveness of European universities was straightforward: the

environment offered by the European universities is less attractive than that of the American universities (21). Concurrently with internationalisation, the universities should also be catalysts for multiple partners at the regional level.

This communication was welcomed by the university sector as "a clear acknowledgement by the Commission, for the first time, of the unique role of universities in shaping the European knowledge society" (EUA 2003). Clearly, the message was deeply reflected on at university level, and it was also welcomed in Finland. The Finnish reservations centred mostly on the comparisons with the USA and the issue of private funding, but the idea of increasing financial autonomy, as well as the emphasis on excellence, was welcomed (SiV 2/2003).

It may be noted that the Commission's objectives follow the lines of Clark's ideas to some extent, as the challenges identified by the Commission can be linked to the demand overload defined by Clark (1998, 129–131): demands for a skilled labour force, demands for efficiency, interest group pressure (especially from industry) and simultaneous knowledge expansion. Like Clark, the Commission also recognised that financial resources could be increased by diversifying income. Clark emphasized that the strengthening of autonomy at institutional level and the reduction of governmental dependency would be a way of creating a truly entrepreneurial university. The Commission (2003) argued in this communication that there was over-regulation in higher education policies (58, 13, 16 and 17), but they did not identify a need for increasing autonomy. Instead, the wording the Commission used in this communication was to "ensure" and "respect" *autonomy* (COM 2003, 2, 22).

Clark proposed differentiation as a solution to demand overload as specialised institutions were better positioned than the more comprehensive ones. Similarly, the Commission stressed the need for excellence and noted that the pressure of competition forced universities and Member States to make choices: "They needed to identify the areas in which different universities have attained, or can reasonably be expected to attain, the excellence judged to be essential at European or at international level (...)" (58, 18).

Efficiency and effectiveness of higher education systems can be seen as closely linked to ideas about the relevance of HEIs to society, and to accountability. An increasing political interest has been identified in the outcomes of higher education, and due to globalisation and increased economic competition, there is constant pressure to make more efficient use of resources. Furthermore, higher education policy needs to be integrated with other policy domains, especially with those domains related to innovation policy (Elken & Stensaker 2011, 297). Orosz (2012) notes that, although

"accountability" has frequently been an issue in policy documents and scholarly literature since the beginning of the 1990s, its meaning has not been made fully explicit, with explanatory contexts varying from state-university relationships to the duty of HEIs to contribute to the national knowledge society. One popular system of accountability that has, however, been identified is performance funding (691–693).

The competitiveness of universities and higher education systems is another issue that was frequently mentioned in higher education policy at the turn of the century. Competitiveness is related to both the funding basis and the management of universities, which as historic and relatively large institutions have not generally been perceived as very competitive in the past. According to Enders (2004), the huge state-funded growth of higher education over the last half-century has restrained any need for competition (366). But both Enders (2004) and Shattock (2010) note that most institutions' ability to compete has in fact been limited, even if they might have wanted to. This is among the reasons why the Commission drew attention to the competitiveness of universities – directing Member States to look at these issues by presenting facts about the state of the European HE system as compared to systems elsewhere.

According to Teichler (2004, 18), structural differences between national higher education systems can be perceived as a possible barrier to international cooperation and mobility. It might be that the cooperating partner would interpret the difference negatively and would not engage sufficiently in cooperation from a staff or student perspective. On the other hand, differences between countries can also be seen as an asset, offering a unique learning environment at both systemic and individual levels. Teichler argues that diversity between countries was acceptable until the 1980s, in part because of the strong persistence of national models while, in contrast, intra-country diversity was more often seen as a barrier. A high degree of homogeneity helped national governments or higher education institutions to negotiate with their partners abroad in respect of recognition and cooperation, but in cases of high national heterogeneity, equivalences had to be resolved at an institutional level. The quantitative growth of higher education, followed by a new managerialism and deregulation (at least to some extent), caused created diversity between HEIs, and intra-national diversity grew (18–19).

Internationalisation is in no sense a new issue in the life of universities. In fact, it is fair to say that the universities have been regarded as one of society's most international institutions, and they have also been a major force in the internationalisation of societies (see for instance Enders 2004, 364; Teichler 2004, 8). But Enders (2004, 365)

points out that universities are at the same time still very much national institutions: their regulatory and funding contexts are national, and their contribution to national culture is significant, not at least in training a skilled labour force for the state. In this light, universities seem to be both objects and subjects of internationalisation. Teichler (2004, 8) also notes that for a long time the international activities of universities, though valued highly, have often been relatively slight; only a small proportion of the European student population enrol abroad, and graduate employment abroad has also been less than expected, lending topicality to the Commission's concerns.

Mobilizing the Brainpower

As already noted, the Wim Kok report (2004) analysed the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and stated that there was incoherence and inconsistency, both between participation and between policies. In the latter half of the decade, the Lisbon Strategy was therefore refocused on growth and employment in Europe, and the Commission became still more active in the field of higher education, making several new proposals related to the problems of European higher education systems.

In *Mobilising the Brainpower of Europe: Enabling Universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy* (COM 2005b), the Commission extended the scope of the universities' potential contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. The consultation conducted on the 2003 communication had helped to focus the Commission's message on three main challenges: "achieving world class quality, improving governance, and increasing and diversifying funding" (COM 2005b, 3). The Commission introduced the concept of the *knowledge triangle* – education, research and innovation – and in all three respects, universities were considered essential. The Commission also prepared a detailed report on the state of European HE system as a background document (SEC 2005).

In this second initiative, the Commission (2005b) identified the following bottlenecks in the European HE system: uniformity, meaning that insufficient differentiation created only average quality; insularity, meaning that European HE was fragmented into small and medium clusters with different regulations and languages and remaining largely insulated from industry, with over-regulation as the cause of inefficiency; and finally, under-funding, and in particular the dependency on state funding, which was keeping the European university sector non-competitive. This communication addressed attractiveness through increasing differentiation, meaning

that each university should use its full potential, with its own strengths and priorities, which it should be capable of identifying itself. The need for openness of the teaching and learning environment was also identified.

According to this communication, governance of HE systems required a new approach by ministries, "with less ex ante checks and greater ex post accountability of universities for quality, efficiency and the achievement of agreed objectives". On funding, the message was similar to the previous communication in 2003, underlining the need to find new funding sources (7). The Commission invited the Council to adopt a resolution on the communication, which the Council (2005) did in that same year. It mainly shared the views on enhancing the quality, attractiveness and relevance of higher education institutions (the term "HEI" was chosen by the Council), developing governance and improving the sustainability of funding and improving partnerships with the surrounding society. It also added the *social dimension* of HE as well as the need to improve HEIs' performance in attainment, access and research. The Council asserted the importance, where necessary, of adapting the regulatory framework and widening access to HE as well as encouraging diversity within HE systems. The Council's response to the Commission's demand for diversified funding sources was cautious: the Member States examined the level of resources and reviewed possibilities "for securing additional funds through a variety of means, including both public and private support as appropriate" (Council 2005).

Dale (2008) argues that, in this communication, "governance" means modernisation of the relationship between states and universities, along the lines of New Public Management. This argument seems quite valid as the Commission urged the Member States to establish new partnerships with universities in line with the Lisbon Strategy, taking actions to ensure that regulatory frameworks enable strategic university leadership (COM 2005b, 9).

Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities

With the help of the EU presidencies (UK, Austria and Finland), the Commission apparently wanted to strengthen the message about higher education, publishing an agenda on HE reform entitled *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation* (COM 2006a) only one year after the second communication. This third Commission communication on higher education since the commencement of the Lisbon agenda was jointly introduced by the Members

of the Commission for Education and Research. The communication responded directly to the acknowledgement made at the European Council's informal meeting at Hampton Court in 2005, during the UK presidency, and at the spring 2006 European Council Meeting, that universities were the foundation of European competitiveness. At Hampton Court, the Heads of State discussed the so-called Aho (2006) Report on *Creating an Innovative Europe*, and some areas for further action on universities were planned in order to drive forward the Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs. The Commission had already proposed the establishment of the European Institute of Technology (EIT), which gained high-level support when it was welcomed by the Spring European Council in 2006 (COM 2006b).

This 2006 communication generated the concept of *modernisation of universities*. One of the key messages of the communication was that the universities should be given "real *autonomy* and accountability" (COM 2006a, 5). It may therefore be fair to say that the lobbying of the Rectors' conferences had finally succeeded (cf. EUA 2003; de Maret 2005) as the Commission had taken autonomy as one of its key messages. This meant that "the Member States should build up and reward management and leadership capacity within universities" (COM 2006a, 6). It did not, however, focus only on the systemic change of HE but also emphasised the remaining obstacles for geographical and inter-sector mobility and underlined the need to achieve the core Bologna reforms by 2010 in all EU countries. Another issue that was newly emphasised in the communication was the partnership with surrounding society, with particular reference to university-business cooperation. As universities played a key role in supporting the workforce, general discussion about the right skills also generated the idea of employability, suggesting that graduates should also attain an entrepreneurial mindset and opportunities for lifelong learning. The document again repeated the above-mentioned messages on funding, interdisciplinary, excellence and attractiveness.

According to Dale (2008, 36), this communication entails an implicit but clear statement of the necessity for the universities to diversify to include both labour market-oriented and research-oriented universities, and both inward-looking as well as global universities. The European modernisation agenda has been criticised for being deaf to the democratic purposes of higher education, and the Commission's agenda has been seen as driving more towards "knowledge economy" than "knowledge society". Reform documents give little attention to "the possible role of universities in developing democratic citizens, a humanistic culture, social cohesion and solidarity, and a vivid public sphere" (Olsen & Maassen 2007, 9; see also SiVL 1/2005).

The Education Council discussed the communication in its meeting in the end of 2007, but the Competitiveness Council adopted a formal Council resolution on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy on 23 November 2007. Thus, both the communication and the discussion in the Council were joint projects between two sectors. In a typical compromise text, the Council (2007) also reaffirmed the need for sufficient autonomy in higher education institutions, with better governance and accountability in their structures to face societal needs and to enable them to grow. Furthermore, the Council agreed the need to diversify universities' sources of public and private funding in order to reduce the funding gap with the European Union's main competitors. The Council invited Member States to promote excellence and internationalisation, and to take the necessary steps to modernise HEIs by granting them autonomy and greater accountability. The Member States also sought to underline the HEIs' contribution to social and cultural life. The resolution encouraged Member States to create incentives for HEIs to open up to non-traditional learners and to further develop, where appropriate, the diversity of the tertiary education system. The Commission was asked to support the Member States by identifying possible measures to address challenges and obstacles, and by facilitating mutual learning. The Commission was also asked to identify possible measures to address obstacles to mobility.

The discussion on the modernisation of HE was continued in a communication on University-Business dialogue, which underlined the importance of accountability and connections with surrounding society, especially from the viewpoint of entrepreneurship and employability (COM 2009). The Council, on the other hand, sought to emphasise the importance of internationalisation and presented their conclusions on that in 2010 (Council 2010a). The modernisation of HE systems was next discussed thoroughly in the Council after the Commission's communication on the topic in 2011, again revisiting many of the same ideas as previously (COM 2011; Council 2011).

2.3.7 Observations of EU HE policy cooperation

To conclude, it is possible to argue that the Commission's initiatives and the discussion in the Council of the EU on HE was topical in many ways. During previous decades, European countries run reforms of higher education steering and governance (see for instance SEC 2011a; Eurydice 2011). But most recently, the enhancement of institutional autonomy and the reorganisation of governance systems have been the key issues for reform, informed mainly by the ideas of new public management

(Magalhaes & Amaral 2009, 186). These ideas were also apparent in the initiatives advanced by the Commission, whose overall purpose and interest has also been that governments would no longer decide to the same extent as previously what form HEIs should take and how they might organise themselves. Teichler (2004, 21) adds that guaranteed funding has also gradually diminished and access to funding overall has become more competitive, making the diversification of resources a matter of interest in many countries.

It is assumed that the greater the autonomy of higher education institutions, the better will be their performance and the more responsive they will become to the goals of government and the economy. Collegial forms of governance are no longer seen as efficient or effective. The state's role in the management of institutions has been withdrawn to focus solely on the steering of the higher education system. Institutional autonomy is encouraged by, for instance, transforming the universities in law from public institutions to private organisations. It has been argued that "as the relationship between the state and the autonomous institutions is configured as a contractual linkage ruled by the state according to governmental strategies, it appears as an enhancement rather than a retraction from system and institutions coordination" (Magalhaes & Amaral 2009, 186). Instruments to control autonomy, based mainly on performance indicators and funding, have spread across Europe, including Finland (OKM 2011). The purpose of this research is to explore understandings of Finnish HE experts in relation to the impact of EU initiatives and policy cooperation on Finnish HE policy formation.

By following the ideas of policy analysis inquiry (Dunn 1994, see chapter 2.1), it becomes clear that the policy problem for EU level discussion of higher education policy in the last decade was defined in the Lisbon Strategy. The Strategy called for growth and jobs and acknowledged the need for a knowledge-based economy, which was seen as a strong message to the HE sector to look for new policy actions. Although the EU has no competence in the field of higher education, the strong message from the Heads of State encouraged the Commission to look for new means to address HE issues. The policy actions included the various soft law tools from both the Commission and the Council on higher education, as well as the adoption of the Open Method of Coordination in higher education (Cluster on the Modernization of HE, chapter 2.3.5.1). It seems clear that Clark's notions about the entrepreneurial university found fertile ground in the Commission when it began work on the content of new EU HE policy. Shattock's idea of connecting Clark's visions with the Commission's initiatives invites questions about what other influences, ideas and sources the Commission may

have used in its policy formation. This notion also prompted research to clarify the interaction between Member State level and the Commission.

With this description of the context, EU activities or actions in the field of higher education can be divided into the terms *cooperation* and *policy*. Cooperation between EU Member States, and between Member States and the Commission, takes place within the Council of the EU as well as within different informal configurations and OMC peer learning activities. Policy is formed by the Commission and the Council in official documents and decisions. As indicated in the introduction, this research concentrates on EU level cooperation, and on how it is perceived and understood by Finnish experts. Since soft law in the higher education sector cannot have direct effects on the national education system (see 2.3.2), it seems relevant to observe what is (ir)relevant in cooperation so that policy ideas can move to Member States. The possible outcomes of cooperation in Finland will be observed in the next chapter, as well as in the analysis of the expert interviews.

2.4 Main higher education policy developments in Finland 2000–2010

The Finnish higher education system comprises two parallel sectors, the universities and the polytechnics (also called Universities of Applied Sciences). Both sectors provide bachelors and masters level degrees, but the universities also provide education leading to a doctoral level degree. There are currently 14 universities and 24 polytechnics under the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOE). In order to respond to the EU 2020 goal on tertiary education,[20] the Government's goal is that 42 per cent of all 30–34-year-olds should have completed a higher education qualification by 2020. In 2011, the share of population with a completed tertiary qualification was 43.6 per cent (Ministry of Finance 2013, 44).

Välimaa (2001) notes when describing the main features of the Finnish higher education system, that Finland was the battleground between Swedish and Russian armies for hundreds of years. This has meant that Finland's identity can be described as the "westernmost East European country" and that Finland has been a mediator between the East and West. Socially and geographically, Finland is, however, part of the Nordic countries. One of the key characteristics of the Finnish social basis that

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20. At least 40% of 30–34-year-olds completing tertiary education.

Välimaa notes is that women have been as important as men in social situations, i.e. Finnish women were allowed to enrol in a university by the 1880s. Furthermore, as in the other Nordic countries, "the concept of state refers to a benevolent state which takes care of citizens" (9). Following this idea of the role of a state and given the fact that there is low population density, the private education sector is relatively weak in Finland.

The expansion towards mass higher education began in Finland in the 1950s. Equal opportunities and equal access to higher education was one part of the welfare-state agenda. The expansion of the HE sector was supported by regional policies and universities were established to all major provinces by the 1980s. (Välimaa 2001, 29). According to Kaukonen and Välimaa (2010, 16), Finnish higher education policy has been characterised by two endeavours since 1980: a gradual increase of universities' autonomy and a strengthening of the universities' main functions in relation to the needs of Finnish society and economic life. These developments were executed by reforms to steering and legislation (i.e. Universities Act 1997), and it is argued here that the new University Act (558/2009), compared to previous changes in the legislation, was a continuation of previous evolving and natural process. The massification has also meant that society has become the largest sponsor of higher education and it is its duty to pay attention to the resources spent (Välimaa et al. 1997, 155). Välimaa et al. (1997) also argue that the 1990s was characterised by increasing competition between the HEIs because a new higher education sector, the polytechnics was founded. They note that this kind of new liberalism and the education policy environment can be described as marketization of higher education. It has been characterised by the gradual development of outcome-based steering approach. The Ministry of Education also launched a process for structural development in 1991 in order to increase the efficiency of the Finnish higher education sector (Järvinen, Kivinen, Rinne 1993, 13).

Thus, in the last decade Finnish higher education policy was characterised by two familiar alignments: continuation of structural development of the higher education sector and university reform. Naturally, the Bologna process concurrently affected the degree structure, and there were other legislative changes, but in terms of systemic changes impacting on the steering of the HE system, the two alignments mentioned above were of greatest importance. The impacts of university reform have already been assessed by an expert group (OKM 2012), and as the material on the reform process is extensive, it will suffice to present a brief overview here of the goals and achievements of reform.

Structural development of the higher education system in Finland has been continuous, and has also been ongoing during the decade under observation (OPM 2006a). But a renewed policy for the structural development of the Finnish HEI system was set out in the Development Plan for Education and Research for 2008–2012, which was adopted by the Government on 5 December 2007 (OPM 2007a). It has been argued that the new "structure policy" on universities and the research system as a whole began after 2005 (Kaukonen & Välimaa 2010: 19, 16). The MOE specified goals in a guideline paper (OPM 2008), which also defined a vision of the Finnish HE sector for the year 2020. At that time, there were in total 20 universities and 26 polytechnics, and the vision was that by 2020 there should be a maximum of 15 universities and 18 polytechnics. The policy for structural development emphasised the importance of creating flexible, profiled and strong higher education units and structures, as well as the need for clear priorities in research at universities. It also underlined the need for internationalisation and world-class research. According to MOE, the main objectives of the structural development policy (OPM 2008) were as follows:

- To enhance the HE network in order to create more prominent institutions with higher standards
- To ensure the quality and effectiveness of HEIs' research and teaching
- To allocate resources to top-level research and strategic priority areas
- To strengthen the role of HEIs within the innovation system
- To improve the capacity of HEIs to cooperate with foreign partners and to compete for international research and other funding
- To strengthen the adult education function of HEIs
- To safeguard the availability of a skilled workforce in a changing operating environment
- To improve the position of HEIs in the international education markets
- To diversify the funding base of HEIs
- To improve the attractiveness of HEIs as a competitive employer in order to recruit the best personnel

The guideline paper prepared by the Ministry of Education made reference to the communication of 2006 on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities (COM 2006a), but also to the developments in France, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The paper also referred to the OECD thematic review of Finnish higher

education (OECD 2006). It is apparent that the themes of the guideline paper resample the themes and issues emphasised in the Commission's initiatives on universities.

It is also interesting that discussion of the need for university reform in Finland was concurrent with the discussions on HE systems in the Council of the EU, and in 2005, the MOE invited two experts to make proposals for universities' financial and administrative standing (OPM 2006c). The experts' provisional report made references to both the Commission's communication (COM 2005) and the Council resolution (Council 2005) on "the need to enable higher education to make its full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy" (OPM 2006c, 31–32). The Ministry commissioned several proposals for university mergers (OPM 2006d; OPM 2007c; OPM 2007d), and after reviewing the results of these reports, the Government Program (2007) stated that "University core funding will be increased and a top-level university for research and education will be composed of the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics, and the University of Art and Design Helsinki." Furthermore, it decided on the key actions for legislative reform: "To enhance the financial autonomy of universities, they will be given the status of a legal person in public law or a foundation in private law. The administration and decision-making systems of universities will be revamped at the same time" (Government 2007, 28). It has been argued that this kind of policy formation process (commissioning of proposals > production of reports by experts > inclusion of the proposals in the next government program) is one of the characteristics of Finnish education policy that ensures continuity in the education system, even though political power may change (Kaukonen & Välimaa 2010, 17).

By Finnish standards, there was historically strong resistance to the University Reform (Kaukonen & Välimaa 2010, 18). The Parliament, however, passed the Universities' Bill on 16 June 2009 after some changes to the proposal, and the new law replaced the Universities Act of 1997 on 1 January 2010. The new Universities Act extended the autonomy of universities and gave them an independent legal personality, either as public corporations or as foundations. The reform gave universities more power by reducing the steering of universities by state administration, so that the universities were no longer to be developed as part of the state administration. The universities reformed their management and decision-making systems, and the reform also attempted to consolidate academic decision-making and the position of the university rectors. In addition, the universities were now able to compete for public funding, and to use "the revenue from their business ventures, donations and bequeaths and the return on their capital for financing their operations" (HE 7/2009).

As recommended by the Ministry of Justice (OM 2004), the government proposal for a new University Act included an extensive assessment of legislative developments in other countries' university systems, and it also made reference to the above-mentioned OECD assessment and to the EU initiatives on the modernisation of universities. In fact, government proposals in Finland for new acts must include international comparisons and an explanation of how precedents from abroad have affected the preparation of the proposal. The guidelines from the Ministry of Justice emphasise that, in particular, examples should be given from other Nordic countries and the European Union (OM 2004, 13). Thus, bills always include an international comparison. It follows that Finns preparing the university reforms were very much aware of developments elsewhere,[21] so it would be interesting to know how relevant and how significant the EU discussion on the role of universities really was at this stage. As Kaukonen and Välimaa (2010, 20) also note, these processes are influenced by many factors that may be difficult to forecast.

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21. See also the publications commissioned by the MOE in the preparations for university reform: OPM 2007b and Kohtamäki 2007.

3. THE FRAMEWORK

In order to comprehend the possible EU influence on national policy formation, this chapter reviews previous literature on external effects on national higher education policies and presents the concept of Europeanization of education policies. The second purpose of this chapter is to use the literature review to specify the research problem (in section 3.3). The third purpose of the chapter is to introduce the arguments of policy transfer method as a possible explanatory model that has already been used in previous research on EU influence.

Teichler (2010, 52–53) argues that there are three distinct factors that have influenced both policy-making and trends in higher education: internationalisation, globalisation and Europeanization. Internationalisation of higher education is characterised mainly by increasing physical mobility, research cooperation and knowledge transfer. Globalisation is characterised by market control, transnational study programmes, global competition and more commercialised knowledge transfer. Teichler (2004, 7) also argues that Europeanization of higher education frequently refers to *regional cooperation* and mobility. However, it also covers such issues as integration, convergence of contexts, structures and substance. This research concentrates on the observation of *Europeanization* process of HE policy, and so the literature review does not consider the vast research on internationalisation of higher education as such, but presents the key elements of *supranational influence* on national (higher) education policy formation. Finally, it must be noted that there is an extensive literature on the importance and (non)success of soft law and on the international influence of other supranational processes in policy sectors other than education. That has, however, been excluded from this study.

3.1 Global and international effects

To begin from the broadest context, national education systems are influenced by global and international effects, as noted by Dale (1999), who focuses in particular on external effects on national education systems. One of Dale's main arguments is that the effects of globalisation on public services like education are largely *indirect*, and the means of reacting to external pressure vary across countries. Marginson and van der Wende (2007, 9) have argued that the transmission of (HE) reform templates is global in scale, and these developments have made the different national systems more similar to each other in form and organisational language. They go on to say that higher education reforms are often justified on the grounds that competition, performance funding and transparency make both institutions and systems more prepared for the global challenge. The new public management reforms have also become a means of importing Anglo-American practices into Europe, and the authors argue that policy-makers seem to believe that in order to succeed like American universities, it is necessary to adopt their approach. Since the trend is mainly American, it is readily imported to other national systems and imitated there. The fact is, however, that similar management systems cannot deliver similar outcomes without the same environment and resources as those enjoyed by institutions in the United States.

Ideas for reform are indifferent to geopolitical borders, and policy ideas seem to spread at speed from one country to another. Using the concept of institutional isomorphism, Cai (2010) has observed the mechanisms that facilitate the migration of global reform ideas to Chinese higher education. Cai argues that the Chinese government has been subject to global isomorphic processes, and in particular the reform advice of UNESCO and the World Bank, which have played a vital role in guiding the government's approach to transforming higher education.

Jallade (2011) points out that the agenda of international organisations, notably OECD and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), has for decades included education cooperation. In addition, the EU, Council of Europe and aid agencies such as the World Bank and the European Investment Bank have aimed at fostering education cooperation. Jallade notes six different modes of cooperation that are thought to have influenced national policies and the steering of education systems: promotion of universal, normative values; setting and monitoring common goals for education systems; development of comparable quality standards and performance indicators; enhancement of policy dialogue and dissemination of good practices; financial aid; and promotion of the European

dimension through mobility. Concluding that the influence of these cooperation modes seems to vary a lot – for instance, mobility may have impacted more on HE systems than agreements on certain common policy goals – Jallade asks whether these tools of international organisations are "enough to have a significant impact on national education policies and systems?" (7–24.)

Enders (2004, 365) notes that universities are both objects and subjects of internationalisation: universities need to internationalise themselves internally, but universities and higher education policies also take their place among the issues contested in international organisations and policy spheres. International education and research activities have long been at the heart of universities, but Enders argues that it is now possible to see more substantial changes towards systematic national or supra-national policies, combined with a growing awareness of issues of international co-operation and competition in a globalising higher education market (363).

Ursin, Aittola and Välimaa (2010) reported some interesting results in an interview study on understandings of university mergers in Finland, in which interviewees considered that global development, and in particular the creation of the European Higher Education Area, have informed national structural development of the HE system. The interviewees believed that internationalisation, and results or comparisons deriving from international cooperation, have challenged a country as small as Finland and that political choices needed to be made in order to respond to this external pressure. (53–54.)

It has, however, been argued that most of the influence on the development of national education systems comes from the OECD (see for instance Kallo 2009; Coate & McLabhrainn 2009). Kallo argues that OECD pressure can be linked directly to impacts on national higher education policy in Finland. Rinne (2007) and Niukko (2006) have also reported that Finland has eagerly followed the recommendations of the OECD, even indicating an active desire for assistance (in Grek et al. 2009). As is the case with other intergovernmental organisations, the influence of the OECD in higher education policy is twofold. Although it has no tools for enforcement over its member states and its aims in education policy are weakly formulated, the OECD has nevertheless gained international authority in education policy and has managed to influence opinion formation and to put pressure on domestic actors. According to Martens and Wolf (2009, 93), the OECD studies serve as a reference point, demonstrating strengths and weaknesses of education systems and raising questions of best practice.

Dale (1999, 13) describes how the OECD does dissemination (see also later in section 3.4.) through "an agenda setting strategy", meaning that most of its documents aim to indicate to participating countries future directions in certain policy fields. This gives the OECD a "catalytic role", identifying new policy issues emerging on the horizon that may call for national attention. The OECD combines these issues within a structured framework and sets a number of questions for national policy-makers. These statements of key issues and questions are a major input in reconsidering the current state of policy.

On a voluntary basis, the OECD grounds this catalytic role in careful analysis of policies in participating states, and on their systems' performance (Papadopoulos 2011, 85). The organisation can also be seen as an agenda-setter, especially when conducting peer-reviews (Kallo 2009, 78). Comparative evaluations require indicators, and by accepting the measurement, states agree on a shared set of evaluative concepts (Martens and Wolf 2009, 96–97). The International Indicators of Education Systems (INES) are the best-known programme contributing to the Education at a Glance reports. Martens and Wolf (2009) argue that this cooperation has not been a completely voluntary process on the part of the OECD member states, claiming that in fact states did not anticipate how the indicators programme would develop or what the OECD would make of it. No state could withdraw from the process without losing face. It is even argued that states (the US and France in the first instance) approached the OECD in order to gain leverage for domestic reforms and comparative data for policy-makers, and in turn, they got international supervision.

3.2 Observations on the Europeanization of education policies

Europeanization is a top-down perspective in the EU literature, verifying the process of structural change caused by EU integration and focusing mainly on the effects of European policies nationally. Europeanization is defined as follows:

> In a maximalist sense, the structural change that it entails must fundamentally be of a phenomenon exhibiting similar attributes to those that predominate in, or are closely identified with, 'Europe'. Minimally, 'Europeanization' involves a response to the policies of the European Union (EU) (Featherstone and Radaelli 2003, 3).

The Europeanization literature is often connected to empirical concerns about measurement and causality, focusing on legally binding instruments and implementation (Exadaktylos & Radaelli 2009, 508).[1] These studies concern cases where compliance with EU law is obligatory and implementation is coercive. This is not the case with EU higher education policy, however. As explained previously in respect of EU HE policy cooperation, EU policy may only be complementary to national higher education policies without being harmonising or coercive in any sense. Therefore, the Europeanization perspective in this research refers to the Europeanizing of higher education as a counterpart to regionalisation, but with a political flavour. The Europeanization of HE is coordinated by two European processes: the Bologna process and EU HE policy. Europeanization in higher education has been described as growing regional co-operation and even integration on equal terms, involving mutual co-operation and horizontal interaction between governments, sectors and higher education institutions. (Enders 2004, 368).[2]

A number of studies have focused on the responses of countries to Europeanization of education policies by different transnational actors (see Lawn and Lingard 2002; Lawn 2003; Grek and Lawn 2009; Grek et al. 2009.), arguing that a new European educational policy space has emerged that is characterised by a constant process of translation and mediation of policy discourses, especially within the EU and the OECD. The European space in education is steered by use of indicators and benchmarks (ET2010) that do not, however, have a fixed identity (Grek & Lawn 2009); their comparative data from various European countries, including Finland, is based on interviews with policy actors who are defined as "policy brokers", interacting between national and European policy areas and translating the policies to national contexts. Rinne and Simola contributed to the research project and produced examples from Finnish responses to global and European pressure in education policies. They argue that Finland seems to be more bound to the OECD exercises than other countries in the study (Grek et al. 2009). Dale (2006, 47) distinguishes the EU process from the OECD cooperation by arguing that in the case of the OECD, individual states are seen as the dominant and independent partners. The EU on the other hand aims

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1. See also an example of a study on Europeanization and the impact of EU directives in Hämäläin-en 2008.
2. Radaelli makes the distinction between vertical and horizontal Europeanization: with vertical mechanisms, the EU level defines the policy, the domestic level metabolizes it and there is clear adaptation pressure, whereas horizontal mechanisms perceive Europeanization as a non-binding process. In Featherstone and Radaelli 2003, 41.

at collective achievement of a common project, where both the purpose and the process are shared.

Enders et al. (2011) focus on internal and external pressures to reform and change European higher education and research. They address contemporary higher education policy issues, including European reform initiatives such as the Lisbon and Bologna processes, the Erasmus programme and EU higher education policy. Recognising that policy success requires an understanding of complex policy processes, they note that a better understanding of the implementation and effects of policies is needed before higher education policies can be modified. In line with this argument, one should consider both the policy as made at European level and its effects at the level of Member States. The following sections introduce ideas of the European influence on HE, as observed from the perspectives of Bologna process, EU funding and EU cooperation.

3.2.1 Intergovernmental influence

There is a significant literature on European cooperation in the field of higher education policy. Most of the research on the Europeanization of higher education concentrates on the effects, impacts and implementation of non-EU cooperation – that is, the Bologna process, which has clearly been the most influential international cooperation process in education policy (Muller & Ravinet 2008; Witte 2006; Heinze & Knill 2008; Neave 2009; Ravinet 2009; Amaral 2009; Higher Education Policy 2010). The EU level discussion and the Bologna process are often dealt with and discussed as imbricated processes (see e.g. Huisman & Wende 2004; Keeling 2006; Papadakis & Tsakanika 2006; Walter 2007; Dale 2008; Veiga & Amaral 2009; Garben 2011), which is sometimes confusing due to the differing contexts, but understandable to the extent that they share certain similarities. Both EU HE policy discussion and the Bologna process have been part of the discussion about the reconstruction of higher education institutions and their functions Europe-wide.

Shortly, the Bologna process is an intergovernmental, voluntary and ongoing process that started in 1998 when the education ministers of Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom signed the Sorbonne Declaration concerning the harmonisation of European higher education degree systems. In the following year, the Bologna Declaration was signed by the education ministers of 29 European countries in Bologna with the declared aim of creating barrier-free and harmonised European

higher education area by 2010. Today, the process includes 47 countries and the entire European continent, with a new declaration by the ministers concerned every two years. The declarations are not binding and so have no legal consequences. In reality, however (as noted above), the effects of these declarations have been far-reaching. The ultimate goal of the Bologna Declaration was to create a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010, aimed at improving the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education in a global context. Six criteria were identified for the success of EHEA: comparable degrees, uniform degree structures, establishment of a system of credits, increased mobility, promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance and promotion of the European dimension in higher education. Follow-up of these objectives was founded on the two-year cycle and ministerial meetings, as well as on the Bologna follow-up group, in which all the participating bodies (governments, higher education institutions represented by rectors, teachers, students and various associations) are involved (Bologna 2012).

The objectives of the Bologna process are clear – the introduction of common degree schemes, a transferable credit system, quality assurance, and mobility of students and teachers – but achievement of these ends has not always been easy. The reconciliation of various actors' interests, national agendas, European incentives and mutual adaptation pressures has been required to push the Member States of the Bologna process to move deliberately towards convergence (Walkenhorst 2008, 579). The Bologna process has integrated the European higher education sector through a common degree structure, a common credit transfer system (ECTS) and a quality assessment approach with comparable criteria and methods. It has led to structural convergence of national higher education systems and even to harmonisation of the higher education degree structure, and its influence in Europe has been impressive. For some participating countries, such as Germany and Italy, this has meant the most fundamental reform process for decades (Martens & Wolf 2009, 87). Maassen and Musselin (2009, 6) argue that when the EU Member states signed the Bologna Declaration, they gave up their opposition to the principle of harmonisation, at least in an intergovernmental setting. The process itself and the debate around it, however, include some controversial elements. Martens and Wolf (2009, 103–104) argue that the Bologna process has faced problems of conflicting aims (harmonisation vs. diversity) and claims of hidden agendas such as the introduction of tuition fees.

It has also been argued by several scholars who have studied the national pre-Bologna contexts that the Ministers signing the Bologna Declaration also saw Bologna as an opportunity to use an intergovernmental agreement to impose reforms in their

own countries. In some cases, they are also seen to have used the threat of decline vis-à-vis other European partners to gain influence in issues that had previously been difficult to tackle (Martens and Wolf 2009, 81–109; Ravinet 2009; Neave 2009, 50), such as study duration in Germany and Italy (Witte 2006) and binary systems in France, or the relatively recent expansion of HE in the UK. Most countries were also interested in attracting students from abroad[3]. French politicians even deliberately linked domestic reform to European cooperation because they felt that reform could succeed only if it were possible "to blame it on Europe" (Martens and Wolf 2009, 88). Neave quotes Clausewitz's famous dictum about war and politics, arguing that Bologna can be perceived as "a pursuit of national politics by other means" (Neave 2009, 51), echoing Moravcsik's ideas of a liberal intergovernmental approach.[4] National governments enter the intergovernmental arena not only to join common problem-solving but also to gain influence at the domestic level. Intergovernmental governance can be perceived as an instrument used by national executives to withdraw control from national decision-makers and to manipulate the domestic context (Martens & Wolf 2009, 83).

Maassen and Musselin (2009) argue that the Bologna process is unique in at least three ways. It was initiated by nation states, not by the European Commission, and in fact excluded the Commission at the outset. As Muller and Ravinet (2008) have found, the countries preparing the declaration were rather sceptical about EU involvement at that time, and a French minister even declared that the Commission's fuel is not needed for the construction of the universities of Europe: "N'ont pas besoin des « usines à gaz de la Commission » pour construire l'Europe des universités" (Claude Allègre 1998).[5] The Commission became a full member of the Bologna process later, when the basic policy goals were already fixed and some instrumental and resource-linked aid from the Commission was needed. Second, the Bologna process has not remained inside EU borders but has rather become an overarching process on the European continent. It has been argued that this was a deliberate move to guard against the Commission's leverage (Martens & Wolf 2009, 89). Third, the Bologna process aims at transforming the production and products of higher education rather than the systems (Maassen & Musselin 2009, 7). As in an intergovernmental process, the

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3. Ravinet 2009: "Sur certains points, les problématiques sont donc nationales : le dualism univer-sités/grandes écoles est ainsi un problème français, tandis que l'objectif d'ouvrir l'accès à l'ensei-gnement supérieur est lié à la massification tardive au Royaume-Uni. (…) L'enjeu de la durée des études est une préoccupation majeure en Allemagne et en Italie"
4. "The unique institutional structure of the EC is acceptable to national governments only insofar as it strengthens, rather than weakens, their control over domestic affairs." Moravcsik 1993, 507.
5. Muller & Ravinet 2008, 656. Translated in the text above.

participating states did not need to avoid the sensitive issues faced constantly by the Commission. However, Martens and Wolf (2009, 88–89) argue that the controlled inclusion of the Commission permitted national governments to institutionalise and apply more external pressure domestically. It provided a strong political argument that was used by all governments. On the other hand, Muller and Ravinet (2008, 658) note that, since the Commission funded the Bologna follow-up process, it in fact played a quite controversial role in the process from the beginning.

Neave (2009, 21) divides the Bologna impact studies in two categories: those that examine the impact of Bologna on higher education systems and those others that focus on the institutional level, assessing Bologna as an instrument rather than as a process. A good example of Bologna impact evaluation at a *system level* is a report by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council on the Bologna process implementation (KKA 2012). Similar assessments have been done elsewhere, as well as by the European Commission (see for instance Dobbins and Knill 2009; Faber & Westerheijden 2011, Eurydice 2010). It is worth mentioning separately that an Armenian case study utilises the *policy transfer concept* (see more in 3.4) in analysing the diffusion of Bologna principles into the Armenian higher education system. The study analyses both the Bologna implementation in Armenian higher education policy documents and university teachers' perceptions of the reform process (Karakhanyan, van Veen & Bergen 2011). Amaral and others (2009) discuss in some detail the role of the Bologna process in European integration relating to higher education policies.

3.2.2 Financial influence

Researchers have also paid attention to the influence of the EU through education cooperation programmes, especially through the Erasmus programme, which has been one of the Union's most successful financial instruments (see for instance Dahl 2003; Ertl 2003; Ertl & Phillips 2006; Keeling 2006; Beerkens 2008; Sigalas 2010; Batory & Lindstrom 2011; Beerkens & Vossensteyn 2011; Van Vught 2011). The effects of EU programmes have naturally also been monitored and carefully studied by the Member States (see for instance OPM 2006b) and assessed by the Commission (COM 2011b, SEC 2011b), especially to provide grounds for continuing the action during the subsequent financial framework.

Beerkens & Vossensteyn (2011) assess the effects of the Erasmus Programme on European higher education and conclude that the funding programme has had a

significant effect, especially in supporting the Bologna process and the work towards the European Qualifications Framework. At national level, it is difficult to estimate the influence of EU education programmes; attempts have been made to map these effects, but policy documents and interviews do not specify which particular national policies may have a connection to Erasmus. The Erasmus programme has, however, assisted the European Commission in generating initiatives related to various higher education themes such as quality assurance and has therefore had an influence at the supranational level. Higher education cooperation within Erasmus has been expanding constantly, and new methods have been developed for supporting higher education change in Europe (Beerkens & Vossensteyn 2011, 46–62). In fact, the new Erasmus + (and the previous Lifelong Learning programme, LLL) is likely to have a significant impact in supporting policy cooperation and reforms in higher education as it is the main sponsor of the Open Method of Coordination and the Bologna process. It finances both the organisation of the Bologna Follow-Up Group at the European level and the cooperation of national experts at the national level (Erasmus 2013, article 6). EU (structural) funds can also to a certain extent be used for assessment of HE education systems. It is noteworthy that the latest higher education initiatives funded from Erasmus, namely the U-map and U-multirank (2013) and the Student Loan Guarantee Facility,[6] have raised a lot of discussion about the extent to which the Commission can finance such innovative instruments. It is still too early to estimate the impact of these initiatives on higher education policies, but they are the Erasmus initiatives most likely to have systemic impacts on national higher education.

Ertl and Phillips (2006) argue that EU education programmes have caused actors in the Member States to react in similar ways when faced with new problems, especially because of the mutual learning activities and "best practice" models financed by the programmes. They call this symptom a "standardizing effect" of Socrates and Leonardo. Ertl and Phillips argue that this standardizing effect follows from the creation of central agencies for programme implementation in Member States. This is quite an interesting claim, given that the programme agencies do not usually contribute to national education policy preparations or to the OMC participation of Ministries of Education. According to previous research, however, it seems clear that the EU's financial power as exercised through education programmes has had an impact at

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6. COM 2011a, 8. The Student Loan Guarantee Facility is a scheme intended to increase degree mobility in Europe. According to the Commission, insufficient funding "is particularly acute for students wishing to complete a full Masters degree programme in another Member State where tuition fees are likely to be high."

both European and Member States levels – not only on mobility flows but also on education policy processes, and on education in general.

3.2.3 EU's influence methods

Within EU studies and higher education policy studies, the effects of EU cooperation and policies on national higher education have attracted less attention than the impacts of Bologna or Erasmus. In fact, the research on EU cooperation often concentrates largely on the Commission's increasing role in higher education policy and on policy development at the EU level (see for instance van der Wende & Huisman 2003; Corbett 2005; Keeling 2006; Olsen & Maassen 2007; Beerkens 2008; Amaral et al. 2009; Gornitzka 2009; Maassen 2009; Maassen & Musselin 2009; Jones 2010; Maassen & Stensaker 2011; Lange & Alexiadou 2010; Elken and Stensaker 2011; van Vught 2011; Erkkilä 2014). For instance, Amaral et al. (2009) evaluate the governance model developed by the European Commission in the area of higher education. Gornitzka (2009) has evaluated the effects of increasing cooperation on education at the European level in terms of different kind of networks, arguing that the administrative capacity of the Commission in education has emerged since the late 1990s. Beerkens (2008) even claims that the Commission has "Lisbonised higher education", meaning that it has deliberately linked problems together for increasing new political possibilities (also called cultivated spillover). In this way, the Commission has created a discourse where "the connection between education on the one hand and economic competiveness and sustainable social advancement on the other, is used to pursue the Lisbon Strategy, and through this, a European reform in higher education" (422).

When observing the influence on a Member State level, Phillips and Ertl's (2003) work on the implementation of European Union education policy in four Member States is interesting. It studies, however, the impact of EU cooperation in education before the Lisbon process and the launch of the EU's Education and Training 2010 programme. On the other hand, Dahl (2003) reflects on the impact EU cooperation has had in Sweden in recent decades, noting some signs of the EU's practical influence at the turn of the century on Swedish education at curriculum level, but also remarking on an apparent conflict between the EU's function as a peace project and as a promoter of the acquisition of knowledge (201–211). A joint project by the Universities of Turku and Tallinn evaluated the long-term effects of EU initiatives on education

in Finland and Estonia. Their particular focus was secondary adult education and recognition of diplomas, and on the basis of a comparison between EU documents and national documents, they conclude that policy argumentation, especially in Finland, leans heavily on EU education policy (Rinne et al. 2008). According to a Greek study, both the EU and the OECD have been cited in educational discourse in Greece to legitimate the core role of education in future economic prosperity (Lawn & Lingard 2002, 299). Focusing on Lithuanian and Slovakian responses to supranational trends, Kralikova (2011) asked interviewees how the higher education governance model promoted by the European Commission and other international agencies was received in these countries. In her preliminary results, it was argued that actors in these countries were not inspired by EU level policies as much as by the policies of other countries.

When looking at EU policy influence, Capano and Piattoni's (2011) research is of particular interest. They use the EU's Lisbon Strategy as a framework for observing changes in higher education systems, and they argue that the Bologna process aimed merely at achieving convergence of HE systems from a staff and student point of view, whereas Lisbon promoted the convergence of both quality assurance and HE systems. Their empirical findings, however, prove that changes in HE systems had already started before the Lisbon Agenda, making it difficult to evaluate the real impact of Lisbon at national level. According to the authors, it seems clear that the Lisbon script had, to some extent, both an ideational and an organisational influence, but its implementation as a policy remains unclear. Coate and McLabhrainn (2009), on the other hand, argue that the OECD review of the knowledge society and the Lisbon Strategy were the two most influential documents in Irish higher education in last decade. Van Vught (2011, 65) identifies the beginning of the Lisbon process in 2000 as the most crucial phase of European integration in higher education and research because of its emphasis on the importance of the knowledge-based society. In fact, there seems to be a general consensus that the Lisbon Strategy was a significant turning point in European cooperation on higher education (see for instance Ertl 2006; Blomqvist 2007; Rinne et al. 2008; Walkenhorst 2008; Coate & McLabhrainn 2009; Veiga & Amaral 2009; Pépin 2011; Van Vught 2011; Capano and Piattoni 2011). The Bologna process and the Lisbon agenda have been integrated to some extent in the Education and Training 2010 policy framework and documents. In higher education, Veiga and Amaral (2009) argue that cooperation has been facilitated by the use of distinct but similar instruments. As a result, according to Maassen and Musselin (2009, 9), European integration of higher education policies has succeeded by

means of both a supranational process (the Lisbon process) and an intergovernmental agreement (the Bologna process). Apparently, the Lisbon Strategy's impact requires a close look also in this research.

On the different EU cooperation methods, Grek and Lawn (2009) provide a useful description of the development of the Education and Training 2010 programme and the improvement of common EU indicators measuring the achievements of Member States in education. They note, however, that there are still open questions for further research. For instance, what is the significance of national policies when a transnational policy emerges with its own policies, agencies, and indicators? And what is meant by convergence of educational systems in Europe?

The literature on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) as a tool for Education and Training 2010 programme (ET2010) is extensive (e.g. Alexiadou 2007; Blomqvist 2007; Lange and Alexiadou 2007; Drachenberg 2009; Lajh & Stremfel 2011). According to Lajh and Stremfel (2011, 513), the adoption of the OMC in education policy cooperation was based on a belief that the exchange of ideas and creation of mutual understanding would produce policy change at the domestic level. The OMC was approved by Member States because it enabled improved cooperation in education and training without the transfer of competences. The Commission saw that EU level discussion would generate useful pressure for domestic discussion.[7] According Warleigh-Lack and Drachenberg (2011), this was an obvious EU tactic and an example of neofunctionalist spillover. Alexiadou (2007, 104–106) characterises the OMC in education as a form of soft law that is persuasive but not legally binding. The OMC is also a reflexive tool of governance, drawing on peer review and policy learning as Member States are urged to learn from each other. Blomqvist (2007) has described thoroughly the change caused by the OMC in EU cooperation in education policy.

The use of benchmarks and indicators measuring performance has been part of policy-making in many Member States but also in other international organisations such as the OECD. Stremfel and Lajh (2010) make the interesting point that, unlike the OECD PISA results, national achievements within the Education and Training 2010 programme have not usually drawn any substantial media attention, and the process of "naming and shaming" seems only to work at the level of EU meetings (80). Štremfel and Lajh's (2010, 2011) research questions are also relevant, investigating how the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia have adopted EU goals (benchmarks) in education, utilising the OMC, and how these countries have changed their own policies in line with EU policy. Štremfel and Lajh focus on the implementation of

7. Director David Coyne (DG EAC) and Director General Nikolaus van der Pas (DG EAC) in Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg 2011, 1004–1005.

OMC, but since this is an informal learning process, and there are no obligations on Member States to comply with EU targets, there are no sanctions if they fail to comply. The authors reach the interesting conclusion that the extent of participation in implementation of EU goals in national systems depends primarily on the extent of individual initiative of the respective ministerial body (Štremfel & Lajh 2010, 73). They also argue that it is hard to distinguish the influences and impact of EU policies from the influences of other international organisations such as OECD, UNESCO and the Council of Europe (76). In the case of Slovenia, they conclude that Slovenian discourse on education policy resembles the discourse at EU level. A good example of this is the adoption of a lifelong learning policy in Slovenia, but still it is difficult to trace the influence the EU/OMC may have had on Slovenian legislation (520–521.)

Another research project pays also particular attention to the attempts of the Union to direct Member States' policies in education through the Open Method of Coordination. Lange and Alexiadou (2010) focus on the Commission's OMC efforts and Member States' responses to OMC in the field of education. Interestingly, they identify four distinct policy-learning styles that occur in the OMC framework: mutual, competitive, imperialistic and surface policy learning. However, in their study of the UK response to the OMC, the authors became sceptical about the real influence exerted by the EU on national education. The UK response to OMC initiatives has been vague and minimal resources have been dedicated to EU coordination and policy formation (Alexiadou 2007; Alexiadou & Lange 2011.)

Concerns have also been expressed about the effectiveness and utility of the OMC as a policy development tool. One weak point of the OMC seems to be its democratic deficit: it is not transparent, and "it does not include as broad a range of actors as it should" (Lajh & Štremfel 2011, 524). Rather than strengthening the participation of all stakeholders in policy-making, it appears primarily to address national administrators (Veiga & Amaral 2009, 138). Warleigh-Lack and Drachenberg (2011, 1006) stress that as the OMC is a voluntary process, good cooperation between the European and national levels is even more important for the implementation of policies. They also point out that the participation of local and regional governments, as well as social partners and civil society, varies across countries. It seems that, to date, the focus of participation has been on elite level actors with recognised expertise, and national governments have usually selected the participants themselves. Štremfel and Lajh (2010, 73) have also noted that participation in the implementation of EU goals in education national systems depends primarily on the extent of individual initiatives at the ministries. It has also been pointed out that, since the OMC depends on soft

law and cooperation at the EU level, national parliaments are also excluded from the process (Lajh & Stremfel 2011, 517). Taken together, these findings suggest that the OMC seems weak in its connection to national policy formation.

3.3 Development of the research problem

The examples of previous literature on external influences on national higher education policy are classified in Table 2, followed by a discussion of how this informs the research objective.

Table 2. Previous research on the external influence on national HE policy.

Objective of the research	Examples of authors in alphabetical order
Global and international effects on national (higher) education policy	Dale 1999, Cai 2010, Coate & McLabhrainn 2009, Enders 2004, Jallade 2011, Kallo 2011, Marginson & van der Wende 2007, Teichler 2004 and 2010.
Europeanization of (higher) education	Dale 2008, Enders et al. 2011, Grek & Lawn 2009, Grek et al. 2009, Lawn & Lingard 2002, Lawn 2003, Muller & Ravinet 2008, van der Wende 2009.
Intergovernmental influence (Bologna)	Amaral et al. 2009, Dobbins & Knill 2009, Faber & Westerheijden 2011, Eurydice 2010, Karakhanyan et al. 2011, Martens & Wolf 2009, Maassen & Musselin 2009, Neave 2009, Ravinet 2009, Veiga & Amaral 2009, Witte 2006.
Financial influence of the EU through Socrates and Erasmus	Batory & Lindstrom 2011, Beerkens 2008, Beerkens & Vossensteyn 2011, Dahl 2003, Ertl 2003, Ertl & Phillips 2006, Keeling 2006, Sigalas 2010, Van Vught 2011
Effects of the Lisbon and OMC processes on EU education policy	Capano and Piattoni 2011, Blomqvist 2007, Coate & McLabhrainn 2009, Ertl 2006, Pépin 2011, Rinne et al. 2008, Van Vught 2011, Veiga & Amaral 2009, Walkenhorst 2008.
Significance of EU (higher) education policy cooperation in Member States	Alexiadou 2007, Alexiadou & Lange 2011, Grek et al. 2009, Dahl 2003, Phillips & Ertl 2003, Rinne et al. 2008.

It would appear that globalisation and international *cooperation* may have some influence on national policy-making. It has been indicated in previous research that international cooperation may lead to changes in national policies. Second, when considering the literature on the Europeanization of HE policies, it can be concluded that there is quite a substantial literature on the significance and effects of the intergovernmental Bologna process.

The previous research on EU effects further suggests that the Lisbon Strategy was a turning point for higher education cooperation in the EU, but the influence of EU initiatives at national level is difficult to identify. Maassen and Musselin (2009, 10) argued that merits of the recent approach in higher education policy-making within the Lisbon process were not yet evident, from either a theoretical or an empirical perspective. Furthermore, most of the available research focuses on the Commission's role. There is also plenty of evidence that the OMC has changed policy-cooperation in education (see Blomqvist 2007; Trubek & Trubek 2005; Maassen & Musselin 2009; Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg 2011), but its impacts on national policy formation have not been extensively studied. Lajh and Stremfel (2011, 508) insist that it is too early to estimate the effects of the OMC, primarily because of a lack of qualitative empirical analysis of the OMC's influence on national beliefs, decisions and policies. There is therefore a need to collect this kind of qualitative interview material from Member States, especially from those who have been involved in the process. The earlier research data, mainly documents, was also collected when the Lisbon Strategy was still ongoing and before the OMC's influence could really become apparent. Policy cycles are long: in Finland, each government term usually lasts for four years, which means that the policy process prior to the decision-making phase can take years, and even several governments.

It appears that there is still a need for research on the significance of EU cooperation and soft law in higher education policy, especially from the viewpoint of Member States. The present study uses expert interviews to ask what might explain the success or failure of EU cooperation in higher education, and to establish what is significant in EU cooperation. The role of the discussion among Member States in the Council and the significance of the Council's decisions remain largely undiscovered. With earlier research frameworks, the impacts of EU higher education policy cooperation have proved difficult to estimate. European cooperation will gradually spillover or spill around into new policy areas. The impact studies help to develop policy processes and policy formulation as well as the policies themselves. The perceived experience of forms of cooperation is tested by the education sector, and the results could be used in other policy fields where soft law is pertinent. Whether the research results provide a rationale for improving EU policies or the use of those policies nationally remains to be decided by the higher education experts and decision-makers themselves.

According to Metsämuuronen (2006, 38–41), it is justifiable to study the connection between two relevant variables with some knowledge of both of them separately. In such cases, a research question may take a form of "What kind of

connection exists between…?" There is existing research on the development of EU level cooperation and the development of Finnish HE policy over the last decade, but relatively little research on the significance of EU HE policy cooperation in Member States. The research problem, then, is the connection between EU and national level discussions on HE policy. The aim is to discover what kind of cooperation is significant from national actors' viewpoints, and how ideas for policies are successfully transferred in EU HE cooperation. The focus here is on different forms of cooperation more than on the relevance of policy substance (see also 2.3.7).

3.4 Policy learning and policy transfer

As described above, there is some evidence that the EU education policy discourse has been transferred to Member States, and so it seems relevant to look more closely at the discussion around policy learning and policy transfer. Lange's and Alexiadou's (2010) research differentiates various policy learning styles in the education OMC by categorising different types of interactions between the same range of public policy actors (Member States themselves, and Member States and the Commission). The concept of mutual learning holds that qualitative knowledge about different practices is as important as quantitative information. Participation in mutual learning is voluntary, and the Member States have positive incentives to participate (in clusters and peer learning activities) when the knowledge from these events may help them to solve problems of national policy.

According to Lange and Alexiadou, the concept of competitive policy learning focuses more on the quantitative side of cooperation within the education OMC framework. Various EU institutions (Eurostat, Cedefop and the European Training Foundation) develop statistical analyses of education practices in the EU. Competitive learning starts from specific assumptions, indicators or benchmarks, and discussions are limited to the selected problems. While mutual learning aims at deep learning of traditions and politics, the goal of competitive learning is rather to open up international *comparisons*. Competitive learning depends on the pressure created on Member States. Because States are motivated to preserve their good reputation, pressure becomes effective in combination with media attention. Since statistics are created mainly by formal institutions, competitive learning is less a bottom-up process than mutual learning (452–454). Lawn and Lingard's (2002, 300) earlier study also

stresses the importance of statistical production – previously done mainly by the OECD but latterly by the EU as well – and the statistical comparison that is central to harmonisation. Erkkilä, on the other hand, argues that the European Commission has increased its role in higher education policy by using global university rankings. These rankings have created "a political imaginary competition, where European universities must be reformed if they are to be successful" (Erkkilä 2014, 92).

The concept of imperialistic policy learning refers to some countries' attempts to export their national education policies to others, and to the Commission's policy agenda (Lange & Alexiadou 2010, 452–454). There is some evidence that this has been one of the goals of UK higher education policy (Alexiadou & Lange 2011). Surface policy learning, on the other hand, refers to a more passive or negative response by a Member State, which is an attempt to minimise the influence of the Commission or other Member States. Learning, for the most part, entails only observation of possible infringements of national sovereignty that should be reported back to national administrations. Another manifestation of surface policy learning, according to Lange and Alexiadou (2010, 455–456), is the national progress reporting for ET 2010/2020 that sometimes only describes Member States' own national education policies, even with regard to benchmarks that differ in scope or timeline from those mutually agreed at EU level.

As members of international structures or regimes, national governments may have to adopt policies as part of their obligations. The question here is whether policy transfer within the EU can be interpreted as coercive, given that individual nations have in principle joined the EU voluntarily. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, 14–15) point out that in fact each Member State does have an influence on the adoption of EU policies, and so they actively and voluntarily shape Union politics. It is therefore possible to argue that policy transfer in the EU is both obligated and negotiated.

Contemporary policies are increasingly affected by policy transfer, especially in the European context, because of the operation of the OMC in many policy fields. As part of globalisation and Europeanization, politicians and civil servants become acquainted with each other, and at the same time, international organisations and policy entrepreneurs "sell" policies around the world. Teichler wisely reminds us, however, that although the increase of knowledge transfer across nations has typically been seen as a phenomenon of globalisation, one must keep in mind that governments are highly active in shaping the rules of knowledge transfer, doing so in order to maximise their national gains. (Teichler 2004, 13.) The penultimate section of this chapter examines the concept of policy transfer in greater depth.

3.4.1 Policy transfer explaining lesson drawing

Radaelli (2000) and Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) define policy transfer as a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting or system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting or system. Dale (1999) identifies a total of eight mechanisms under policy transfer: borrowing, learning, teaching, harmonisation, dissemination, standardisation, installing interdependence and imposition. Policy transfer is the comprehensive term for all these mechanisms, covering both voluntary and coercive transfer in different circumstances and by various actors.

The concepts of policy transfer and policy diffusion are both founded on the notion that the ideas of other countries or systems may be worth testing elsewhere. These policies may either spread or be transferred into new environments. The difference between policy transfer and policy diffusion is that diffusion studies tend not to reveal anything about the content of new policies, focusing more on process than substance (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 345).

In the globalised world of the twenty-first century, policy transfer is a policy formation tool that has gradually increased in use between nations.[8] Public policy is something that is both global and national, and policy-makers study other political systems for new ideas about policies, programmes, institutions and jurisdictions, and look to apply the policy to their own context. The policy transfer concept can be used either as an independent variable—to explain why a particular policy was adopted—or as a dependent variable to explain why transfer occurs (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 354).

The following questions can usefully be asked about policy transfer. Why engage in policy transfer? Who transfers policy? What is transferred? From where and why? How is the transfer composed and what are the different degrees of transfer? How is the process related to policy success or policy failure? (See Radaelli 2000; Dolowitz & Marsh 2000). It has been shown that at least six main categories of actors are involved in policy transfer: elected officials, political parties, civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs/experts and supranational institutions (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 345).

Policy transfer may be either voluntary or coercive, and includes objects such as policy goals, structure and content, instruments and techniques, institutions, ideology, attitudes and concepts as well as negative lessons (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 350).

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8. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) mention three reasons for increasing policy transfer: global economic pressure, rapid growth of communications and the influence of international organisations.

Voluntary transfer is usually based on a perceived dissatisfaction with the current state or even on observed policy failure. Uncertainty about the reasons behind problems or the effects of previous decisions may prompt actors to search for policies they might borrow. As Haas has put it (according to Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, 347): "International collaboration…is an attempt to reduce uncertainty".

Coercive transfer can take place either directly or indirectly. *Direct coercive transfer* occurs when transfer is required by an external actor. That obligation is, however, rarely imposed by another state; international institutions are typical players in direct coercive actions, and EU legislation is a good example of this kind of measure. *Indirect coercive methods* derive from a variety of situations that include technological development, economic pressures and international consensus. Fears of being left behind on an important public issue may also generate attention and lead to policy transfer: "A country can indirectly be pushed towards policy transfer if political actors perceive their country falling behind its neighbours or competitors" (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 347–349). This can be driven by international comparisons, which are made against the current best. The flow of national data internationally has increased, and comparison is now everyday business, usually conducted between countries. It has been argued that comparison is a highly visible tool for governing at all levels: at organisational level for management purposes and at state level for governing and for measuring performance (e.g. PISA) (Grek et al. 2009, 10).

Another question concerns why countries engage in policy transfer. Both supporters and opponents of various policies use reasoning as needed to win support for their ideas. It has been noted that policy lessons from abroad can also be used as *neutral truths*, but equally, these truths can also be used as political weapons (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 346). Dale observes that *policy borrowing* in particular is often related to policy legitimation and political usefulness since borrowing is voluntary and conducted between more or less compatible systems: "We don't usually borrow something we don't know we have a use, even a need for…" (Dale 1999, 9).

The factors that may constrain policy transfer are multiple. The viability of the transferred subject will be judged at a national level according to existing norms and expectations. (ibid.) The more complex the policy or programme, the harder it is to transfer, and differences or similarities between host and target countries or systems also matter. But the simpler the expected outcomes are to predict, the easier the transfer becomes. Bureaucratic size and efficiency may also influence transfer, as well as economic resources, since implementation often requires financial measures (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 354).

Policy learning can be understood as one of the tools of policy transfer,[9] entailing learning about organisations, about programmes or about policies. Definition of the term is quite wide and may mean that some form of learning is likely be present in any mechanism of policy transfer. According to Dale (1999, 10–11), normal policy-making is associated with learning about instruments, while learning about policy goals arise in relation to reforms or shifts in policy paradigms.

Policy transfer through *harmonisation* is commonplace in some areas of European integration. The harmonisation mechanism works through collective agreement, where all Member States pool some of their sovereignty for the benefit of the EU. *Dissemination* differs from harmonisation in its dimension and extent: the OECD is a good example of an international actor that disseminates ideas to participant countries without any competency to harmonise policies. *Installing interdependence* is a policy transfer mechanism that usually concerns issues that go beyond the scope of any nation state (peace, environment or human rights). It is focused purely on policy goals and usually works "bottom-up", including the whole of civil society. Finally, *imposition* is coercive and the only mechanism that does not need learning, persuasion or cooperation (Dale 1999, 9-15).

Bulmer and Padgett (2004) use another typology to define different types of policy transfer. *Emulation* or copying is the strongest form of transfer, involving the borrowing of a policy model in it entirety from another jurisdiction. *Synthesis*, on another hand, includes elements of a policy from several sources. *Influence* is a weak form of transfer, which only inspires a new policy. Finally, an *abortive* measure occurs when transfer is hindered by the borrower (106).

In order to understand policy transfer, it is necessary to recognise several other factors. It is not enough to treat transfer as if it were an "all-or-nothing" process: the motivations involved must also be taken into consideration. The policies may develop over time, especially when borrowing policies from elsewhere. Secondly, different actors may have different motivations. It is likely that politicians and policy entrepreneurs will introduce a process on a voluntary basis, but when international organisations become involved, this is likely to result in some coercive policy transfer – although, of course, it depends on the particular action. Finally, the timing of the transfer also affects the process. In times of political and economic stability, transfer is likely to be voluntary. During a political crisis, on the other hand, policy transfer is likely to have some coercive elements (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000, 16-17).

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9. According to Hill (1997), policy transfer theory builds on Rose's work on policy learning (1991, 1993).

The concept of policy diffusion is a little different from the concept of policy transfer. Policy diffusion is studied to identify why some governments are to the fore in adopting policies brought elsewhere, and why others are more reluctant – why governments differ in their readiness to act. At one end of the scale is *immunity*, where no diffusion of a policy is possible because the organisational or state unit is not open to new external ideas; at the opposite end is *isomorphism*, meaning that diffusion of ideas and concepts occurs quite easily, producing homogenisation across states. In reacting to external policy pressure, there are three means or strategic choices: *resistance, imitation and adaptation*. Resistance is a likely initial reaction to external pressure, protecting already established values from external ideas. Strong resistance may make the state or organisation immune to new ideas and concepts. Imitation relates to the concept of isomorphism, where new ideas are adopted smoothly and receptively (Bache & Olsson 2001, 218).

Adaptation may occur on a conceptual level or in practice, or even both. On the conceptual level, an organisation or a state may adopt the ideas of the external world as a rational strategy. But these changes on the conceptual level may also change practice. The discourse around new ideas in an organisation or a state unit may impact "like a virus that spreads and infects the behaviour" (Bache & Olsson 2001, 218). Adaptation may also work like a translation process, in which ideas and concepts may be given a local perspective (see Bache & Olsson 2001, 218; Karakhanyan et al. 2011, 23–24). While policy diffusion emphasises structures, the concept of policy transfer stresses policy content and the role of agency in transferring ideas and practices, and so the concepts are interactive (Karakhanyan et al. 2011, 58).

3.4.2 Policy transfer in the EU

Radaelli (2000) attempts to understand policy change within the EU by utilising the concept of policy transfer. He observes that the EU is in fact an enormous platform of different policy transfers from dominant countries and/or from advocacy coalitions to other countries and coalitions. The European Commission can be seen as an active policy entrepreneur in this process, acting in concert with other "policy transfer activists" such as pressure groups or policy experts. Policy transfer implies that "policy diffusion is a rational process wherein imitation, copying and adaptation are the consequences of rational decisions by policy-makers" (Radaelli 2000, 26, 38).

Radaelli (2000, 31–32) describes the legitimation of European Monetary Union by a transfer process that included several central elements: history and learning, bargaining, the anchoring power of the Deutschmark and consensus on the paradigm of policy credibility. Policy transfer can occur both as a dependent and an independent variable. One can explain policy transfer as a process or use policy transfer to explain policy outcomes (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000, 8). Radaelli (2003, 12) argues that policy learning within the EU context is mostly about power. The formation of indicators, peer reviews and common guidelines support this view as they produce hierarchies of various responses to political problems and create different pressures on Member States to adapt.

According to Bulmer and Padgett, there has been little consensus on how policy transfer really works in the European Union. Their argument is that because there are varied governance structures within the EU, they generate various transfer types. This in particular explains why the EU is such a good "laboratory" for testing the policy transfer concept. The authors identify three different forms of governance in EU politics, to be introduced next and summarised in Table 3 (Bulmer & Padgett 2004; Bulmer et al. 2007).

Hierarchical governance operates in policies related directly to the Single Market, where the EU may exercise supranational power granted by the treaties and utilise coercive measures of policy transfer. These measures are based on supranational European law, but they are also based on the powers delegated to supranational institutions, such as the Commission's powers in relation to competition policy. A state must adopt such a policy as a member of an international organisation or as a condition of financial assistance from it. This form of governance involves a high level of institutionalisation. Hierarchical transfer is related to "negative" integration, which is the purest form of this type of governance; the abolition of restrictive measures from the Single Market is an example of negative integration. A softer form of hierarchical governance comes from secondary legislation (Bulmer & Padgett 2004, 104–105, 108). For instance, a directive for professional qualifications has been negotiated and adopted in the Council and the European Parliament and then transferred to Member States. The states are key players in this transfer process because they must implement this legally binding directive. The Commission and the European Court of Justice supervise this implementation and ensure that the policy's content is transferred as decided at EU level, and that the Member State has really "learned" from the EU policy. Bulmer and Padgett argue that the use of coercive measures and high institutional density in hierarchical governance obliges Member States to emulate EU models (109).

A second form of governance is based on the common rules and norms agreed by Member States and adopted by the EU, using the qualified majority vote (QMV). This form of governance is *negotiated* and fairly common within the EU. Negotiation takes place in a variety of EU contexts, and agreements range from binding legal rules to informal understandings. According to Bulmer and Padgett, this form of governance has been referred to as a "negotiated order", often occurring in circumstances where policy models or ideas from one or more Member States are incorporated into EU norms (104–106). Negotiation is characterised by bargaining and problem-solving. Bargaining is likely to produce competition between the negotiators, and transfer outcomes are likely to correspond to the weaker forms of synthesis or influence, with the possibility of abortive transfer. Problem-solving, on the other hand, may succeed in shaping negotiators' preferences since it promotes exchange of information amongst participants. By providing incentives to national actors, this opens them up to new policy models from other Member States and creates the circumstances for emulative policy transfer. For this reason, Bulmer and Padgett argue that bargained negotiation under unanimity hinders the transfer process since the outcomes are weaker than those received by problem-solving under QMV (110).

A third model is based on *voluntary* cooperation and exchange in policy areas where Member States retain sovereignty but coordinate policy through EU institutions. In fact, the interaction between national policy makers is facilitated by the EU. Bulmer and Padgett call this form of transfer "facilitated unilateralism". Voluntary transfer takes place when a sovereign state unilaterally adopts policy *from* an external source. In this form of governance, transfer occurs horizontally through the diffusion of policies between Member States. Facilitated unilateralism employs only soft or flexible rules and influence to persuade Member States to redefine their policies. With a low level of institutionalisation, EU institutions act as enablers of cooperation, and non-governmental actors are largely absent. An example of facilitated unilateralism is the Open Method of Coordination, which applies guidelines and benchmarks to influence decision-making in the Member States (104–106, 110).

In defining the different types of EU policy transfer, Bulmer and Padgett use the above-mentioned typology of *emulation, synthesis, influence* and *abortive* measures. They argue that hierarchical governance will generate the strongest form of policy transfer—that is, emulation and synthesis—citing the example of the European Monetary Union to make the interesting point that, within the EU, negotiation may produce emulation. Usually, however, Member States' attempts to shape EU policies will result in synthesis or mere influence. According to Bulmer and Padgett,

facilitated unilateralism is confined to mutual influence between Member States, or even to abortive transfer (106). Table 3 provides examples of the institutional variables linked to possible transfer outcomes.

Mode of Governance	Institutional variables	Range of likely transfer outcomes
Hierarchy	Authority/normative mandate accruing to EU institutions Density of rules Availability of sanctions/incentives	Emulation-Synthesis
Negotiation	Decision rules/Mode of negotiation: QMV + problem solving Unanimity + bargaining	Emulation-Synthesis Synthesis-Abortive
Facilitation	Institutionalization: Treaty incorporation of objectives Specificity of guidelines Quantifiable benchmarks Density of exchange networks	Influence-Abortive

Table 3. Mode of governance, institutional variable and transfer outcomes.

After Bulmer and Padgett (2004, 107).

3.4.3 Alternatives to policy transfer

Criticisms of policy transfer focus mainly on its importance – is it really a theory or just another form of policy-making, distinct from more conventional forms? It has also been asked why lesson-drawing and policy transfer occur in place of other forms of policy-making. A third question that arises is how the policy transfer method affects policy making, in particular when compared to other policy processes (James & Lodge 2003).

James and Lodge (2003) argue that 'lesson-drawing' and 'policy transfer' are difficult to distinguish from other forms of policy-making. They say that researchers interested in conceptual, nondomestic or across-time influences in policy-making should not restrict themselves to the policy transfer framework as there are other available approaches. The authors give two examples. The first is the institutional approach, explaining how policy-making is mediated by institutions. Institutionalism offers an answer to the question of who has powers for a coercive action, and why some are recipients and some are not. Institutional analysis also offers an explanation of how organisational structures affect learning processes. A second alternative or supplementary explanatory model to policy transfer, according to James and Lodge,

is the 'power of ideas' in policy-making. The spread of ideas often includes networks of actors involved in learning and transfer, and the nature of the network – whether it is an 'advocacy coalition' or an 'epistemic community' – is important.

James and Lodge argue that developing clearer measures of 'transfer' might help to develop the approach. Effort should also be made to validate whether transfer has occurred and to assess, as needed, the extent of non-transfer. One must note that James and Lodge's criticism is from 2003 when the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) had just started as a policy learning format within the EU. The authors refer to the process of Europeanization and the OMC, but it is obviously too early for them to be able to estimate its effects.

Policy transfer can be a useful explanation tool, but other explanatory models could also be useful, such as international cooperation, policy networks, advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities, which also develop and promote various policies and ideas (also Dolowitz & Marsh 2000, 21; Radaelli 1999) and could be another way of studying the phenomenon at hand. According to Enders (2004, 374), Europeanized policy responses in higher education may also be an example of mutual adjustment; governments continue to adopt their own national policies, but in so doing they reflect the policy choices of other governments or perceived European developments. Bulmer et al. (2007, 5) add that earlier in policy analysis it was typical to look at policy convergence since national policy makers tend to rely on the signals from the international system. By adopting similar solutions, there appears convergence. This approach, however, focuses primarily on the policy outcomes more than on the actors and methods of this policy process. The policy transfer approach also identifies the external catalysts for change, key actors, reasons behind as well as different steps in the process where policy from one jurisdiction is shifted to another.

4. METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

This research follows the qualitative research paradigm and the principles of the phenomenographic approach. Qualitative research is grounded on the available data. The collection of data and the development of theory and methods may interact: the development of theoretical perspectives may even require a return to data collection, or vice versa. This was the case in the present study, as development of the research questions was guided by previous research, and the first outcomes from the empirical data directed the choice of method. In addition, the preliminary results arising from the analysis confirmed the use of policy transfer theory as a framework for the research. Clearly, as is common in phenomenographic research, the present study is inductive (cf. Häkkinen 1996, 14), but also abductive to the extent that the final phase of the analysis was supported by the theoretical framework.

Qualitative analysis is a circular process of describing phenomena, classifying and seeing how our concepts interconnect (Dey 1993, 31.) Qualitative research often produces categories that help to understand different perspectives on a particular phenomenon. Phenomenography is a typical qualitative research method, focused on classifying various forms of thought and on finding connections between them. Phenomenographic study emphasises content analysis and is therefore applicable here as an analytical tool since the content and the development of the observation framework proceeded in tandem.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, the scientific explanation model is presented, and then the methods of data gathering and the form of data analysis are introduced. The last part consists of presentation of the results. As is typical in phenomenographic studies, the presentation of results begins with the main findings before proceeding to a detailed presentation of the various results as categories of

description. The idea is to provide both a solid description of the results and a clear sense of the process that produced those results. Finally, the results are presented as an outcome space that clarifies the relationships between the main result categories (categories of description), providing a holistic representation of the understandings of Finnish HE experts and how those understandings are connected to the policy transfer framework.

4.1 Research approach

Different approaches and studies in the social sciences can be compared in terms of their ontological base – relating to the existence of a real and objective world – or by their epistemological base – relating to the possibility of knowing this world and the forms this knowledge would take (Della Porta & Keating 2008, 21).

In phenomenography, the ontological position is non-dualistic. The ontological problem refers to the relation between consciousness and reality: the world is not a real objective "out there" or a subjective "in here", not constructed, but rather constituted between those two. There is no distinction between mind and reality in non-dualist ontology; the experiencer and the experience cannot be taken separately (Uljens 1996, 114–116). Here, the ontological basis is people's ways of experiencing the world—the different ways of understanding or experiencing the world is all there is. It does not matter whether these are called scientific understandings or everyday understandings. The various conceptions can be compared, but phenomenographers find it difficult to compare an individual's understanding with reality itself. This means, in principle, that it is impossible to reach absolute truth about something: the only reality is the one that is experienced (112–113).

This research attempts to contribute to the discussion concerning the significance of EU policies, while also aiming to contribute to higher education policy research and EU research. The purpose is to identify the different qualitative categories that underpin experts' understandings of the significance of EU higher education policies in Finland. In short, the phenomenon under scrutiny here is EU higher education policy, and the informants are Finnish higher education policy experts. The interest of knowledge is hermeneutical – based on interpretations – and the function is to describe perceptions of a phenomenon. The research cannot provide "the truth" about significance, but it presents a variety of understandings of it. The EU as an institution

is real, and the policies it generates are real, but the impacts of those policies are contextually bound, and understandings of influence depend on that context.

For the purpose of the present study, the epistemological position – assumptions about the character of knowledge – is as follows. Since phenomenographic research aims at "description, analysis and understanding of experiences" (Marton 1978, 6, in Roisko 2007), the main aim is to characterise variations in people's experiences. Marton (1981) identifies two perspectives from which people interpret reality. From a *first-order* perspective, people aim at describing various aspects of the world, while from a *second-order* perspective, research aims to describe people's ideas of various aspects of the world through their personal experience. (177–178.) Phenomenography concentrates on the second-order perspective, studying the phenomena indirectly on the basis of understandings and beliefs. The results are a set of second-order categories, called "categories of description", describing how the relevant phenomenon is experienced by the participants rather than by the researcher. The second-order perspective influences how research questions are formulated. In a phenomenographic study, the research questions ask about "how" and "what" rather than "why" (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 99). The epistemological assumption is that experiences differ but that these differences can be described, transmitted and even understood by others (Roisko 2007, 41).

Typically, as will be explained below, phenomenographic data consist of semi-structured, individual, oral interviews using open-ended questions (cf. Marton 1981; Richardson 1999, 64). The epistemological assumption here, then, is that the interviews of national actors may reveal understandings about the connection between EU and national higher education policy, as well as about the significance of EU higher education policy cooperation in a Member State.

Phenomenography is based on the ideas of Ference Marton, who studied perceptions of learning among university students in Sweden during the 1970s. With his colleagues, he discovered that students had qualitatively different ways of comprehending what they read and learned. The purpose of Marton's research was not to classify people or to compare groups, nor to explain or predict, but rather "to find out and systematise forms of thought in terms of which people interpret aspects of reality" (Marton 1981, 180). His research gathered different understandings that were socially significant and which could have been shared by the members of a particular kind of society.

The phenomenographic approach is widely used in Nordic countries, but there are also studies using phenomenographic analysis in the British, Australian and Canadian

literature. In the educational sciences in particular, phenomenography is understood not just as a method of research or analysis but as a qualitative research orientation (e.g. Häkkinen 1996; Huusko & Paloniemi 2006). It has, however, been used in other research disciplines principally as an analytical tool. According to Bowden (1996), phenomenographic research methods can be used to study a range of issues, varying from studies of learning to understanding general issues in a society. Although the research method has its roots in studies of learning, phenomenographic methods can also be applied outside the field of education (49). The phenomenographic tradition has developed from studying variations in human meaning, understanding and conceptions (Marton 1981) to its more recent use to describe ways of experiencing a particular phenomenon (cf. Marton & Booth 1997 in Åkerlind 2005, 322).

Phenomenography's purpose is to find and systematise forms of thought, aiming at understanding different perceptions of phenomena and the relations between those perceptions – finding and describing different ways of understanding or conceptions, which are typically then represented in categories of description and analysed further with regard to their logical relations (Marton & Pong 2005, 335). Phenomenographic research is essentially descriptive rather than explanatory, focusing on people's thoughts rather than on a search for "the truth". For this reason, a phenomenographic study does not provide a description of "reality", but rather a description of people's views and understandings. The orientation is inductive more than deductive as the analysis focuses first on details and then attempts to form general conclusions that describe the understandings of a phenomenon (Häkkinen 1996: 5, 14). The data in a phenomenographic analysis consist of written documents that are often transcriptions of interviews, which must be collected in a way that allows open answering that accommodates different perceptions (Marton 1981, 177; Huusko & Paloniemi 2006: 163–164, 171).

Heikkinen et al. place phenomenography close to constructivism and phenomenology in the philosophy of science. The ontological undertakings of phenomenography also lie somewhere between realism and constructivism (Heikkinen et al. 2005, 348). The central concern of phenomenography, however, is constitution rather than construction: specifically, how perceptions are constituted. Phenomenography perceives individuals as rational creatures, who form perceptions of experienced phenomena by joining incidents together and by aiming to explain them. Language is the tool used to form and express thinking and understandings (Huusko & Paloniemi 2006, 164; see more on the importance of language at Häkkinen 1996, 28–30).

Phenomenography emphasizes the relational character of understandings. An individual may understand only one part of the phenomenon because they observe it in a certain context, and the phenomenon's content reflects this context. In particular, a change of context may also influence the understanding; in an interview, for instance, people may present different views on the same subject, depending on the context or questions posed. People may also change or restructure their understandings during an interview (Åkerlind 2005, 331; Häkkinen 1996, 24–25).

Therefore, in phenomenographic research, understandings are not usually connected to individuals but are used to describe various ways of understanding the world. Phenomenography focuses on describing the understanding rather than looking for reasons behind the perceptions (Häkkinen 1996, 24–25; Uljens 1989, 42). The categories created in the analysis separate forms of thought from the thinking and from the thinker (Marton 1981, 196; Uljens 1989, 39). The idea is not to focus on any particular individual's thinking but to capture the range of understandings within a particular group. The interpretation is based on the interviews as a whole rather than on individual interviews considered separately (Åkerlind 2005, 331).

4.1.1 Aims and outcomes in phenomenography

The knowledge-related concern of phenomenography is to reveal the variation in human experience and to provide a description of this variation (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 100). In general, a *conception* is the basic unit of description in phenomenographic research. Conceptions can also be referred to as "ways of experiencing", "ways of understanding" and so on (Marton & Pong 2005, 336). The situations vary greatly: "One can never discern a feature which is always present." (ibid.) To clarify this idea, the example of ventilation has sometimes been used: if the ventilation system is on all the time, you cannot hear it – until it is switched off. The contrast makes one aware of both circumstances. In other words, there is no discernment without variation; every feature recognized relates to a certain amount of variation of the object when compared with other objects (ibid.)

The totality of experiences is called *awareness*. One key feature of awareness is that we cannot be aware of everything in the same way: if we could, there would be no variation between the experiences. Another important feature of awareness is that it is layered: "Some things make up the core, they are objects of focal awareness, they

are figural. Others again, belong to the fringe that stretches indefinitely in time and space" (Marton 1996, 179). The anatomy of experience consists of a referential aspect (the meaning of an individual object) and a structural aspect (the combination of features detected and focused upon). These two aspects may be intertwined (Marton & Pong 2005, 336).

Conceptions, or people's ways experiencing, are represented in the form of categories of description. This means, according to Bowden, that a single conception cannot form a category, since categories are not created simply from the communication between the researcher and the individual. The categories of descriptions are developed in relation to other categories, obtained from a number of people. Sandberg (1996) describes it as follows: "The basic idea of the phenomenographic approach, then, is to identify and describe individuals' conceptions of some aspect of reality as faithfully as possible" (130). This means, according to Bowden, that there is a distinction between conceptions and categories (Bowden 1996, 64). Conceptions refer to people's ways of experiencing a particular aspect of phenomenon, and categories of description represent multiple or collective conceptions (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 105).

Marton (1981) argues that conceptions can be described in an absolutely reliable way: "This means that the same categories of description appear in different situations. The set of categories is thus stable and generalizable between situations, even if the individuals "move" from one category to another on different occasions" (195). It follows that understandings are not usually connected to persons themselves but instead are used to describe different ways of understanding the world (Häkkinen 1996, 25).

There are several different ways to present the results of a phenomenographic study. Some describe the formation of categories in detail (see for instance Anttonen 2009) while others focus on the results (see for instance Koskinen 2009, Roisko 2007, Valkonen 2006). But reliability in phenomenographic research is fundamentally based on the reliability of the researcher's interpretation (Sandberg 1996, 137), and for this reason, the process of analysis is usually as open as possible. Åkerlind (2005) summarises the aims of a phenomenographic study as follows:

> Outcomes are represented analytically as a number of qualitatively different meanings or ways of experiencing the phenomenon (called 'categories of description' to distinguish the empirically interpreted category from the hypothetical experience that it represents), but also including the structural relationships linking these different ways of experiencing. (322.)

Thus, the main results of a phenomenographic study are presented as categories of description and an outcome space. Each category of description is accompanied by illustrative quotes from the data. Quotes from the transcripts demonstrate how each category differs from other categories (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 106). The categories of description are not formed from a theoretical framework or from previous research, but rather on the basis of the research results. The categories may, even must, however, be discussed in relation to previous research, in order to describe the similarities or differences between findings (Uljens 1989, 43).

Marton and Booth (1997) have defined three primary criteria for categories of description (modified after Åkerlind 2005, 323):

1. Each category in the outcome space reveals something distinctive about a way of understanding the phenomenon
2. Categories are logically related, typically as a hierarchy of structurally inclusive relationships; and
3. The outcomes are parsimonious – i.e. the critical variation of experience observed in the data should be represented by a set of as few categories as possible.

Categories of description are typically expressed by "something (x) is seen as something (y)" (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 106). As explained above, one way of describing awareness or the anatomy of experience is in terms of referential and structural aspects. The structural aspect presupposes the referential aspect (the meaning or label assigned to the experience). "The meaning is simply what something is seen as" (Marton 1996, 180). The structural aspect of an experience comprises two elements: the external horizon and the internal horizon. The external horizon refers to whatever is in the background of the experience, sometimes called the perceptual boundary (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 101). The internal horizon, on the other hand, refers to "what is thematised, or in focus, the internal relationship of the phenomenon's parts to each other and its cohesive whole" (ibid.). Referential and structural aspects are considered useful in phenomenography as a means of understanding the ways in which people experience phenomena. Furthermore, phenomenography may provide tools for understanding the knowledge people use in experiencing (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 101).

Categories can be organised as horizontal, vertical or hierarchical. Horizontal categories are equal – for instance, all categories that include "good" or "important" are at the same horizon. Vertical categories have a hierarchy – for instance, good–less–

not at all. In a hierarchical category, some understandings are more developed than others, meaning that they differ qualitatively (Uljens 1989, 46-51).

The *relationships* of the various categories formed are represented as an "outcome space". As described earlier, phenomenography is founded on a non-dualistic ontology, in which "the ways of experiencing represent a relationship between the experiencer and the phenomenon being experienced" (Åkerlind 2005, 322). The different ways of experiencing may be logically related to one another, and so it is not enough to constitute only a set of different meanings – an attempt must also be made to create a logically inclusive structure that relates the meanings to each other: categories of description are represented as a structure, the outcome space. This kind of representation of results makes it possible to look holistically at collective experiences of a phenomenon, even though it may be perceived very differently by different observers and under different circumstances (Åkerlind 2005, 323). As Uljens (1989) says, "individual subjective understandings are interesting only in relation to other individuals' understandings".[1] The outcome space may take the form of a table, image or diagram; its main idea is to present a map of how each category relates to each other (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 106).

4.1.2 Evaluation of phenomenography

One of the open questions in the phenomenography literature seems to be the orientation's relation to phenomenology. Marton (1981) goes to some lengths to show that the phenomenographic orientation was not founded on phenomenological philosophy, arguing that "phenomenological investigation is directed towards the pre-selective level of consciousness" (181) – what the world would look like without learning to see it, or how everyday existence is lived. In phenomenography, on the other hand, "we would deal with both the conceptual and the experimental, as well with what is thought of as that which is lived. We would also deal with what is culturally learned and with what are individually developed ways of relating ourselves to the world around us" (181). Richardson (1999, 59) criticises Marton's definition on the grounds that it is based mainly on the ideas of Husserl, even though many fundamental aspects of Husserl's phenomenology were rejected by writers such as Heidegger and Sartre.

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1. Uljens 1989, 42: "enskilda individers subjektiva uppfattningar är intressanta endast i relation till andra individers uppfattningar."

The first difference between the phenomenology and phenomenography is, according to Häkkinen (1996), the relationship to empirical data. Uljens argues that, in phenomenographic analysis, the researcher cannot study the data without presuppositions because empirical study is always directed by a certain interest. It follows that Husserl's pure mind phenomenology is more like philosophy, whereas phenomenography is an empirical science. Häkkinen continues that the second difference between the orientations is the connection to experience, which is more important to phenomenography by comparison with phenomenology's greater focus on the phenomenon (11–12). Marton (1981) argues that phenomenologists could not accommodate his distinction between a "first-order" perspective, aiming to describe the world, and a "second-order" perspective that seeks to describe people's experience of the world. The third difference, according to Häkkinen (1996), is that phenomenology attempts to eliminate the influence of cultural learning, whereas the phenomenographic orientation studies both conceptual and experienced (culturally or individually learned) understandings (11–12).

Another consideration is the choice of phenomenography rather than ethnography as a method. Ethnography is often referred to as the method of fieldwork through participant observation. In the present case, ethnography may have been applicable as a research method because of the researcher's position as a civil servant at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland. However, interviewing was chosen as a data collection method because stakeholders could then also be informants. There are some assumptions that phenomenography shares with ethnography, but there are also some important differences between these two approaches, in their focus of interest as well as in terms of theory. Although there is no reason why phenomenographic research should not include participant observation, this has not been the tendency of previous research. According to Richardson (1999), ethnographers have traditionally aimed to provide a realist account of the cultures they have studied. Phenomenographic researchers try to take the statements of the interviewees as they were given and accept the experiences at face value (58–59). The data in phenomenographic research are more informative than storytelling.

The main criticism of phenomenography is directed to the vagueness of definition of the term "conception". Häkkinen (1996) explains that the phenomenographic idea behind conceptions is threefold: a conception is a relationship between the individual and the world, for which previous knowledge and experience are the foundation; conceptions are processed with given meanings, and people create meanings in relation

to a certain entity; and conceptions are expressed to other people through language, but thoughts expressed verbally are always subjective and do not necessarily follow the general rules of language(23–28).

Another criticism concerns the generalisability of research results. Since understandings are collected in a closed situation and are contextually bound, the interpretation of categories may be difficult in practice. This is related to the fact that understandings change (Metsämuuronen 2006, 109). However, the phenomenographic researcher decides the categories of descriptions, and these are the researcher's own constructions, so that it may be difficult to view the categories as remaining the same or stable over time.

Other identified shortcomings in phenomenographic research relate to the use of data (interviews) and to insufficient guidelines for conducting the research (Roisko 2007, 97). Both of these criticisms are relevant, but they can be resolved by means of good and ethical research practices. It has also been noted that, because people have very different ideas and thoughts, some of these may be wrong, making it necessary to consider which of these understandings is most developed or most correct (Metsämuuronen 2006, 109). This argument, however, is not relevant here, as the interviewees are experts. Alatalo and Åkerman (2010, 372) note that expert interviews are often used in order to acquire information about processes, giving rise to the possibility that people's memories are wrong or limited. In phenomenography, the "truth" is not the only thing to pursue: rather, the results represent the variation between understandings, and the focus is on qualitative differences between the categories of descriptions. Theoretically, the most marginal understanding may even be the most interesting result (Huusko & Paloniemi 2006, 169). Both "right" and contradicting or "wrong" answers are of interest to phenomenographers because the variety in the answers reveals the differences in how people may understand a phenomenon (Häkkinen 1996, 17). The analysis allows for a combination of factual and cultural approaches and also takes account of the context of the interpretation (Alastalo & Åkerman 2010, 389). In the present study, understandings that differ from the "official truth" are indicated by reference to facts from official documents, such as position papers from the Parliament of Finland. In this way, the documents complete the reader's understanding of the phenomenon. At the same time, it must be noted that the main data of the research are the interviews themselves; the purpose is to reveal understandings of HE experts on the significance of EU policy cooperation, not the results of that cooperation (outcomes of the Council for instance) or the official statements about it.

4.2 The researcher's position

The relationship between the researcher and the object of research can be characterised as a constructivist epistemology, which is founded on the idea that each researcher forms their own understanding of the reality of philosophy of science in social interaction with other researchers. That understanding may even come to be different for any two researchers (Heikkinen et al. 2005, 347). According to the hermeneutical paradigm, the personality of the researcher has an impact on the research. Qualitative research often has a participatory viewpoint (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2011, 23). As Sandbergh puts it:

> The researcher is a human being, he/she is always intentionally related to the research object. As the researcher cannot escape from being intentionally related to the research object, the categories of description are always the researcher's interpretation of the data obtained from the individuals about their conceptions of reality" (Sandbergh 1997, 208).

It is therefore necessary to describe and be conscious of the researcher's sensibilities in order to enable an assessment of how the background of the researcher may have influenced the results. In the present case, the researcher's assumptions, based on previous knowledge and work experience, have no doubt influenced the construction of the research questions, the collection of data (to some extent) and probably also the formation of categories of description, even though the analysis was inductively driven and based on the data.

Chronologically, then, as an EU enthusiast majoring in European Studies in international relations and formerly an active participant in the European Movement, it is evident that the success of European integration has been in the researcher's interest. Having herself benefited as a student from EU mobility programs (EU-Canada transatlantic exchange and Erasmus program to France), this researcher has experienced at a personal level the impact such policy decisions can have on student mobility. Studying at McGill University in Montréal some 14 years ago was an opportunity to experience a world-class university environment, which for most students was also a significant (financial) investment. Even then, an understanding of the difference between higher education systems formed part of the researcher's knowledge.

In addition, while studying Canadian federalism, one started to have doubts about the necessity of continuous spillover and deepening integration in the European Union. Canada is a federal state, but with a very different background to that of the

United Europe. The EU is *sui generis*, which became clear during the year in Quebec. The hesitant attitude towards federalism in the EU was finally confirmed when one learned about the nuances of EU education policy at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Helsinki, first as an EU advisor (2005–2006) and then (since 2007) as a Senior Advisor at the Department of Higher Education and Research Policy. Working on EU education policy as a member of the EU Education Committee and as a vice-chair of the sub-committee EU30, the subsidiarity principle became a key everyday tool. It was logical to follow the subsidiarity principle: decisions should be taken as close to citizens as possible. Like the Treaty of the EU states, EU actions in the field of education only complete national decisions. Education is a policy area that touches citizens directly, which means that the best knowledge and understanding of the right means is at national and regional level. In saying this, however, one must note the specific role of higher education as a "transnational commodity", which differs, for instance, from general education.

Globalisation and higher education markets have transformed the role of higher education. Unlike in the Middle Ages, the flows now involve millions of students and members of staff. Higher education systems do not develop in a vacuum; the work at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland has shown that there is constant interaction between actors at institutional, regional, national, European and global levels. While saying this, it is reasonable to ask what affects what. What affects national higher education policy formation in Finland? What is the relevance of EU actions in the field? How do colleagues at the ministries and in the university sector perceive the significance of EU cooperation? What is the usefulness of this Europeanization process of higher education in Finland? At the outset of this research project, there were no ready answers, only questions. Having worked so closely with EU affairs, it was still difficult to assess the connection between EU and national level higher education policy. There seemed to be a causal link between the EU HE policy and Finnish university reform, but it seemed necessary to ask the experts involved how they perceived and understood this causation. The answers were more multifarious than ever expected or thought, as individual voices made themselves heard in the results of this phenomenographic study.

4.3 The research strategy

As already described, face-to-face interview is the primary method for data collection in phenomenographic studies (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 102). When the research process started, it soon became evident that there is an extensive literature on the development of EU higher education policy, especially from the Commission's perspective. There is also a substantial body of research on the modernisation of higher education in various EU countries and on the development of the university systems (see for instance CHEPS 2010a&b; Eurydice 2011). What was missing from the literature, however, was the voice of national experts and other stakeholders—the supposed end-users of the Commission's initiatives, and Council's decisions, on HE policy. It was unclear how policy cooperation looks from the national actors' point of view. Was there a connection between the EU higher education policy cooperation and the national higher education policy? What were the implications of EU soft law in higher education for domestic processes, policies or higher education institutions? The only way to find out was to explore the understandings of relevant actors involved in the process of "modernisation of Finnish higher education".

4.3.1 Data collection

The main data in this study consist of recorded and transcribed interviews (N=14, 15 hours, 167 pages) which is typical of phenomenographic research. The interviews took place in Helsinki, Finland in 2012. Documents form a supplementary pool of data, consisting of the pronouncements of the Education and Culture Committee in the Finnish Parliament (SiVL nro/year) as well as other relevant documents. The selection of interviewees and documents is explained below.

Interviewing is an appropriate method of research when one needs to collect opinions, knowledge, perceptions or beliefs. This method may reveal why people act in a certain way or how they judge various events, as discussion can illuminate the reasons behind certain kinds of action or behavior (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2011, 11–12). Especially in political science, questions related to decision-making processes, informal procedures, different stages and the reasons behind decisions are often impossible to reveal since they remain for the most part unrecorded in the official documents. Where research questions require a comprehensive understanding and information from the actors themselves, interviewing is a common method. Documents are important

sources, but in many cases, they do not communicate the phenomena in sufficient detail or depth; data from interviews and documentary sources enrich the information by providing two different perspectives (Mykkänen 2001, 110). Interviewing is not a method without risks, however. Analysis of people's knowledge, perceptions or beliefs is challenging, and the method often needs to be tested in practice. Interviewing is also contextual and situational, with results derived from interpretation, and care must be exercised in any generalisations (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2011, 11–12).

Selection of interviewees is an important part of the research strategy and will clearly be influenced by the research questions. The interviewees in this study were selected with due regard to the type of information sought (Cassell 2011, 504). The main focus was to investigate the significance of EU higher education policy cooperation in relation to national HE policy formulation. It was therefore understood that the relevant interviewees would include participants in EU cooperation and in the preparation phase of national policy formation, as well as those who participated in the formation of national standpoints on specific EU issues. The people invited for interview were considered to be suitable as informants in the Finnish context.

In phenomenographic studies, as in other qualitative research methods, purposeful sampling is commonly used. This emphasises the importance of in-depth understanding and often involves the selection of information-rich cases with the highest potential to produce significant amounts of relevant data. Participants in a phenomenographic study must be selected based on the basis of their appropriateness for the study, meaning that they must have experience of the phenomenon being explored. On the other hand, as the fundamental aim is to reveal variation, the selection must avoid presuppositions about the nature of conceptions held by particular people (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 103).

The interviewees were chosen by "referral sampling" or "snowball sampling" (Burnham et al. 2008, 233), in which the interviews started with a few key informants who were asked to identify other key individuals of relevance to the study. In modern democracies, the actors in policy processes include politicians, civil servants, and interest groups. In the EU process, the actors play slightly different roles. According to Young (2010, 50), the bureaucrats of the European Commission have an important role in agenda-setting and policy formulation and a lesser role in implementation, which is mainly handled by the Member States. National ministries participate in the Council of the EU and adopt legislation, representing the country's views. European interest groups tend to be associations of national organisations. Hill (1997, 171) acknowledges that civil servants are likely to be involved in the policy formulation

process at national level. In particular, they are very involved in the detailed formulation of policy, although here they may be guided by politicians.

Selection of government officials can be justified by using Egeberg's (2007) definition of the internal vertical specialisation of government bureaucracies: officials' level or position correlates positively with contact with political leaders as well as with degree of horizontal interaction with other actors. Those with few horizontal contacts and those who identify themselves with lower level units are likely to be dealing with a narrow range of problems and solutions, whereas those who have more extensive lateral relations are likely to address broader agendas, competing demands and system-wide concerns. Furthermore, officials in central agencies are more insulated from ongoing political processes at the cabinet level than their colleagues working at the ministries. (83–84). For these reasons, the interviews included experts with wide contacts both on the European level and in higher education institutions, with officials only from relevant ministries.

The interviewees did not include experts from the EU level, since officials from the Commission, for instance, could not assess Finnish perspectives. The interviews included people from eight different contexts: civil servants from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Prime Minister's Office, and representatives from the higher education institutions, rectors' councils, student union, industry, trade unions and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Table 4. The number of interviewees). Several of the interviewees had multiple roles, having held various positions over the years at government level, in the HEIs or even in the third sector. This made the discussions very fruitful, since the interviewees were able to assess the significance of EU actions from several different perspectives. This also made the analysis more challenging, as it was not possible to categorise answers according to interviewees' current positions, and one had to take into account that the context of understanding may have changed over time. In this sense, phenomenographic analysis again seemed useful as it pays more attention to the understandings than to the people presenting them.

Table 4. The number of interviewees.

Officials 6 (OA, OB, OC, OD, OF, OG)	Prime Minister's Office Ministry of Education and Culture
Stakeholders 8 (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8)	Universities Higher Education Evaluation Council Rectors' Councils Student Union Trade Unions Industry and Commerce
Total 14 people	Total 8 contexts

The selection of interviewees can also be called an "elite sampling" as the sample included only people assumed to know best the phenomenon under study (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2012, 86). Only experts who have been dealing centrally with European higher education policy issues in Finland were interviewed. In particular, the sample included people who were involved in the preparation of national higher education policy during those active years of higher education policy debate in the EU (2003–2010), as well as experts who have been participating for quite some time in international cooperation in higher education. Selection of the sample was also based on the idea of choosing interviewees who might have had a role as a mediator or participant in European and national policy debates. Most of the interviewees had participated in the national policy decision-making process on EU policies in sub-committee EU30 at the Ministry of Education and Culture. The EU30 consists of officials and stakeholders from relevant organisations in education policies.[2] The total number of interviewees was 14: two experts turned down the invitation to participate for personal reasons. The sample size was also determined by a saturation point (see more in section 4.3.6).

Interviews of this kind, conducted with a selected group of individuals, are often called expert interviews, focused interviews or elite interviews. Mykkänen argues that, in general, an elite interview is understood as an interview conducted with someone occupying one of the highest posts in a large organisation. But Mykkänen (2001) suggests that elite interviews can also be understood as interviews of people whose expertise, experience or other characteristics require particular preparation, flexibility or meticulousness from the interviewer. The position of the elite is often founded on the fact that they have exclusive information possessed by only a limited number of people (108, 111). It has been noted that elite interviewing is applicable when it is possible to treat a respondent as an expert about the topic at hand. Elite interviewing also means that some respondents may be more important than others, depending

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2.   Appendix 1. Sub-committee EU30 (education) in Finland.

on their position in the decision-making process (Burnham et al. 2008, 231). Dexter (2012) points out that "(…) it may well be that only a few members give the insightful answers because they are the ones who both know and can articulate how things are actually done" (19). In a sense, the experts involved in the EU decision-making process in Finland form this kind of elite, since there is only a limited number of people who are involved in EU affairs, and these procedures, issues and protocols, as described in the framework, are highly sophisticated and selective.

Thomas has pointed out that not all "important people" are important for research purposes.[3] When choosing interviewees who could answer questions related to the preparation phase of national HE policies, it seemed irrelevant to interview politicians (i.e. Ministers of Education). Furthermore, in respect of EU policies, it is important to understand the EU decision-making process in the country, which is run by the government in Finland, and so it also seemed irrelevant to interview Members of Parliament. These issues were discussed with several experts, and they generally confirmed that, given the focus of the research, interviewing politicians would not add value, agreeing that it was more important to interview people with knowledge of the substance of EU affairs and in education policy, who participated in the policy formation phase. It was also noted that the Minister of Education has changed every two years in Finland in recent years. The documents from the Parliament of Finland were, however, used where necessary to complete the interviews.

Since interviews provide the main data for this research, the documents constitute complementary data. Phenomenography does not look for the truth about a phenomenon but only for perceptions of it (Åkerlind 2005, 330), and therefore the documents can only complement the information acquired in the interviews. In the framework, the supplementary data (EU documents) were used to provide information on the developments of EU HE policy and its content. In the analysis, the Finnish views on EU education policy developments were mirrored by the official standpoints of Finland from the Education and Culture Committee (ECC) of the Finnish Parliament. The pronouncements of the ECC proved useful, as these are the only available official public documents on national EU positions setting out the opinions of both government and Parliament. Other government position documents on EU affairs, i.e. reports from the Education Committee and Education Council, are classified and were not available for use in this research. All of the ECC pronouncements from 2000 to 2013 dealing with the interview themes were, however, collected and analysed systematically with content analysis. Those points that

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3. Thomas, Robert J. 1993 Interviewing important people, p. 83 in Mykkänen 2001, 110.

were connected either to the issues mentioned in the interviews or to the themes of the research in general were collected for the analysis. These documents do not only complement the picture but also help to assess the reliability of the categorisations together with the theoretical framework.

4.3.2 Research ethics

Individual autonomy is considered such an important element of social science that the tradition insists that individuals always have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of research in which they are involved. In order to fulfil the requirement of autonomy, individuals must have the opportunity to agree to their participation, without any physical or psychological coercion. Second, the decision to participate must be based on full and open information. The codes of ethics insist on the protection of peoples' identities as well as those of the research locations. Confidentiality must be assured and all personal data secured (Christians 2005, 144). These are the fundamental principles that were followed in this research. The checklists of The Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD) were found particularly useful when preparing the interviews.[4] All the interviewees were approached by e-mail, in which the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation and the protection of privacy and confidentiality were described. It was promised that data would be analysed anonymously and without reference to any personal details, including organisation information. It was, however, agreed in all the interviews that the names, titles and organisations of the interviewees can be provided as part of the research bibliography. The use, preservation and disposal of data in the FSD were also specified, along with contact information for the responsible researcher, the instructor and the university (Appendix 3. Invitation for an interview**.**).

In saying this, it should, however, be noted that the interviews conducted were with experts, selected for their expertise on the topic, and as such they did not encroach on the personal details of individuals themselves but rather on their opinions about the phenomena at hand. It is also worth noting that, since the number of the experts in Finland in this field is limited, it may prove impossible to have watertight confidentiality, since pseudonyms and situations as well as locations may often be recognised by insiders (see Christians 2005, 145).

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4.   Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD) 2012.

4.3.3 Interviewing

The interviews were recorded and conducted in a semi-structured way, which is a common interview technique in phenomenographic studies. This means that, for instance the questions, but not the order of the questions, is determined beforehand. The interviews conducted were grounded on the same themes and areas of interest, but questions and the order of the questions varied, depending on the person and their expertise (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2011, 47–48). To allow responsive questioning and respondent elaboration, not all the questions below were asked in every interview. The themes or questions were sometimes also introduced by the interviewer as needed. If the interviewee did not know the theme or did not understand the question, it was dropped, because the idea was to collect experts' understandings of the phenomenon, not their knowledge of it. The interviewer gave time and space for the interviewees to present their understandings freely, and to develop them concurrently while talking. As the interviews developed, the interviewees were also allowed to move freely to any topic of interest.

When there is a need to ensure that the interviewer and interviewee understand each other, the most effective means is the one we use in casual talk (Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2009, 31). Expert interview is characterised by the fact that people are interviewed as representatives of their background organisation or position, and that their personal experience or thoughts are usually irrelevant. According to Alastalo, this differs from the usual premise of interview studies today, where interviewees are usually both the source and the subject (Alastalo in Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2009, 59).

The themes for discussion were formed according to intuition and founded on research questions, previous research and theoretical literature to operationalise the study, while the research questions tied the study into one consistent entity (cf. Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2009, 11; Aaltola & Valli 2001, 33). Previous research guided delimitation of the research topic as well as setting up the interview questions.

As described in section 2.3, EU cooperation in higher education takes various forms. First, there was the influence of the European Council and horizontal policy guidelines such as the Lisbon Strategy. Second, the education policy sector (DGEAC and EYC) tried to influence this high-level discussion, as well as national policy formation, with its Education and Training 2010 program that also adopted a new cooperation method, the Open Method of Coordination. Third, the Commission's initiatives (communications) and the drafting of Council resolutions or conclusions also form part of EU level cooperation. Therefore, the interviewees were asked to describe

how they perceived the significance of these actions and their connection to national policy formation. Below are the themes and questions discussed in the interviews.

The Lisbon process and the national discussion of the role of universities

1. How did the Lisbon process, according to your understanding, change – or did it change – the higher education policy debate in the EU or in Finland? What was the connection between the national discussion on the significance of universities and the Lisbon agenda?

The connection between the EU higher education modernisation agenda and university reform in Finland

2. What was the connection of the EU HE modernisation agenda to university reform in Finland?
    What was the influence of the Council resolution of HE modernisation on national higher education policy?

The connection between the Open Method of Coordination and national actions

3. What about the OMC – are you able to estimate what has been the significance of it in national higher education policy?

The connection between the decisions done at the Council of the EU (soft law) and national development

4. What kind of significance do the Council conclusions or resolutions have, in your opinion?

The connection between the Bologna process and the EU HE policy from a national perspective

5. What has been the significance of the Bologna process in Finland?
6. How do you perceive the role of the EU in the Bologna process? What kind of connection there has been between EU and Bologna?[5]

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5.   Appendix 4.

In brief, the themes discussed in the interviews were: Lisbon Strategy (question 1); EU HE policy (questions 1, 2); Education and Training 2010 and the OMC (question 3); soft law (question 4); and the Bologna process and the EU (questions 5 and 6).

Two pilot interviews were conducted in March 2012 to refine the research questions, data collection and the framework. The main theme under discussion in these pilot interviews was the same as in the rest of the interviews: the significance and impact of EU higher education policy in Finland. Both of these interviews went deep into the significance of EU processes in higher education, but the importance of the Bologna process was also thoroughly discussed. This helped to make the first revision: the research question had to be limited more carefully to the significance of the EU higher education policy and various EU actions in the field. It was not necessary to discuss the Bologna process in detail, since it differed so much from the EU process and as such would serve as a good separate research theme. Some limited comparison between the two processes, where necessary, could however be useful, but at this stage it had already been decided that the analysis would focus on the relevance of EU actions and exclude observations of the Bologna process. It was clear, however, that it would be impossible to prevent people comparing Bologna and EU, and for this reason, those interview questions on Bologna were retained.

Second, it became clear that a precise EU initiative had to be chosen in order to give the interviewees concrete grounds for assessing the importance of EU actions. It was therefore decided to focus on the relevance of the EU HE modernisation agenda as a concrete example of EU HE policy. The third lesson was perhaps the most important: even with only two interviews, the perceptions differed so much that it was apparent that the analysis should focus on the understandings of the individual experts interviewed. It was also clear that the experts' points of view might differ greatly, depending on their position, level of participation, motivation, ideology, experience and even on the context of the interview. A phenomenographic method of analysis, focused on presenting different categories of understandings, therefore started to seem applicable to this research.

The fourth lesson learned from the pilot interviews was that the interviewees offered the same kind of ideas about policy learning and transfer that had emerged in previous research, and so the concept of policy transfer started to seem applicable as a theoretical framework. The interviewees did not see the possibility of any direct implementation from EU soft law to national purposes, but they saw the processes as interacting, and how people learned in various ways from these processes. The fifth lesson learned from the interviews related to techniques of analysis, namely transcribing. The two first interviews were transcribed thoroughly, but it soon seemed

unnecessary as the recordings included a lot of material that was irrelevant to the research questions. Since the pilot interviews proved to be as extensive and useful a resource as other interviews conducted with more focused themes, the pilot interviews form part of the analysed data.

4.3.4 Interview situation

Interviewing is unavoidably historically, politically and contextually bound. It is not merely an exchange of information, questions and answers, since two or more people are involved, and their exchange, informed by all previous knowledge, motives, desires, feelings and biases (a priori) creates the *interview.* Fontana and Frey (2005, 696) argue that an interview is a contextually bound and mutually created story, bound in historical, political and cultural moments – and that as those moments change, so does the interview.

When conducting interviews, one must also consider the sensitivity of the context: somebody telling somebody else for some purpose(s) (e.g. Hyvärinen 2007). The things people tell are situated in a certain institutional and cultural context, and the context of this research topic has been extensively described in the previous part. It is difficult to assess from this data why interviewees answered in the way they did, but it is possible to observe two elements in the interview situation that may have affected the context. The first is the sensibility of the researcher, which was explained earlier. The second is the larger context of the state of play in EU politics in general, and in Finland, at the time of the interviews (two pilot interviews in March, the rest in August and September 2012): specifically, the recession, the problems of the Eurozone and the rising Euroscepticism in Finland. This was witnessed in the parliamentary elections of 2011 and in the rise of the "The Finns Party", an EU-critical party in Finland. This context may have opened the door to new criticism of the EU in a way that was not customary before, when Finland preferred to maintain her "good pupil" role in the EU.[6]

It should also be noted that by 2010 it was already clear that the Lisbon Strategy was outdated and had, for the most part, failed. The Commission looked ahead, and with Europe's economy falling into recession, the EU launched the Europe 2020 strategy. The link with higher education was strengthened at the behest of the

6.   The "good pupil" or "mallioppilas" syndrome of Finland in the EU is described e.g. in Penttilä, 2008, 42. Raik 2013 has described how the changing role of Finland in the EU "changed the country's image from that of a model pupil to one of a troublemaker" pp. 53–54.

Education Ministers, who had already agreed on the new Education and Training Programme 2020 in 2009. The EU 2020 strategy included the goal that by 2020, 40 % of the population aged 30 to 34 ought to have achieved tertiary-level education. In the Fall of 2011, the Commission again launched an initiative on modernisation of higher education (COM 2011c), and the Council responded eagerly in November 2011 (Council 2011).

Of particular interest, in the aftermath of the EU 2020 Strategy, is the launch of European Semester, a yearly cycle of economic policy coordination set up by the Commission. Each year, the European Commission undertakes a detailed analysis of EU Member States' reforms and provides them with *recommendations* for the next 12–18 months. Since 2011, country-specific recommendations (CSR) have also included direct recommendations on national higher education policies[7] because this policy sector is both part of the goals of the EU2020 strategy and of the guidelines for EU employment policy (Council 2010b).

As the Commission puts it:

> Country-specific Recommendations should, in the first place, support Member States in their efforts to improve the performance of their education and training systems and can offer a way for national policy-makers to mobilise political support for their domestic reform agenda. CSRs can also play a crucial role in helping to secure financial support for policy reforms in key priority areas through European Structural and Investment Funds as illustrated in the document 'Channelling Cohesion Policy Funds towards Education and Training. (COM 2013a)

At the time of the interviews, the role of the EYC Council, the Ministers of Education and the Open Method of Coordination in the formation of these recommendations was unclear (and still is), as those recommendations were prepared in other Council formations. Even the mandate to prepare these country-specific recommendations on education policies remains unclear. Education seemed to become only an "assisting" support to employment policy, and the Ministers of Education and the Education Committee felt left out of the European Semester process (cf. Council 2013b, 5–8, SiVL 8/2013). This situation may have affected the views of the civil servants interviewed, but it is difficult to see how the stakeholders could have been aware of the situation as the entire European Semester was still evolving in 2012. It was clear, however, that the EU level impact on national (higher) education in EU politics

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7.   To AT, BG, CZ, EE, IT, LV, SI, SK, PL, see more in COM (2013a).

changed at the turn of the century, and this may have influenced the context of the interviews. On the other hand, some interviewees saw that it was relevant to discuss how the previous cooperation has succeeded from a national point of view in order to assess new developments in the sector.

Finally, considering the situation of the interviews, the choice of location for the interview is not a neutral matter, since it is part of the overall social context and has a role in both the interaction and the knowledge produced (Cassell 2001, 504). The interviews usually took place at the premises of the expert's organisation, and three of the interviews were conducted at a public library. In consequence, the expertise of the interviewees became part of the interview. Even though they were asked to speak freely, their role as experts in an organisation may have played a role in the interviews.

4.3.6 Transcription

The research data is produced by collecting and selecting from various sources for the purposes of the research. The techniques of data collection and transcription determine the final form of data (Dey 1993, 15) – in this case, from transcribed interviews.

The amount of the transcribed data is 167 pages and the interviews took a total of 875 minutes, in other words, almost 15 hours. The shortest interview was 47 minutes, and the longest was 100 minutes. On average, the interviews took 1 hour and 7 minutes (Appendix 5. Interviews**.**).

Transcription of the interviews was done by the researcher, mostly during the same period when the interviews were conducted. Transcribing is an integral part of qualitative research (Nikander 2008, 225), and it proved very useful to hear the interviews repeatedly, noticing similar or contradictory answers ahead of the formal analysis. Transcription was done in the original interview language (Finnish) and the analysis was based on the texts in Finnish. Only in the last phases of the analysis, where the categories of meanings were formed, were the quotations translated. The analysis was, however, bilingual, as the coding was done in English.

As Nikander (2008) indicates, transcribing and the art of translating is a particular problem that the researcher meets when conducting qualitative research in an international environment. Qualitative material should ideally be accessible to fellow researchers for inspection of the data on which the analysis is based. Translating data raises questions about the level of detail chosen for transcription, and choices concerning how the translations or transcriptions in the original language are to be

physically presented in the research. It has been pointed out that original data should be accessible to the reader if the principle of validity through transparency is not to be violated; these points were taken into consideration when conducting the analysis, and it was decided to keep the original transcriptions available to the readers. This was also necessary because some terms translate differently in "EU English" than they normally do. As an example, consider the word "osaaminen" in Finnish. A direct translation would be "knowhow", but in some instances in relation to EU education policy, the Finnish "osaaminen" and "tieto" are confused in discussion—that is, "knowledge triangle" translates both to "osaamiskolmio" and "tietokolmio".

Transcription codes are listed in Appendix 6. In order to protect the identities behind single answers as much as possible, any dialects were also smoothed, and transcriptions used standard Finnish language, but in spoken form of course. Finally, the last clarification relating to the transcriptions is that, since spoken language is never entirely precise and does not include commas or even clear pauses, sentences are formed by the researcher to help the reader to understand the points as clearly as possible. Since the purpose of the study is to provide understandings of the phenomena, the pronunciation or original structure of the interviews are secondary to this research. The intention of the researcher was, however, to keep the transcriptions close to the spoken language.

4.3.6 Evaluation of the data

Since the results of the research are based on the data, it is useful to evaluate the process of data collection. There are "validity threats" in this research, identified as relating to the size of sample and to the analysis. In qualitative research, the researcher must define the right amount of data according to purpose and resources (Baker & Edwards 2012, 10). In phenomenographic research, the number of interviewees may vary between 10 and 300. According to Uljens (1989, 11), the sample size should be restricted for practical reasons, as phenomenographic interviews are in-depth and rather long, and too large a sample may mean that qualitative analysis remains superficial. The number of interviewees should, however, be sufficient to allow for discovery of variation in conceptions and understandings. On the other hand, the selection should avoid presuppositions about the nature of conceptions held by particular people, as the fundamental aim is to reveal such variation (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 103). These issues were taken into consideration when approaching the interviewees.

It has also been proposed that the sample size can be determined by a saturation point, meaning that data collection should continue until no additional conceptions of the phenomenon under investigation are recognised (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 103). In this study, the number of interviewees was limited by the limited number of possible informants. In addition, by the tenth interview, the same kinds of conception had already started to repeat, suggesting that a saturation point had been reached. Finally, the number of utterances and conceptions (N=400) connected to second level categories, the categories of meanings, is extensive and provides sufficiently variation in the understandings (see from Appendix 8 to Appendix 11).

Most of the interviewees came to the interview unprepared, even though they were all sent the themes of discussion beforehand. This was expected, knowing the time pressure on these experts. However, most interviewees dedicated plenty of time to the interview and all relevant topics got the time needed for discussion. No one finished the interview too early – on the contrary; the researcher had to make sure to adhere to the timetable, because many of the interviewees were eager to speak more than expected. If rich and lengthy and informative answers are the criterion of successful interviews, one may say that these interviews were successful as a rule. The average duration of an interview was 65 minutes, and the longest took 100 minutes. Most interviewees were enthusiastic about the theme, some indicated that the questions posed had been bothering them for quite a long time, and they were happy to share their thoughts with the researcher. This was especially true of the experts at the ministries. Only two stakeholders indicated that some of the interview themes were unfamiliar to them, but they were able to assess the significance of EU HE actions from their own standpoints.

The most difficult question that had to be tackled during the interviewing process related to the researcher/interviewer's position as a colleague of most of the interviewees. In their role as an expert, it was important that the interviewee was given enough space and time, even though the researcher may have had some knowledge or information about the issue in question. Tiittula and Ruusuvuori (2009, 36) make the observation that in fact there is no single solution to the role the interviewer should take in relation to the interviewee. Some level of neutrality has, however, traditionally been valued. A leave of absence for the main interviewing period helped to increase this neutrality, and it was more convenient to contact colleagues and other stakeholders as a full-time researcher than as a colleague. Thanks to the leave of absence, discussion at the interview was limited to the research topics only.

Ideas and conceptions are expressed through language. Language is a tool, but the challenge is that words may have several meanings (Häkkinen 1996, 28). When considering the relevance of interviews, it has to be remembered that data collection is based on the use of language. When a person is a conscious actor and an active subject, as Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2011) argue, they are also taking positions in their use of language. The interviewer may try to find out how meanings are constructed for the interviewee (49). In the interviews, this became particularly challenging when the interviewees spoke about the contents of EU initiatives. The transcribed data revealed that different issues (such as accountability, third mission and university-business cooperation) were discussed using various terms in Finnish. It was also noted that the interviewees did not speak about the themes systematically, but sometimes confused EU documents and issues. This was quite understandable, as several years had elapsed since discussions and policy formation. This did not cause any problem for the analysis, however, which focused on the understandings of the process rather than on the "truth" of the policy.

The analysis took into account the Finland's official standpoints from the statements of the Education and Culture Committee (ECC) of the Finnish Parliament, where possible[8]. The number of these documents, however, is limited and other government position documents (such as the reports from the Education committee meetings) are classified. Thus, as already mentioned above, the documents can only complement the picture of the understandings. All relevant ECC pronouncements were however studied systematically (cf. 4.3.1).

4.4 Data analysis

Phenomenographic analysis is a constant circle of reading the data, formation of categories and reflection. This does not mean mere reorganisation of empirical data but rather an exploration of relevant features of the data. Structural differences form categories of description that are constructions aligned to empirical context (Häkkinen 1996, 41). The process is strongly repetitive and comparative (see for instance Åkerlind 2005, 324) as it includes continuous sorting of utterances, quotes and concepts, constant comparison between categories and concurrently developing a scheme that consists of only a limited number of categories.

8.   See Documents and all SiVL nro/year.

There is no single recommended process or technique for phenomenographic analysis: instead, a range of approaches is reported in the literature, varying from four-stage analysis to an even greater number of stages. For this reason, phenomenography has also been criticised for the absence of a distinct approach. Phenomenographers themselves have, however, argued that a single model is not even possible or desirable due to the nature of the research (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 103).

This analysis consisted of eight parts. First, after listening and transcribing in Finnish, the transcribed interviews were read several times, and some clarification was done in order to eliminate parts that were irrelevant to the research (dealing, for instance, with personal details, current work or daily politics). As described earlier, it was decided after the preliminary analysis of the test interviews that the analysis would focus on the four themes directly related to EU processes: Lisbon Strategy (question 1); EU HE policy (questions 1, 2); Education and Training 2010 and the OMC (question 3); and soft law (question 4). The discussions concerning the Bologna process (questions 5 and 6) were taken on board only when they contributed to analysis of the significance of EU cooperation.

Then, starting with the longest interviews, which were also the most in-depth, expressions or "utterances" that described the phenomenon in question were identified in all the interviews, using the Atlas.ti coding program. The analysis started by reading through the data and marking different utterances in Finnish with descriptive codes in English, which linked the utterance to the substance it alluded to. This was the moment where analysis became bilingual, reading Finnish and coding in English. The interviews were also marked with reference to the group the interviewee represented (official or stakeholder). In this study, codes were devices used to identify or mark the specific perceptions related to interview themes, taking the form of words in order to identify the subject matter as easily as possible (see Appendix 7. Code families).

The analysis was a computer-aided process, coded with the help of Atlas.ti. It has been pointed out that a data analysis program helps the researcher to deal with large amounts of data without the risk of bias, and that such programs help to increase reliability (Penn-Edwards 2010, 252). Analysis programs help to avoid the danger of making generalisations too easily as occurrence is easily checked, and they also increase the transparency and systematic nature of the analysis (Jolanki & Karhunen, 2010, 406). Analysis programs, however, can only assist the analysis process; programs cannot replace reading and thinking or connecting issues, which must be done by the researcher.

Ryan and Bernard (2003, 275) identify themes as abstract constructs that investigators identify before, during and after data collection. In this research themes derived from the literature, from the researcher's own experiences or even from the data itself. Next, the utterances were collected according to the interview themes that were formed according to intuition and deriving from previous research. In Atlas.ti, these collections of utterances formed the following code families: Lisbon Strategy, ET2010 and the OMC, EU HE policy and EU soft law (Appendix 7). Then, those code families were carefully reviewed to look for any variation in the conceptions under each theme. The analysis proceeded by looking at each code family and interviewee group together, so that first the quotations of the officials on Lisbon were looked at, then the quotations of stakeholders, and so on. Themes were partly overlapping in the interviews, so many of the utterances were marked with multiple codes. Furthermore, the interviewees sometimes expressed different conceptions of the same phenomenon when asked different questions or when the context was changed. This effect has been reported in other phenomenographic studies (Marton & Pong 2005), and it is one of the reasons why the results of phenomenographic studies present different categories of understandings rather than outcomes of individual interviews.

While analysing utterances under each theme, it was possible to find *conceptions*. A unit was formed when there was enough evidence that a particular overall meaning was expressed (see for instance Marton & Pong 2005, 337). It soon became clear that it was possible to form subcategories of these conceptions that took account of either the *positive or negative relevance* or of the *significance or insignificance* of the theme discussed. Selected quotes that expressed various conceptions were grouped and regrouped according to perceived similarities or differences. With the help of subcategories (relevance/significance) that indicated the positive or negative connection between EU and national developments, the categories of meanings that indicated more precisely the variation in perceptions became apparent. The categories of meanings described *how* the Finnish HE experts experienced the theme under observation (structural aspect) and *what* was their understanding of the phenomenon (referential meaning). The categories of meanings were given abbreviations starting with M and a number (e.g. ML1, first category of meaning for theme Lisbon). The entire pool of meanings consists of 35 different kinds of categories of meanings.[9]

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9. The codes range from ML1 to ML11 (Meaning Lisbon), MO1 to MO10 (Meaning OMC), MHE1 to MHE9 (Meaning HE policy) and from MSL1 to MSL5 (Meaning Soft law). See detailed in Appendix 8, Appendix 9, Appendix 10 and Appendix 11.

In phenomenography, the main results consist of various categories of description that will describe conceptions or different ways of understanding and thinking. The central idea of phenomenography is that different categories of description or ways of experiencing a phenomenon are related to each other (Uljens 1989, 11; Åkerlind 2005, 323). In other words, once the researcher has identified a set of things (themes, concepts, beliefs), the phenomenographic analysis should continue to identify how these things are linked to each other (Ryan & Bernard 2003, 277). The second last phase of analysis focused on the formation of categories of description, comparing different understandings to the entire pool of meanings. Once a model started to take shape, the negative cases (the cases that did not fit the model) were scrutinised. Negative cases may either be disconfirming instances or suggest new connections that need to be further analysed. From the comparison, the theoretical characteristics of the categories started to become apparent. The last part of the analysis focused on describing the categories on an abstract level and linking these categories into the theoretical framework.

Phases of analysis

1. Listening to the interviews and detailed transcription of the discussion related to interview themes (Fall 2012)
2. Reading of the transcribed interviews in Finnish (Fall 2012)
3. Coding of different utterances with the help of Atlas.ti in English (Fall and Winter 2012)
4. Categorisation of these utterances in Finnish according to the interview themes; creation of code families in English (Spring 2013)
5. Formation of subcategories on the conceptions of relevance/significance (Summer 2013)
6. Formation of categories of meanings, ML1–MSL5 and formation of pools of meanings, constant verification to the original utterances in Finnish. Connection of categories and codes in English to the original utterances in Finnish and translation of the utterances into English (Summer 2013)
7. Reorganisation of categories of meanings into categories of descriptions (Fall 2013)
8. Creation of outcome space that explains the variety of understandings within the policy transfer framework (Winter 2013–2014)

Following categories are formed inductively but with the help of the research questions and the themes arising in the interviews. Phenomenographic analysis is data-oriented, and therefore the theoretical framework alone does not form the framework of analysis. Consideration of previous, opposite or supporting theories is however a factor when forming the various categories of description (Huusko & Paloniemi 2006, 166). For that reason, this study is also somewhat abductive, in the sense that although the analysis started inductively to accommodate the content, the final phase (formation of categories of description) was supported by previous research and by policy transfer theory. It was not, however, the intention to use policy transfer theory as the sole explanation of all perceptions of the phenomenon at hand.

4.5 Validity and reliability

This section considers the issues of validity and reliability of phenomenographic research, and tackles the quality issue by considering different ways of checking validity and reliability. Since the evaluation of the data collection was already discussed above, the focus here is on the analysis. A detailed description of the communicative validity check and of different practices used in this research is presented in Table 5. Illustration of the verification strategy of the research.

Internal validity refers to the rigor of the study and to the presentation of possible alternative explanatory models that have been discarded for good reason (Tierney & Clemens 2011, 61). Validity means the internal consistency of the object of study, data and findings (Sin 2010, 308). The validity check observes the extent to which a study is actually investigating what it aims to investigate, or the degree to which the findings actually reveal the phenomenon under study (Åkerlind 2005, 330). A key question in relation to phenomenography is what kind of "truth" one gets from the interviews. The reliance on contextual interviews has been much criticised. It has, for instance, been argued that the inherent difference between the language used and meanings in the interview data may be a source of difficulty (Sin 2010, 308).

Phenomenography does not compare the research results to the "truth" about a phenomenon: rather, it observes how well they correspond to human experience of the phenomenon (Åkerlind 2005, 330). "The only reality there is, is the one that is experienced" (Uljens 1996, 114). Dean and Whyte argue that the statements merely represent the perceptions of the informants/interviewees, whose answers are filtered

by their cognitive and emotional reactions and reported through personal usages. That being so, we are receiving only a picture of the world as they see it, and we will receive it only insofar as he/she "is willing to pass it on to us in *this particular interview situation*. Under other circumstances, [what] he reveals to us may be much different" (in Dexter 2012, 101).

External validity largely refers to the generalisability of the study's findings. Uljens (1989, 42) sees that understandings are relatively stable within a certain population in a certain context, and that categories of description can be relatively stable and generalisable to new situations even though the individuals may move from one category to another. The fact is, however, that studies with a small sample, like this research, are not generalisable (Tierney & Clemens 2011, 71). Even though the data collection was careful and included most of the "EU HE elite" in Finland, the purpose is not provide a full picture of understandings in this environment, but rather to provide categories that explain the variety of those understandings. The collection of different experiences is valuable, and the research tries not to explain why the phenomenon in seen in such a way, but the focus is rather on ways of understanding (Uljens 1989, 39, 42). The total number of utterances and conceptions (N=400) presented in appendices (from Appendix 8 to Appendix 11) is enough to elucidate variation in conceptions.

There are several types of validity checks and some of these are a better fit to phenomenography than others. *Communicative validity* concentrates on the defensible nature of the interpretation (Åkerlind 2005, 330). In phenomenographic research results, the main validity threat is insufficient reporting of the analysing process, meaning that the reader cannot follow the formation of the categories. Furthermore, if the categories were insufficiently formed and overlapping, the research would not be phenomenographic. The research is complete when the second-level categories of descriptions are formed on the basis of the first-level categories and there is sufficient comparison between the categories. Theoretical observation completes the research (Huusko & Paloniemi 2006, 169). Thus, communicative validity usually ensures that the methods and interpretation are considered appropriate by the relevant research community (Åkerlind 2005, 330). Within the qualitative research paradigm, feedback may also be collected from the intended audience or from the individuals interviewed, but in phenomenography, researchers do not usually seek feedback from interviewees themselves. This is ruled out, because the phenomenographic interpretations are made on a collective, not an individual interview (Åkerlind 2005, 331, Uljens 1989, 42). In this study too, interpretation was based on the interview transcripts as a

holistic group, and so-called "member validation" of the interview was therefore not applicable. Furthermore, the ontological assumption in this approach is that an individual's experience of a phenomenon is context-sensitive, so the interviewees may not necessarily have the same understanding of the phenomenon subsequently. Phenomenography emphasises the relational character of understandings; an individual may understand only one part of the phenomenon as observed in a certain context. In particular, the change of context may also influence the understanding (Åkerlind 2005, 331; Häkkinen 1996, 24–25).

The analysis of this research was a constant interplay between part and whole. After the interviews, there was a picture of the understandings, but transcribing and reading the transcriptions heightened the details and differences between understandings. Coding revealed the significant number of different perspectives on different issues. Then again, the formation of the code families under each theme gave a bigger picture than simple utterances. The understandings were divided into subcategories by (ir)relevance/(in)significance, but then joined again to categories of meanings and finally to categories of descriptions. The outcome space presents the results in accordance with the criteria of Marton and Booth (1997): each category reveals something distinctive, categories are logically related and the outcomes are presented with as few categories as possible (Åkerlind 2005, 323).

Objectivity, in both design and presentation of policy-related qualitative research, is one important criterion:

> Readers must understand the standpoints of the author on the particular issue, how the research design has been developed and how the data were collected and analysed. Ultimately, the reader – as with all texts – determines whether the text is biased or not (Tierney & Clemens 2011, 76).

In this study, the researcher's bias in relation to the research topic was used to advantage rather than being a hindrance. First, the theme and the research questions were easy to find as the researcher knew the literature, and the kind of information needed on policy formation, quite well beforehand. A rigorous literature review confirmed this, and the interviewing method proved applicable to collecting information that could not be discovered from documentary sources. During data collection, it became evident that it was probably easier for this researcher than for other researchers to secure certain interviews. Only two interviewees turned down the invitation, and all the other interviews were easily arranged. Second, during the interviews, it was easy

to concentrate on the interviewee's understandings of the process and significance because the researcher had extensive knowledge of EU cooperation in education policy. The researcher was, however, listening carefully to the interviewees and consciously avoided showing facial expression or disagreement when responses contradicted the researcher's own knowledge. Transcription was done by the researcher herself in as much detail as possible, in order to avoid losing sight of the different meanings already emerging in this phase. The analysis is described in detail in section Data analysis4.4, and the findings, with different of categorisations, are reported below in chapter 5.

Pragmatic validity includes the extent to which the research outcomes are seen as useful and meaningful to the intended audience (Åkerlind 2005, 331). The research aims to provide knowledge on the different understandings of the significance of EU HE policy cooperation. Tierney and Clemens (2011, 67) argue that qualitative work puts a voice and a face to those individuals being studied. The point of qualitative research dealing with policy development is not only to design a study, analyse the data and to reach conclusions but also to help decision-makers reach some sort of conclusion about what actions should be taken (67). The added value of this kind of qualitative research is that it can help to provide new understandings of issues at hand, and therefore it is important that the researcher also produces a text that is readable and usable by policymakers and the general public (67). The aim here has been to collect data that reveals new information on the EU policy cooperation, to ask questions that relate to topical issues (e.g. the future of EU education policy cooperation and the OMC) and to preserve the direct voice of the interviewees in the analysis in order to give the reader a good opportunity to assess the categorisations made by the researcher.

A broad understanding of the *reliability* of research relates to replicability of results – the probability that, if another researcher repeated the research, they would arrive at the same results. There is a general consensus that the idea of replicability does not fit phenomenography (Cope 2004, 9; Sandberg 1996, 131). Huusko and Paloniemi (2006, 169) note that the requirement of repeatability of results is an odd one in qualitative research. As (Cope 2004, 9) puts it, open data collection and the interpretative nature of data analysis mean both that the intricacies of the method applied by different researchers will not be the same. This relationship is unique, and the replication of the outcome spaces or the categories of description is therefore unlikely and unnecessary.

Similarly, the relevance of *inter-judge reliability* to phenomenography – meaning that either multiple researchers or researchers outside the study independently classify

the transcripts against categories of description and aim to test whether they can see the same results – has been questioned, notably by Sandberg (1996, 132). This approach is too positivist, since categories of description do not represent an aspect of reality but rather the variation among understandings. Different emphases in finding and combining various conceptions may also cause confusion as the co-judges lack the familiarity with the data of the original researcher (133). Furthermore, inter-judge reliability fails to assess the use of the method because it focuses on the results (Cope 2004, 10).

In phenomenography, a common alternative to these reliability checks is to make the *interpretation* clear to readers by fully describing the steps taken (Åkerlind 2005, 332), and this was the approach adopted here. The description of the analysis is detailed, and quotations included in the analysis and the list of appendices are extensive, affording the reader an opportunity to assess the interpretations. A possible shortcoming in qualitative research is that authors present findings in deterministic fashion, to the exclusion of other possible interpretations (Tierney and Clemens 2011, 77). The aim here is to avoid this mistake, and the researcher is very much aware that the categories are her own interpretations. Säljö has stressed the need for phenomenographic researchers to accept the fact that categories of description are their own constructions: the researcher interprets, selects and reorganises the data and constructs a conceptual description of perceptions of the phenomenon at hand. In order to do this, the researcher must be very familiar with the phenomenon under discussion (Säljö (1997) in Koskinen 2009, 94). Säljö emphasises that, since the analysing process is strongly interpretative, researchers must understand that other researchers may arrive at different categorisations on the basis of the same evidence (Säljö (1988) in Richardson 1999, 67). Categories cannot, therefore, be taken as an objective reality, but should rather be considered as forms of understanding. Categories should not try to explain the phenomenon but to help to understand the thinking of the people interviewed (Häkkinen 1996, 14).

Some reliability threats can, however, be identified here. Even though Atlas. ti was of great help in coding the utterances in the text, there was also a risk that it might have complicated the process. It was too easy to mark all kinds of utterances in the text, and the code lists started to expand. Analysis programs can also be criticised for leaving the original texts out of the research, so that the reading process is easily forgotten when all the documents are in the program. Being aware of these risks, the aim here was to avoid both complication and oversimplification of the analysis.

Table 5 presents the verification strategy for this study and the different means used to assess validity and reliability.

Table 5. Illustration of the verification strategy of the research.

Communicative validity check:	Practices used:
The means by which an unbiased sample is chosen is reported (Cope 2004).	Data collection was introduced.
In cases where convenience samples are used, the characteristics of the participants should be clearly stated (Cope 2004).	Pilot interviews were used, with elite sampling and referral sampling.
Design of the interview questions is justified (Cope 2004).	Questions rose from the previous research, but semi-structured interviews also allowed interviewees to talk freely. Leading questions were avoided. The interviews and their themes also developed over time and situation.
The strategies taken to collect unbiased data are included (Cope 2004).	Interviewing strategy is presented above. The researcher listened attentively to answers and directed the exchange only when lost on irrelevant tracks.
Strategies used to approach data analysis with an open mind (Cope 2004), reflexivity (Sin 2010), and researcher analysed own presuppositions (Åkerlind 2005).	Researcher has identified her own preconceptions and documented them fully. Research choices and each stage of the research process are reported explicitly so that readers can make a judgment.
The researcher should not rely only on the transcripts (Sin 2010),	The researcher was the sole interviewer, reflected and made notes shortly after the interviews, listened several times to those and transcribed all the interviews in detail herself.
The data analysis method is detailed (Åkerlind 2005).	Description of phenomenography is provided, and the phases of analysis are introduced.
The researcher accounts for the process used to control and check interpretations made through analysis (Sandberg 1997). The researcher has adopted a critical attitude towards own interpretations (Åkerlind 2005).	The researcher checked the interpretations and developed those until no new categories were born. By using documents, where possible and completing the analysis with theoretical literature, the reader can also assess the reliability of the categorisations.
Results are presented in a manner which permits informed scrutiny (Cope 2004).	The presentation of results is detailed, and the sources (conceptions) for the meanings are provided in the appendices.
Categories of description should be fully described and illustrated with quotes (Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012).	The chapter on the results provides a full description of the content of the categories and a large number of quotes, both in English and in the original language.

5. THE CATEGORIES OF DESCRIPTION

The results of a phenomenographic study are represented in general categories that describe the individual conceptions of a phenomenon and the relation between those conceptions (Bowden 1996, 64-66). The second-order categories construct a picture of what is relevant or irrelevant in EU cooperation in a soft law area such as higher education policy. Finally, the purpose is to discuss these categories from the point of view of the research framework. Policy transfer theory and previous research connect the results to a wider context and may provide explanatory models that help to address the following questions: What kinds of policy cooperation methods are able to transfer policies, and what kinds of transfer methods are less successful, according to the experts' understandings? The following chapters present the results as categories of descriptions that combine the full variety of different conceptions in categories of meanings. The difference between categories of descriptions will also be described.

Figure 4 illustrates how the categories of description were formed from the categories of meanings, which in part consisted of the conceptions arising from the utterances of the interviewees (see also Data analysis 4.4).
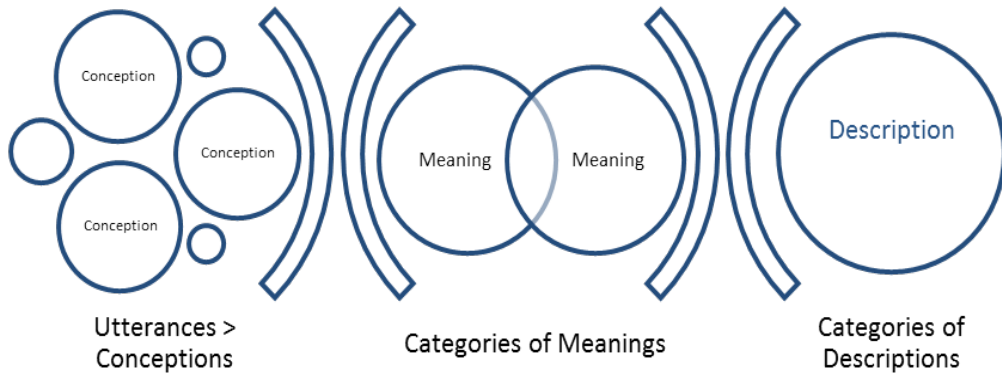
Figure 4. Structure of the analysis.

In response to the main research question (*What kinds of understandings do the Finnish higher education experts have of EU cooperation in the field of higher education?*), the following categories of description (Figure 5) were formed inductively.

A. EU cooperation in higher education has changed

B. EU cooperation in higher education influences in different ways

C. EU cooperation in higher education is part of fusion

D. EU cooperation in higher education is irrelevant and resisted
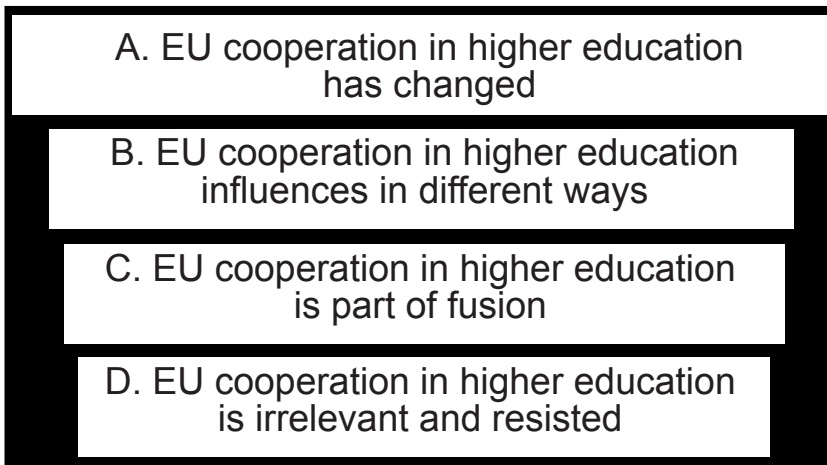
Figure 5. Categories of description.

These categories are vertical, meaning that there is a hierarchy in the understood relevance of EU cooperation: (A) impact, (B) significance, (C) partial significance and (D) no perceived significance. The vertical presentation of the results presents

all four categories as equal, even though the conceptions differ and the number of meanings and utterances varies between the categories. All the categories are also equally developed; none of the categories is better than any other.[1] As is common in phenomenography, all results are equally important: the category indicating that EU cooperation was significant is as important as the category where no significance was perceived.

The preliminary vision of the outcome space (Figure 6) is, however, that the level of significance rises from category D to category A. The arrow represents the level of understood significance of EU HE cooperation in each category, but this will be discussed in detail in the last chapter of the analysis.

Change

Influence

Fusion

Irrelevant
Resisted
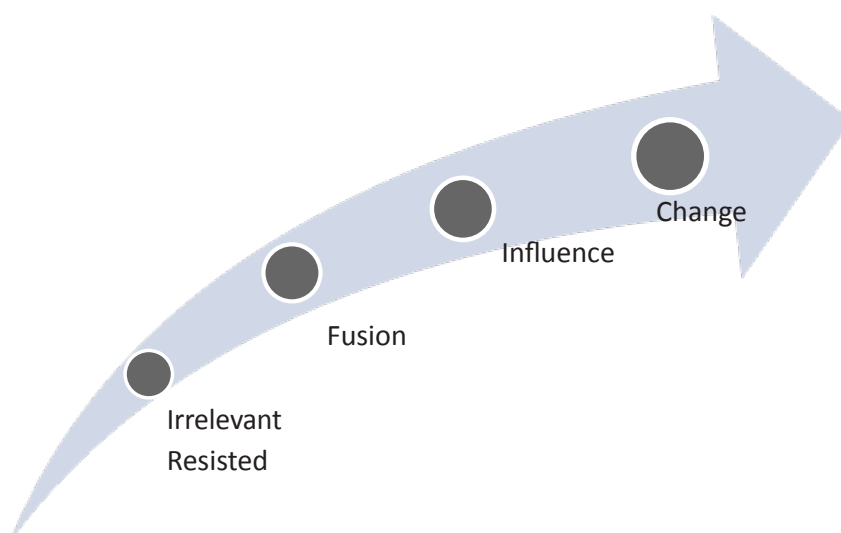
Figure 6. Preliminary outcome space.

Additionally, the categories of description differ by the level of analysis. This means that category A explains the change that occurred at the EU level; categories B and D discern the connection between the EU cooperation and national HE policy formation, so the analysis is at the level of nation states; in category C, both levels of analysis are touched upon. Under each category of description, the results are presented with referential and structural aspects that describe the variety of meanings given in each

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1. In comparison, the hierarchical presentation would have presented the categories differing also qualitatively. Uljens 1989, 50.

category and how the phenomenon under observation is seen (cf. Yates, Partridge & Bruce 2012, 101).

The content of the categories is illustrated with a picture at the end of each subchapter, and the picture summarises the meanings connected to the category. The text also includes a large number of original quotations (original quotations in footnotes, translation in the text) in order to enable the reader to verify the interpretation. The researcher's own questions or comments are in italics, other transcription codes are clarified in Appendix 6.

5.1 Change in EU level cooperation

The first results from the analysis formed category A, describing conceptions of the transformation in EU cooperation in higher education policy after the launch of the Lisbon Strategy. The meanings in category of description A identified a significant change in the forms of cooperation in education policy, change in the emphasis on HE and change in the interaction between the Commission and the Member States. On this basis, category A was given the title "EU cooperation in higher education has changed". The level of analysis is supranational, meaning that this is the category that identified the change that occurred at EU level.

The category is divided into three sub-categories based on the various meanings given by the interviewees on the four themes under observation (Lisbon Strategy, EU HE policy, Education and Training 2010 and the OMC, soft law). The categories of meanings and the utterances behind this category are listed in Appendix 8.

Table 6. Referential and structural aspects of category A.

Category A: Change	
Referential aspect—What is the meaning	**Structural aspect—How is the phenomenon seen**
A1. Lisbon Strategy was significant	Changing role of education policy and the systemisation of cooperation
A2. EU HE policy was strengthened	New emphasis on knowledge in the EU
A3. Interdependence emerged	Increasing EU cooperation in HE policy

In phenomenography, each category of description can be represented in terms of referential and structural aspects of how the phenomenon is experienced. As described earlier, the referential aspect indicates the particular understanding of the significance of EU HE policy in Finland, and the structural aspect represents the structure of awareness and how experts understand the phenomenon in terms of external and internal horizons. The internal horizon refers to what is in focus (i.e. higher education policy), and the external horizon refers to what is in the background of the experience (i.e. change compared to previous cooperation). In other words, "How we see a phenomenon, defines what we also see".[2] The referential and structural aspects of category A are shown above in Table 6. The following subsections, describing the contents of categories of meanings, unpack these aspects more carefully.

5.1.1 Lisbon Strategy was significant

At the Lisbon European Council on 23 and 24 March 2000, the Heads of State or Government resolved to make Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. The Strategy aimed to prepare the transition of the EU to a knowledge-based economy and society through better policies for the information society and for research and development. The Strategy emphasised the need for structural reform to increase European competitiveness and innovation, and the completion of the EU's internal market (European Council 2000). According to one of the conceptions in this category, there was a significant change in the nature of EU cooperation in education policies in general after the launch of the Lisbon Strategy (ML1[3]).

For the EU, education policy became one of the tools that could save Europe from falling behind in the international competition between economies. The entire Lisbon Strategy was based on the idea that Europe as a continent was falling behind in global competition and that the EU needed to reform its competitiveness strategy. Education policy, aimed at producing and renewing skills and knowledge, was considered vital for the competitiveness of the EU.

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2. "Miten me näemme jonkin ilmiön, määrittelee myös sitä, mitä me näemme." in Huusko-Palo-niemi 2006, 164.
3. As previously described, the codes starting with M stand for the category of meaning code relevant for the understanding described here, i.e. ML1 is Meaning Lisbon 1. The codes are detailed in Figure 7 at the end of this chapter.

The 2000 was significant to education cooperation, it changed, this is only continuation to that, this Lisbon strategy was a huge change. (…) I got a little taste of that 90s EU education policy, or it was not even allowed to talk about EU education policy – it was education policy cooperation, we…and then suddenly we have, education is there in the vocabulary of the Heads of States, just like that.[4]

Within the so-called Lisbon agenda that followed the Lisbon Strategy, there was a fear that the EU as a whole would not keep up with the United States of America or the rising Asian economies. As a political document, the Strategy itself refers to the challenges of globalisation in general (European Council 2000), even though the Kok Report, which evaluated the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, referred directly to competition with North America and Asia (Kok 2004, 6). This comparative tone was also used in EU HE policy documents such as the Commission's communication *The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* in 2003, as presented in the framework (COM 2003). The comparative method was noted by several interviewees, but they also noted that this was really nothing new in higher education policy as North America in particular had always been a point of reference.

That USA has been the reference, especially if we talk about research…that USA, she has been the one to compare to.[5]

There was a general understanding in the interviews that the Lisbon Strategy had a spiritual impact. As well as the HE experts, the Heads of State and even industry also started to stress the importance of universities to society and the economy. Some saw that the expanding EU level interest in education policy, and in particular in HE policy, was "a huge thing" and a surprise to many at that time. This created optimism and excitement about the new status of the (higher) education sector, especially at the Ministry of Education.

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4. OD: "Vuosi 2000 oli merkittävä koulutusyhteistyölle, se muutti, tähän on vaan jatkoprosessi kuitenkin sille, se Lissabonin strategia oli hurja muutos. (…) mä sain vähän makua siihen 90-luvun EU:n koulutuspolitiikka, tai ei saanut edes puhua EU:n koulutuspolitiikka – se oli koulutuspolitiikkayhteistyötä, mekin…sit yhtäkkiä meillä on, koulutus on siellä valtion päämiesten vocabularyssa, tosta vaan."
5. OC: "Se USAhan on ollut se referenssi, jos puhutaan erityisesti tutkimuksesta…se USAhan on ollut se mihin verrataan.". Interestingly in the official position of the government and the Parliament was that the functions of the European universities are, however, different of the US universities and the Parliament emphasized that observations should also be done to other directions. SiVL 2/2003.

My feeling is that it changed quite crucially, it depends on the perspective you have, if you look at it from the perspective of those working at the university then the change was huge, if you followed the discussion. (…) It probably changed the discussion at the government level.[6]

Secondly, there was a conception that the Lisbon Strategy, and in particular its follow-up program, systemised EU cooperation in education policy (ML3), bringing structure, targets and common tools to EU education policy with the Education and Training 2010 program (ET2010) a few years later.

And yes, it was I think, a great change, like I said, Bologna on the one hand and ET on the other hand. Until then it was conclusions and resolutions about that (…) it would interfere as little as possible in this national [policy].[7]

In particular, the Education and Training 2010 program, which followed the practices of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), was seen as a relevant and important tool for EU education policy cooperation (MO1). It improved EU cooperation by providing structure and common goals, as compared with the earlier situation where each Presidency of the Council of the EU at the time was able to decide the agenda and the issues on the table for every six-month period.

There is, in my opinion, plenty of positive and good, it is more foreseeable and from a national perspective it is much better that there are long-term plans, strategies and visions.[8]

The official position of the Finnish government was that the ET2010 benchmarks agreed in the Education Council were relevant to the follow-up of the Lisbon Strategy and should be part of the Lisbon Strategy follow-up introduced to the European Council. The Committee for Education and Culture at the Parliament agreed with this and reiterated that the Commission had encouraged Member States to continue to

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6. OC: " Mun tuntuma siihen on, että se muutti aika ratkaisevasti, riippuu varmaan näkökulmasta mistä sitä kattoo, jos sitä kattoo korkeakoulussa töissä olevien näkökulmasta niin se muutos oli varmaan huikea, jos seuras tätä keskustelua. (…) kyllä se varmaan valtioneuvostotasollakin muutti keskustelua."
7. OB: "Ja kyllä se oli mun mielestä suuri muutos, niin kuin sanoin, toisaalta Bologna ja toisaalta ET siihen saakka se oli päätelmiä ja päätöslauselmia sitä (…), että se mahdollisimman vähän puuttuisi tähän kansalliseen [politiikkaan].".
8. OA: " Siinä on mun mielestä paljon positiivista ja hyvää, se on ennakoitavampaa ja kansallisesta näkökulmasta on paljon parempi, että on pitkän tähtäimen suunnitelmat, strategiat ja visiot."

invest in human capital (see SiVL 15/2002). The Finnish perspective on the ET2010 therefore seemed welcoming. The Ministry of Education (MOE), which introduced the government's position, saw that the connection of the ET2010 to the Lisbon Strategy follow-up could be beneficial and something to pursue: "Finland considers it important that education is part of the Lisbon Strategy and its follow-up process, also at the level of the European Council".[9] The documents, then, confirm that the new role of EU education policy was approved and seen as a positive development in EU education policy cooperation.

5.1.2 The strengthening role of HE policy in the EU

The Lisbon Strategy, focusing on the need for a highly skilled labour force, for innovativeness and for a knowledge-based society, changed the role of higher education in EU politics (ML2). Nearly all the interviewees perceived the Lisbon Strategy and the agenda that emphasised these goals as one of the major factors that raised the role of higher education at EU level and in Finland at the beginning of the century.

> Yes, it was a great leap, the manner how education policy, why not the higher education and even science was seen as a part of that entire EU strategy. Lisbon strategy was the first one that brought it up so clearly. Earlier we had made conclusions and programs, but now education was seen in much more strategic way and higher education and the role of universities.[10]

> So that is a very huge thing in my opinion that the political decision-makers started to really strongly think about our university matters. And then another powerful player was of course the industry and commerce.[11]

These developments in the role and status of education policies strengthened the EU HE policy (MHE1). The EU HE modernisation agenda was highlighted as particularly

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9. SiVL 1/2004.: "Suomi pitää tärkeänä, että koulutus on keskeisesti mukana Lissabonin strategian seurannassa myös Eurooppa-neuvoston tasolla."
10. S3: "Kyllähän se oli suuri harppaus, koko se tapa miten koulutuspolitiikka, miksei korkeakoulut ja tiedekin nähtiin osana sitä EU:n kokonaisstrategiaa. Lissabonin strategia oli ensimmäinen, joka sen niin selkeästi toi esiin. Aikaisemmin oli tehty päätöslauselmia ja ohjelmia, nyt nähtiin koulutus huomattavasti strategisemmalla tavalla ja korkeakoulutus ja yliopistojen rooli."
11. OF: "Siis tää on mun mielestä se erittäin iso juttu, että se ne poliittiset päätöksentekijät rupes todella vahvasti ajattelemaan meidän yliopistoasioita. Sitten toinen vaikutusvaltainen taho oli tietysti elinkeinoelämä."

useful because it was linked to the overall Lisbon Strategy and therefore to the highest level of decision-making.

> (…) Look it comes to the usual rhetoric then that how to save the Europe –kind of stuff. It is really easy for everyone to appeal it. It is after all substance that is decided on the level of the heads of states, kind of on the highest level possible has been done something that is easy to attach some minor partial objectives.(…)[12]

It was also argued that HE issues have remained on the high-level political agenda in the EU. The importance of innovation, research and higher education policy has become a routine argument in the speeches of the Finnish Prime Minister. Clearly, the situation has changed significantly in 15 years, and the EU emphasis on the importance of policies supporting a knowledge-based economy has evidently had an impact there.

> European Council, I do not know if there has been a single European Council where our Prime Minister would not say anything about higher education, research or innovations. So that it is on a high-level agenda. It has remained there, it has changed the higher education discussion, and it has kind of changed the level in the political discussion.[13]

The position of higher education policies in high level political discussion was new: as a policy based on limited EU competence and utilising only soft law methods, it had not previously attracted the attention of EU Heads of State. The launch of the intergovernmental Bologna process (1998–1999) had, however, paved the way for European level discussion and closer cooperation. The further developments and the launch of the specific EU policy on the need to modernise universities were understood as a result of the Lisbon emphasis on knowledge.

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12. OF: ”(…) kato sehän tulee sitten yleiseen retoriikkaan, että millä Eurooppa pelastuu –tyyppinen. Siihen on kaikkien kauheen helppo vedota. Kuitenkin että se on valtioiden päämiestasolla pää-tettyä asiaa tavallaan korkeimmalla mahdollisella poliittisella tasolla on tehty jotakin johon sitten voidaan kiinnittää pienempiä osatavoitteita.(…)”.

13. OD: ”(…) Eurooppa-neuvosto, en tiedä onko ollut yhtäkään Eurooppa-neuvostoa, jossa meidän pääministeri ei sanoisi jotain korkeakoulutuksesta tai tutkimuksesta ja innovaatioista. Että tota se on korkealla agendalla. Se on jäänyt sinne, se on muuttanut korkeakoulutuskeskustelua, se on muuttanut tasoa tavallaan poliittisessa keskustelussa.”

5.1.3 Increasing interdependence

According to the interviewees, there had been a tradition in Finland of learning from elsewhere, using the experiences of other countries as a tool for developing education policy (discussed further in category C). But interestingly, here as well a new kind of cooperation or interdependence was noted after the Lisbon Strategy, between the Commission and Member States as well as between the Commission and Finland.

First, there was an understanding that the new form of governance – the OMC, with extensive reporting, benchmarking and peer learning – created a new kind of interdependence between countries (MO3). In fact, there were interviewees who saw the OMC to be relevant as a supporting instrument for Member States. The OMC improved the understanding between the education systems, and that is important both to the Member States and for Union level cooperation. The free movement of persons requires that the Member States trust each other and trust the quality of learning outcomes in different education systems. The OMC initiative has increased learning from each other. It was noted that all the Member States seem to choose to take part in the OMC exercises, suggesting that they must see some significance there, as they do not want to be excluded.

> It has always important this kind of psychology both in the administration or where ever, if EU has increased this kind of understanding between these countries, on the importance of education policy and on developing it, it is psychologically really important. Even if those decisions were sometimes little vague.[14]

> There is peer pressure, that has been strengthened; it has probably come through peer learning this. No more unheeded, that we do what we want. France said probably still 10 years ago that we cannot learn from other countries, quite straight even ££, but she does not do it anymore.[15]

Second, an interesting understanding in this category was that the Commission needs support for its work. It was understood that the Education Council's outcomes;

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14. OG: "Tärkeetä on ollut aina tää tämmöinen psykologia siis sekä hallinnossa että missä tahansa, jos EU on lisännyt tämmöistä ymmärrystä näitten maitten välillä, koulutuspolitiikan merkityksestä ja kehittämistarpeesta niin se on psykologisesti tavattoman tärkee. Vaikka päätökset olisikin ollut välillä vähän epämääräistä.
15. OD: "Siinä on vertaispainetta, ja se on vahvistunut, se on varmaan oppimisen kautta tullut tämmönen, ei nonselaaraa sitä enää, että mehän tehdään mitä me halutaan. Ranska varmaan vielä 10 vuotta sitten sanoi, että me ei voida oppia muilta mailta, aika suoraakin ££ mutta ei sekään enää."

decisions, resolutions and conclusions (soft law) is more important to the Commission than to Member States. The process whereby the Member States have to "digest" the Commission's suggestions in the negotiations of the Education Committee was understood to be essential. The drafting result, taking the form of a Council decision, is the Member States' compromise in respect of priorities for future work (MSL1). The Council's decision gives a mandate to the Commission to continue certain actions and may also determine the necessary timetables. It was also understood that, if there was a Commission initiative that preceded the Council's output, the decision would have an impact, but not otherwise. It followed that any conclusions drafted on the Council Presidency's initiative were seen worthless for Member States.

> And that what is in the conclusions [of the Council] may give the Commission some leeway or not with processing future papers, but how the policy is transferred happens really through that the Commission has defined that agenda for discussion.[16]

> I do not really believe that people become acquainted to those [Council decisions] widely (…) if we look how those all have been justified, that international pressure, we refer always to those [Commission's] communications. Yes.[17]

> That process is really important, that there it comes like processed.[18]

On the other hand, the interviewees expressed the understanding that, in order to advance its initiatives, the Commission depends on Member States. But the Member States also use the Commission for national purposes. Several interviews revealed Finland was very active in the debate on the EU HE modernisation agenda. As Presidency of the Council during the second half of 2006, Finland did, in fact, promote discussion of the HE modernisation agenda. The Commission welcomed this support from Finland, as it could not advance these issues without support from some Member States. In particular, the support from a Presidency of the Council was useful for the Commission. Finland, on the other hand, gained support, ideas and feedback for the preparations done at the Ministry of Education (further discussed

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16. S3: "Ja se että lukeeko päätelmissä niin tai näin antaa ehkä komissiolle liikkumavaraa tai ei tulevien papereiden tekemisessä, mutta se miten se politiikka siirtyy, tapahtuu nimenomaa sitä kautta että komissio määrittää sen keskusteluagendan."
17. OF: "Mä en oikeasti usko, että niihin hirveän laajasti edes tutustutaan. (…) jos kattoo sitä millä ne on kaikki perusteltu, et kv-paineita niin me viitataan aina niihin tiedonantoihin. Niin."
18. OC: "Se prosessi on hirveän tärkeä, että siinähän se tulee niinkun prosessoitua."

in category B). In this way, some degree of interdependence was established between Finland and the Commission in respect of EU HE policy (MHE7).

> That modernisation agenda, I think <u>we</u> had a really strong contribution to that, we were easily really of the same opinion that this has to be done. That in this, when the researchers make an analysis about that who what influenced to whom well it is quite interesting. (…)
> *Right, the Commission does need support for that discussion.*
> Absolutely! That is why it was then fairly easy there, that this is exactly what we want to bring forward.
> *Well, there was in the preparation phase the presidency of Finland at just the right moment, the higher education agenda was brought up there…*
> We wanted.[19]

> We invoke to EU and OECD definitions of policies that have partly become there because we have been making those ourselves, those definitions of policies to that international level.[20]

When asked about Finnish activity in the promotion of the EU HE agenda, several other interviewees confirmed that the issue suited Finland well, and that Finnish civil servants were active in the discussions in the Council. As a matter of fact, promotion of broad-based innovation was one of the policy emphases during the Finnish presidency of the EU (see SiVL 24/2006, 2). Finland was listened to in regard to education policy because of the success of PISA and positive achievements in the international comparison of innovation systems. Possible evidence of this is that the Finnish Parliament, in its position on the EU HE modernisation agenda, emphasised the social dimension of HE and equality (SiVL 24/2006, 3), and the Council in its resolution stated that HEIs should be opened up to non-traditional learners (Council

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19. OF: "Se modernisaatioagenda, mun mielestä myös meillä oli hirveen vahva panos siihen, me oltiin kaikesta helposti hirveen samaa mieltä, että näin pitää tehdä. Että tässä just, kun tutkijat tekevät analyysia siitä, että kuka mikä vaikutti kehenkin niin se on aika mielenkiintoinen. (…) *Aivan, kyllähän komissio tarvitsee siihen keskusteluun tukea.* OF: Nimenomaa! Sen takia oli sitten aika helppo siinä, että tää on nyt sitä mitä mekin halutaan viedä eteenpäin. *No tota sithän siinä oli siinä valmisteluvaiheessa sopivasti Suomen puheenjohtajakausikin, sielläkin nostettiin tätä korkeakoulutusagendaa esille…* OF: Me haluttiin."
20. OF: "Me vedotaan EU:n linjauksiin, OECD-linjauksiin, jotka on osittain noussut sinne sen takia, että me ollaan oltu niitä myös itse tekemässä, niitä linjauksia sinne kv-tasolle."

2007, 4). Of course, other countries may have influenced the phrasing, but at least the wish of the Parliament was fulfilled.

It is, however, quite difficult to say which came first, the national discussion or the EU level discussion on the role of the universities.

> I don't see that which one came first, chicken or egg. Is the EU policy because of the influence of certain Member States or if there is some consequence that what is discussed in the EU that it becomes acute also nationally. I would not exaggerate the significance of the EU. But perhaps it is more a interactive relationship, when it is possible to refer also here in our discussions and preparations that in the EU there is this kind of thing on the agenda, there happens that and this, that it kind of creates a context to that.[21]

In conclusion, category of description A is characterised by an understanding of the change that occurred in EU cooperation after the launch of the Lisbon Strategy. There appeared to be a conception that the nature of cooperation in education policy in general, but especially in HE, changed during the decade under observation. The new emphasis on knowledge strengthened the role of HE policy in EU politics. Furthermore, a new kind of interdependence was identified between Member States, between the Council of the EU and the European Commission – and, perhaps surprisingly, between the Commission and a Member State on HE policy issues. Figure 7 provides a full picture of the variety of meanings behind the category of description.

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21. "OD: Mä en nää sitä just et kumpi tuli ensin, kana vai muna. Onko EU-politiikka tiettyjen jäsenmaiden syötteistä vai et onko sillä jotain seurausta et mistä keskustellaan EU:ssa et tulee kansallisestikin akuutiksi. En mä ehkä liioittelisi EU:n merkitystä. Mut ehkä se on enemmän vuorovaikutteinen suhde, kun tää voidaan viitata myös täällä meidän keskusteluissa ja valmisteluissa, kun EU:ssakin on tämmöinen keskustelussa agendalla, siellä tapahtuu sitä ja tätä, että tavallaan se luo laajempaa semmosta kontekstia sille."
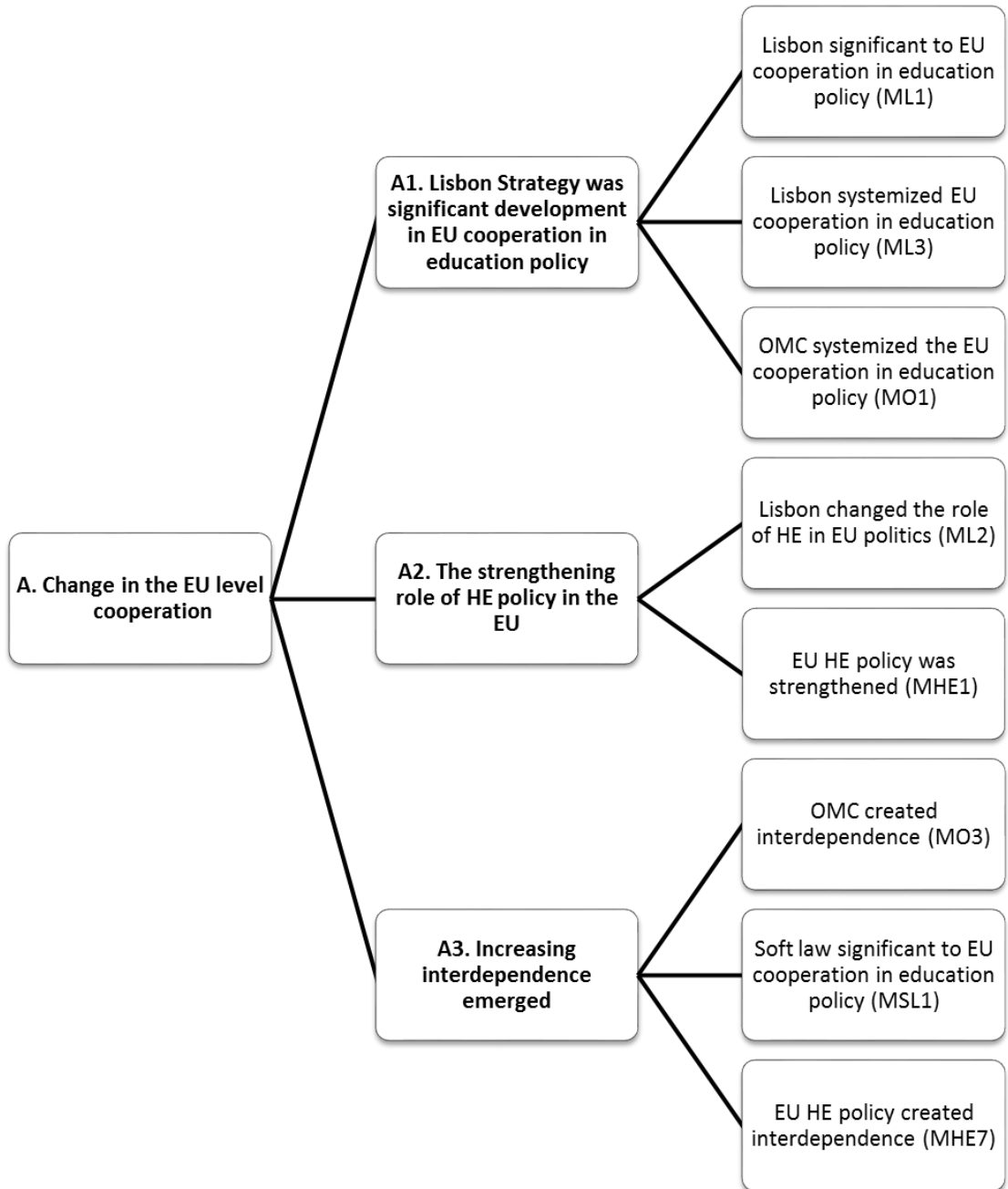
Figure 7. Variation of meanings in category A.

5.2 EU influenced national HE policy formation

The second category of description (B) "EU cooperation in higher education influences in different ways" is the most extensive of the categories. While category of description A (in the previous section) described the change that occurred at European level, the meanings in this category B establish a connection between EU cooperation and national HE policy formation, and so the level of analysis is the nation state.

Category B is again divided into sub-categories that are based on the various meanings supplied by the interviewees on the four themes under observation (Lisbon Strategy, EU HE policy, Education and Training 2010 and the OMC, soft law). The six sub-categories are as follows.

Table 7. Referential and structural aspects of category B.

Category of description B: Influence	
Referential aspect—What is the meaning	**Structural aspect—How is the phenomenon seen**
B1. EU created indirect pressure	Lisbon Strategy influenced FI HE policy
B2. EU HE policy created pressure	EU HE modernisation agenda speeded up national process
B3. Pressure through repetition and process	EU tactic is to repeat the message
B4. EU arguments used as justification	EU initiatives useful for national policy formation
B5. Support for national policy formation	Issues discussed within the EU context were relevant
B6. Soft law supports national policy formation	The Commission's initiatives may be helpful and used in national context

Table 7 (referential and structural aspects) describes the variety of meanings and the structure of awareness of these meanings. It provides a concise introduction to the key understandings behind the category. The deduction in this category is that EU initiatives and EU level discussion of HE policy were useful, even supportive, in national policy formation, and so the discussion at the EU level had a connection to national HE policy formation. The variety of understandings of this connection is described in the subsections below. The categories of meanings and their utterances are listed in Appendix 9.

5.2.1 New policy emphasis created indirect pressure

In the conceptions included in this category, there was a clear understanding that the Lisbon Strategy was a significant document for Finnish higher education policy. The interviewees saw a connection between the Lisbon Strategy and the national discussion on the importance of the higher education system to society. The level of relevance varied across the interviews, but the importance of the strategy to HE policy was identified in nearly all of the interviews (ML4).

The Lisbon arguments supported both university reform and the structural development of the national HE system. The interviewees brought up several issues that, according to their understanding, were of particular significance in the Lisbon Strategy. Several Finns mentioned the idea of the *knowledge triangle* (innovation, research and education) and argued that the Lisbon Strategy introduced it as a term that became applicable for Finnish purposes and discussions. Furthermore, the Finnish officials – at least from the Ministry of Education – began to stress the importance of the knowledge triangle in these discussions within the EU context.

> But there it was for higher education important, that we did not have only one sided innovation emphasis, but rather it has been at least in Finland an attempt to note that structure [knowledge triangle] (…) really [includes] those three, and not one or two. But it is according to Finnish reasoning in that sense, of course it was not our idea, but it was easy to support.[22]

It was also noted that discussion of the need to strengthen universities' autonomy was supported by the Lisbon goals, which were also linked to the relevance of HEIs and to the discussion of better *exploitation* of higher education and research in industry and society. The interplay between university and *business* was, in fact, an issue that was introduced to the EU agenda in the aftermath of Lisbon.[23] The issues of the *profitability* of the university sector and the *diversification* of funding were also linked

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22. OB: "Mutta siinä vaan se oli niinkun korkeakoulutuksen kannalta tärkee, että meillä ei ollut yksipuolisesti innovaatiopainotteinen, että meille on ollut Suomessa ainakin yrittää todeta, että siihen järjestelmään [osaamiskolmio](…) todellakin [kuuluu] ne kolme, eikä yks tai kaks. Mutta tota se on suomalaisen ajattelun mukainen siinä mielessä, mutta se ei ollut tietenkään meidän idea, mutta meidän oli sitä hyvä kannattaa." It was encouraged by the Research and Technology Council of Finland to underline the need to observe the entire innovation system in the EU level discussion. TTN (2003), 7. Also the parliament emphasized the importance of knowledge triangle SiVL 3/2008, 3 and SiVL 14/2009.
23. See more at COM (2009), 2.

to the Lisbon Strategy and were seen to have an impact on discussion in Finland. Someone brought up the issue of *efficiency* of the higher education sector:

> My understanding is that Lisbon brought, not only this structural discussion on the table, but also this effectiveness as also other than scientific effectiveness – the importance of innovations has grown and also the themes on competitiveness. I do interpret that this Lisbon had impact on that. It is contradictory perception to that what university employees today, how they see, what is the mission of a university.[24]

Discussions of the effectiveness and quality of the universities had, however, already been aired in Finland (see more in category C); it is therefore possible only to say that there was a link between the Lisbon Strategy and the Finnish reforms, but not a causal connection. As one of the interviewees put it:

> I believe that these things have a connection, but it is not the causality.[25]

In particular, most of the officials saw the Lisbon process as a significant development. They understood that it brought EU level support to higher education policy, which was mostly welcomed at the Ministry of Education. Quite soon after the launch of the Lisbon Strategy, the Finnish officials saw that the new EU emphasis on knowledge, innovation and competitiveness was beneficial to Finnish policies in general. The Finnish mindset had already placed emphasis on the importance of knowledge and skills for the society for quite some time, but the interviewees saw that Lisbon brought particular support to national higher education and science policy, given that the Strategy supported the fundamental argument that education is an investment rather than an expense (ML6). The result is quite interesting because, as explained in section 2.3.5.1, the Lisbon Strategy itself did not refer to higher education. Apparently, the new reports (Sapir and Kok) resulting from the Lisbon agenda and the Commission's initiatives on the HE and research sector were perceived as an entity.

Key actors in Finnish university reform stated that the new EU emphasis on the knowledge-based economy and attention to the importance of the universities to

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24. OC: " Mun ymmärrys on, että Lissabon toi paitsi tän rakenteellisen keskustelun kartalle, myös tän tuloksellisuuden eli muunkin kuin tieteellisen tuloksellisuuden – innovaatioiden merkitys on kasvanut ja sitten myöskin se kilpailukykytematiikka. Mä tulkitsen, että tällä Lissabonilla oli vaikutuksensa siihen. On ihan vastakkainen näkemys sille, mitä usea korkeakoulujen työtekijä tälläkin hetkellä miten he näkee mitä on korkeakoulun tehtävä."
25. OC: " Mä uskon, että näillä asioilla on yhteys, mutta se ei ole kausaliteetti."

national competitiveness were among the reasons that forced the Finnish government to take a closer look at the university system and its effectiveness. Interviewees believed that this was timely for Finnish politics.

> But then when the University reform was launched, its bases were there in the beginning of 2000 already in Finland.[26]

> *Do you see when the knowledge based economy and competitiveness was raised at the EU level that it had impact in Finland?*

> Yes, maybe as a justification for the entire university reform it was in the background like that, its importance of high level know-how to the competitiveness and how they invest in higher education and research in various countries and this is was indeed in there in the background that if you think of this entire strategy of Finland, that what are the keys for success in the future.[27]

Developments at the turn of the century (Lisbon, ET2010 and Bologna) were the drivers that prompted a closer look at developments elsewhere. Increasing cooperation provided new tools and materials for benchmarking and learning from other countries, including some outside the EU. Those who followed the European and global development of university systems noticed an external pressure that Finland needed to respond to. As a small country, with a binary and quite extensive higher education system, the structures and governance of higher education institutions seemed old-fashioned and uncompetitive.

> Then if you think about those overwhelming Pisa-results in 2000, then the question arrives, that was never asked loudly, that if we have the best comprehensive schools and education in the world, what on earth we are doing on the higher education and university side if we blow this best foundation of the world. So that why don't we have the best universities. (…) Entire OMC and Bologna came

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26. OF: "Mutta silloin kuin yliopistouudistusta lähdettiin tekemään niin sen pohjathan oli ihan tuossa 2000-luvun alussa jo Suomessakin."
27. S6: "Kyllä ehkä sen perusteluna koko sille yliopistouudistukselle se oli taustalla myös sitten, sen korkean osaamisen merkitys kilpailukyvylle ja sitten se miten eri maissa panostetaan korkeimpaan koulutukseen ja tutkimukseen ja tähän näin olihan se siellä taustalla että jos ajatellaan koko tätä Suomen strategiaa, että mikä on Suomen menestyksen avaimet eväät tulevaisuudessa."

timely for our needs. It may be that there were different perceptions in the beginning, what this really means, but the direction seemed to be the right one.[28]

5.2.2 EU higher education policy created pressure

There was a perception that EU level discussion on the importance of HE and research put a strain on national HE policy discussion, especially in light of the Commission's call to modernise the university system, which found fertile ground in Finland. The EU level discussion on HE modernisation was perceived as a process that accelerated national development in HE policy (MHE5). Developments in the higher education system during the 1980s paved the way for new steering and governance models in the beginning of the new century. In particular, the benchmarking of other systems was common when new ideas were tested, so that it may be fair to say that university reform in Finland had a longer history than the EU project. At the same time, it was perceived here that the EU HE modernisation agenda may itself have expedited the national process.

> We have benchmarked, used the OECD, we have looked at the Nordic countries, other interesting countries (…) definitely it speeded up and well absolutely this discussion in the EU and then probably the OECD and other forums in a same way and little the Nordic benchmarking. They did affect that but I would say that there was a little longer history there.[29]

> Well it is kind of apparent that we would have invented these things ourselves as well. But this [EU HE] is, in my opinion this kind of clear speeding-up agenda, agenda that forces to pay attention. These things are like things that are awfully difficult to say loud. Or seems to be. Also the blind spot of the policy has been

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28. S3: "Sitten jos aattelee vaikka niitä hämmentäviä Pisa-tuloksia vuonna 2000 niin se kysymys mitä silloin ei ääneen kysytty niin koska meillä on maailman parhaat peruskoulut ja yleissivistävä koulutus, niin mitä ihmettä me tehdään täällä yliopisto- ja korkeakoulupuolella, kun ikään kuin sössitään tää maailman paras pohja. Et tota miks meillä ei oo maailman parhaat yliopistot. (…) Koko OMC, Bologna tuli oikeeseen aikaan myös vastaamaan meidän tarpeita. Voi olla, että siinä alkuun oli erilaisia käsityksiä siitä, että mitä tää oikein tarkoittaakaan, mutta se suunta näytti olevan oikea."

29. OB: "Me ollaan benchmarkattu, käytetty OECD:ta, me on katsottu pohjoismaita ja muita kiinnostavia maita (…) tota mää - varmasti se vauhditti ja tota ilman muuta vauhditti tää EU:ssa käyty keskustelu ja sitten varmaan OECD ja muutkin foorumit samalla tavalla ja pikkusen pohjoismainenkin benchmarkkaukset. Kyl ne siihen vaikutti, mutta kyllä mä sanoisin, että siinä pitempi historia siinä."

the huge amount of polytechnics, so if there are other kinds of voices that is really healthy."[30]

The Finnish HE experts took the view that the EU initiatives on HE created external pressure that meant HE modernisation either became or remained topical in the Member States. The EU provided a rationale that was seen as supportive in national discussion.

> It was sometimes really on a razor edge that preparation of the university reform, that in a sense, if nowhere else had been done; it would have been difficult to do here as well. Yes I would give it significance. That in all kinds of reasoning documents, probably also in the reasoning of the act it was sacrificed quite a lot of time to that how it has been done in other countries. (…) But of course it effects also how much the Commission kept the thing on the table.[31]

Given that EU level discussion enlightened the developments and challenges of HE systems in other countries, European peer pressure probably kept the process going in Finland as well. It was noted that it is easy to underestimate the significance of external influence within the national context.

> "(…) as a matter of fact I speak contradicting now with that (…) It happens all the time, but it is kind of incremental developing and it may be that this development is sustained by this European peer pressure. If that did not exist, there was not this process."[32]

Interestingly, it was also pointed out that civil servants actually need external support to progress new ideas because they are bound by the government agenda and cannot

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30. S3: "Tota on selvää, että kyllä näitä asioita olis varmaan ittekin keksitty. Mut tota tää on mun mielestä tällainen ihan selkeä vauhdittamisen agenda, huomion kiinnittämisen agenda. Nää niinkun etkun, ne on asioita, joita itse on hirveen vaikee sanoa ääneen. Ja tai näyttää olevan. Samoin politiikan vauhtisokeus on meijän valtava ammattikorkeakoulujen määrä, et jos siihen tulee toisenkinlaisia puheenvuoroja niin se on ihan tervettä."
31. S6: "Kyllä se välillä se yliopistouudistuksen valmistelu oli niin veitsenterällä, että tietyllä tavalla, jos missään muualla ei olisi tehty niin olisi ollut vaikee tehdä myös meillä. Kyllä mä sillä antaisin sille kyllä merkitystä. Et ihan kaikissa niissä perusteluasiakirjoissa, varmaan siinä lainkin perusteluissa uhrattiin aikaa sille miten paljon muissa maissa on tehty. (…) Mutta toki se vaikuttaa myös miten paljon komission piti sitä asiaa esillä."
32. OB: "(…) itse asiassa mä sillä tavalla vähän puhun ristiin ton kanssa (…) Koko ajan tapahtuu, mutta se on tällaista inkrementaalista tapahtumista ja voihan olla, että juuri sitä tapahtumista pitää yllä tää eurooppalainen vertaispaine. Et jos sitä ei olis, niin ei olis tätä prosessia. (…) "

open new issues that are not on that agenda. External pressure may even improve the quality of national decision-making processes when other relevant factors are taken into account.

5.2.3 Pressure through repetition and process

The perception of repetition was mentioned several times in the interviews as a successful means by which the Commission can push Member States in a certain direction. When a policy idea is repeated several times in various forms and forums, it may eventually become reality. This seemed to be the case with the new EU HE policy agenda, with numerous initiatives, summits and meetings on the same idea – the role of innovation, research and universities – in the last decade. It was noted that the Commission is a "patient organisation", repeating the message for as long as necessary (MSL2). It was also noted that, at first sight, strategy papers such as the Lisbon Strategy may not look that important, but when the message repeats itself in all kinds of documents, it starts to become reality. This method seemed to be central to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy (ML9).

> (…)When we put innovation, innovation and innovation to each paper, it starts to become reality. It will spill into implementation, thinking and change, it may be a rather long process, but that is the significance of the strategy paper. That the change occurs.[33]

The perception of process is related to repetition. Some interviewees mentioned that it is, in fact, fairly difficult to see the significance and impacts of single initiatives or documents, while the relevance and significance of the entire EU level discussion can more readily be seen (MSL5). Commission initiatives often also launch the discussion at Member State level, at least in Finland, since all communications in the field of education policy – the Commission's official initiatives – are discussed at sub-committee EU30 and then sent to the Parliament with a proposal on the Finnish position.

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33. OD: "…kun pistetään innovaatio innovaatio innovaatio jokaiseen paperiin, niin siitä alkaa tulla todellisuutta. Alkaa valua toteuttamiseen, ajatteluun ja muuttaa et se voi olla aika pitkäkin prosessi, mutta se on sen strategiapaperin merkitys. Et se muutos tapahtuu."

And in that sense our sub-committee system and the informing of the parliament are extremely important; it does as a matter of fact expose large number of policy makers and officials to that theme that is under discussion [in the EU].[34]

In Finland, then, the national process itself strengthens the EU level message, which should, at least in principle, reach all relevant parties and stakeholders. Stakeholders also understood that EU soft law may be useful for various purposes. The EU has prestige in the same way as other international organisations, such as the OECD.

In a same way these EU's HE modernization, different kind of papers, you may have leaned on those. The EU has, however, such prestige…[35]

On the other hand, it was observed that, with a solid and inclusive structure, EU coordination in Finland cannot really be blamed for a deficit of legitimacy, given that EU positions are formed in a more transparent way than many national legislative decisions.

5.2.4 EU arguments used as justification

It was understood that initiatives and arguments deriving from EU level discussion were useful in the national context. In particular, the Lisbon Strategy was seen to be of use to those who wanted to strengthen their message on the importance of education with an EU flavour. As they were decided at the highest political level, it was easy to reference the Lisbon goals; they started to appear in Finnish HE policy talks, and stakeholders began to use them as arguments in lobbying (ML7).

It was it was extremely central thing in all lobbying. Like in all kinds of papers we did in 2006–2007, we always mentioned the Lisbon goals, almost connected it to everything.[36]

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34. S3: "(…) Ja siinä mielessä meidän jaostojärjestelmä ja eduskunnan informointi on äärimmäisen tärkeitä, ne itse asiassa altistaa aika ison joukon politiikan tekijöitä ja virkamiehiä siihen tematiikkaan, josta keskustellaan."
35. S4: "ihan samanlailla nämä EU:n yo-modernisaatio, erilaiset paperit, niihin on voinut tukeutua. Onhan sitten kuitenkin EU:lla sellaista arvovaltaa…"
36. S7: "Se oli se oli tolkuttoman keskeinen juttu kaikessa edunvalvontatyössä. Niin kun ihan kaiken maailman papereissa sitä tehtiin vaikka 2006–2007, siellä aina mainittiin Lissabonin tavoitteet, melkein mihin [tahansa] liittyen."

When I now recall it back it did certainly appear in the talks of the management of universities the changed situation and position [of HE].[37]

By bringing those in kind of larger context, not that the universities must be reformed but connect it to some declaration level.[38]

It can be inferred from this data that there was an understanding that when an EU initiative had a connection to a high-level agenda, such as the Lisbon Strategy, it was also taken seriously in Finland. This is confirmed by another meaning (MO10) that indicates that benchmarking for higher education attainment became a relevant and useful argument nationally when it was connected to the overall EU2020 strategy. As will be described below, the earlier HE benchmarks on ET2010 were seen as less relevant than the one related to EU 2020, the higher status of which made a better case in national debate and offered a good argument against those who said that the massification of higher education had already gone too far.

Furthermore, it was perceived that EU documents on the need to reform university systems provided good and sometimes necessary grounds for national discussions (MHE6). The EU level discussion and the Commission's comparative tables of different HE systems were used as justification for national reforms by civil servants and rectors, and at the institutional level as well as in the Parliament. The EU papers were a means to raise issues that may otherwise have been impossible to voice in the contemporary political atmosphere, even among civil servants.

Did they say things that was difficult for us to say?
Yes, yes. This funding, absolutely. This was the reason that we always hoped that they will say something about it. Autonomy, that legal status, that was then when the rectors made that initiative to the ministry, that was rejected completely. It was good that they did no tore that paper.
What where?
At the ministry, the leading civil servants thought that it is not worth coming here with that kind of papers.
Well, well
Yes, yes, so that has changed a lot.

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37. OF: "Kyllä mä nyt kun muistelen taakse päin sitä niin kyllä se varmasti alkoi yliopistojohdon puheissa näkyä se [korkeakoulutuksen] muuttunut tilanne ja asema."
38. S7: "Tuomalla niitä semmoisessa laajemmassa kontekstissa, ei niin että nyt pitää uudistaa yliopistot vaan kytkee se johonkin niin kun julistustasoon."

> (…)
>
> Yes those discussions were sometimes quite difficult at the ministry, when we tried as civil servants that we must do something. This pressure becomes so large, that if we cannot reform our public universities, it will come like a landslide this privatization of universities.[39]

As a matter of fact, in the government's position on the first Commission's initiative on the role of universities, it was stated cautiously that the financial autonomy of the higher education institutions might still need to be strengthened (SiVL 2/2003, 4). But by 2006, the position of Committee for Education and Culture at the Parliament was already supportive of the Commission's HE modernisation initiative, saying that Finland was already implementing most of the ideas (SiVL 24/2006, 3) and that Finnish HEIs needed to strengthen their profiles according to their strengths and strategies (SiVL 1/2006, 4).

In its initiatives, the Commission may also underline sensitive issues that Member States cannot raise on their own. It was also pointed out that there had been resistance to ranking the Finnish universities by performance, even though everyone followed the international comparisons that were on the increase at that time.

> So I think this is a good example that in Finland we can quietly say that the University of Helsinki is the best university in Finland, but we don't underline it or talk about a world class university especially. These European papers were a kind of means to raise this fact (…) so it is in the States [USA] the head. (…) We do not succeed with these indicators and it needed to be said.[40]

The external justifications were also seen as a kind of insurance for civil servants at the ministry. Once there was knowledge of similar developments elsewhere, it

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39. *"Sanoks ne asioita, joita meidän oli vaikea saada sanoo?* OF: Joo, joo. Tää rahoitus, ilman muuta. Sen takia aina toivottiin, et ne sanoo siitä jotain. Autonomia, se juridinen asema, sehän oli silloin kun rehtorit teki sen aloitteen ministeriölle, niin sehän tyrmättiin niin kuin aivan. Hyvä ettei sitä paperia revitty niille. *Siis missä?* Ministeriössä, ministeriön silloinen virkamiesjohto oli sellaista mieltä, että tollaisten papereiden kanssa ei sitten kannata toista kertaa tänne tulla. *Kas vain.* Joo joo, siis se on muuttunut hyvin huomattavasti." OF: "Kyl ne oli joskus sitten aika vaikeita ne keskustelut ministeriössä, kun me yritettiin virkamiehistä, että jotain pitää tehdä. Tää paine käy niin suureksi, jos me ei pystytä uudistamaan meidän julkisia yliopistoja, niin se tulee vyöryn lailla tää yliopistojen yksityistäminen." See also chapter 2.2.
40. S3: "Mun mielestä tää on hyvä esimerkki siitä, että Suomessahan me voidaan jotenkin hiljaa todeta, että Helsingin yliopisto on Suomen paras yliopisto, mutta se ei sitäkään alleviivata eikä varsinkaan puhuta mistään huipuista. Tavallaan nää eurooppalaiset paperit oli keino nostaa tää fakta esiin. (…) niin kyllä se vaan jenkeissä on se kärki. (…) Me ei näillä mittareilla hirveen hyvin pärjätä ja sen ääneen sanominen tarvittiin."

became possible to think that certain ideas and thoughts raised nationally were not that wrong after all.

> It is not clear, but at least for us that do, perhaps those at the ministry think that we cannot be that wrong if the others do – it may be that everyone is going to the wrong direction – but regardless of that it gives kind of spiritual confidence to that making.[41]

The interviews also revealed that the rectors of the universities took part in the discussions at European level. The CRE – the Association of European Universities – and the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences (later those formed the EUA) were active from the beginning in both the Bologna process and the EU HE modernisation talks (Erichsen 1999). From those talks, Finnish university sector brought ideas and questions directly to university level.

> (…) that EUA has had a significant role as increasing the awareness. (…) Then the EUA was such a lively voice of the universities. People used to refer to that. We had several people who followed that discussion quite tightly and brought the message here too.[42]

5.2.5 Support to national policy formation

As described earlier, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in education policy was executed by the Education and Training 2010 program. It set benchmarks for the Member States in the field of education policy, and indicators were defined to track achievement of these common goals. In addition, cluster activities/thematic working groups (later working groups) were developed for mutual learning. The ET2010 program was linked to the overall goals of the Lisbon process, and the joint reports of Member States and the Commission reported on the achievement of common goals.

There was a view that the Member States – and especially the administrations – may have benefited from ET2010 in general, and in particular, the different reviews

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41. OB: "Ei se oo selvä, mut ainakin meille jotka tekee, ehkä sellaiset jotka ovat ministeriössä ajattelee että ei me varmaan ihan väärässä muutki näyttää tekevän – voi olla et kaikki menee väärään – mut siitä huolimatta se antaa tietynlai henkistä varmuutta sille tekemiselle."
42. OF: "se EUA on ollut merkittävässä roolissa sen tietoisuuden ajajana. (…) Silloin EUA oli kyllä sellainen aika virkeä yliopistojen äänen käyttäjä. Siihen täälläkin vedottiin. Meillä oli muutamia tyyppejä, jotka seuras kuitenkin sitä keskustelua aika tiiviisti, toi sitä viestiä tännekin päin."

and studies on the performance of different education systems supported national discussion. Mutual understanding between the Member States has increased as a result of ET2010 (MO2) because the OMC provided comparative tools (MO4). However, only two interviewees mentioned ET2010 objectives that were of particular interest: efficient use of resources and performance levels in education. The first issue was tracked under the strategic objective "Making the best use of resources", which focused on increasing investment in education and its quality. This objective was followed with a structural indicator, "Increase in per capita investment in human resources". The second issue related to the objective "Making learning more attractive", which was followed by indicators of participation levels in higher education and the proportion of the population aged 18–24 with only lower secondary education achievement and not pursuing education or training (Council 2002).

The general understanding was that the EU HE policy had some degree of effect on university reform, but some people also made a connection to the structural development of the Finnish higher education system. Therefore, it is possible to say that the general understanding here was that the new EU HE policy and the HE modernisation agenda supported national policy formation (MHE2).

The following quotations give an idea of the perceived connection between EU level discussion on the importance of the HE sector and national developments, as understood by the interviewees.

> But very clearly I think those objectives of the University Reform, what I looked it did arise from here. So in this sense she [Finland] has been a pretty conscientious EU Member States once again yes.[43]
> Yes it, you can find there probably roots there for very many, the new University Act and this entire funding basis and structural development. Yes it has influenced a lot I think.[44]
> There is a clear connection to the Finnish University Reform (…)[45]

Clearly, the interviewees saw the connection both to the two main developments in the HE policy of the last decade and to the discussion on resources.[46] It is noteworthy that

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43. S1: "Mutta hyvin selkeästi mun mielestä ne yliopistouudistuksen tavoitteet, mitä tossa katoin niin ne nousee täältä. Tässäkin mielessä on aika tunnollinen EU-jäsen ollut kyllä."
44. S2: "Kyl se, sielt löytyy varmaan se juuret hyvin monelle, uudelle yliopistolaille ja koko tän rahoituspohjalle ja rakenteelliselle kehittämiselle. Kyllä se on vaikuttanut must paljon."
45. "S4: Siellähän on ihan selvä yhteys Suomen yliopistouudistukseen (…)"
46. Already in 2003 the Research and Technology Council stated that the core funding of the universities should be strengthened as part of the development of knowledge society. TTN (2003).

the stakeholders saw this connection even more clearly than the officials: three officials out of six were more careful about connecting the EU and national developments. This will be further discussed in category D, which presents those understandings that did not see the EU influence as that significant.

Several interviewees noted that EU initiatives such as the EU HE modernisation agenda were useful arguments for political decision-makers, for Members of Parliament preparing the government program and for the heads of the universities, but they were seen as less relevant for the staff at universities.

There was a group of interviewees who saw the connection between EU HE policy and Finnish HE policy more clearly than other interviewees. This may be accounted for by the background of these people, which differed a little from the others. Those who saw the connection strongly were mainly advocates of the new steering system for universities and were working closely for the University Reform in Finland, most of them from the beginning of the project. They may therefore have had a deeper understanding than the other interviewees of the whole reform process and of international influences. According to the interviews, the Finnish officials responsible for higher education policy and the key actors at the Commission found a common denominator in the EU HE modernisation agenda. Finland had already been an active member in the Bologna process, and there were good relationships with key people in Brussels.

> *Modernisation agenda since 2003, how do you see the connection to our national discussion?*
> Well, it was really <u>strong.</u> Saying that the higher education policy actions [EU] were strongest about that time.[47]

The interviews included numerous perceptions of the issues in the EU HE modernisation agenda that were understood to be particularly relevant to Finnish HE policy formation, but these were only mentioned as remarks, without defining what was really meant. For this reason, only those national HE policy issues that were mentioned as having a connection to the EU discussion are noted here. On the whole, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this data about issues that were of particular relevance to Finnish HE policy because that was not systematically discussed in the interviews. The three issues that generated most utterances were *third mission* (referring apparently to the interaction of universities with the surrounding society; see more for instance at KKA 2013); *quality* (with an emphasis on quality assurance and the need for high quality

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47. OF: ”Niin sehän oli tosi <u>vahvaa</u> . Siis korkeakoulupoliittinen toiminta [EU:n] oli vahvimmillaan about näihin aikoihin.”

HE); and *mobility* (the need for international student and staff exchange). Other issues mentioned relevant in the interviews are noted in Appendix 12.

Finally, the stakeholders in particular saw that EU soft law may be helpful in national discussions (MSL6). As already mentioned, the Commission's initiatives were generally seen to be more important than the Council's decisions. The stakeholders seem to use the EU arguments actively, but they also lobby on the EU documents in the preparation phase when those documents may support their ideas. They also saw that the phase of the document or process is less significant than the theme, and the fact that issue was brought up in the first place. The importance of the process as a whole was brought up in the interviews. It is fairly difficult to follow the proceedings of single documents in the EU circle, but the topics and issues are quite widely noted nationally, especially when they are brought up for the first time.

(…) When those [documents] have the right direction, we use them.
And do lobbying to the content of those papers as well
Yes, yes absolutely(...)[48]

This kind of guiding documents coming from the EU may ease the discussion little bit.[49]

Yes that those have been good those Commission's incentives. Then we have to remember that people matter and people bring the ideas. (…) This has become bigger this crop, people travel and so – when these things transfer.[50]

EU HE soft law was also perceived as a benchmarking tool, providing another reference point as a political statement in support of national policy formation.

Perceived influence varies from pressure to support, and the methods of influencing are multiple, but the significance of this influence seems to be determined by national actors. They may choose whether the use of certain methods is to their advantage or not, and whether to import ideas from EU level to national discussion. To conclude, figure 8 below presents the variation in meanings of the EU's perceived influence on national HE policy formation.

48. S1: "(…) Silloin kun ne on sen suuntaisia, niin me käytetään. J*a lobbaatte niiden sisältöihin* S1: kyllä, kyllä ehdottomasti."
49. S7: "Tämmösillä EU-piiristä tulevilla ohjaavilla dokumenteilla voi ehkä päästä keskustelussa pykälän eteenpäin."
50. S3: "Kyllä se, et ne ne on ollut hyviä noi komission herätteet. Ja sitten täytyy muistaa, et kaikki on kuitenkin ihmisiä ja ihmisien mukana liikkuu ajatukset. (…) Tää on tullut laajemmaksi tää porukka, ihmiset reissaa ja näin – jolloin nää asiat siirtyy."
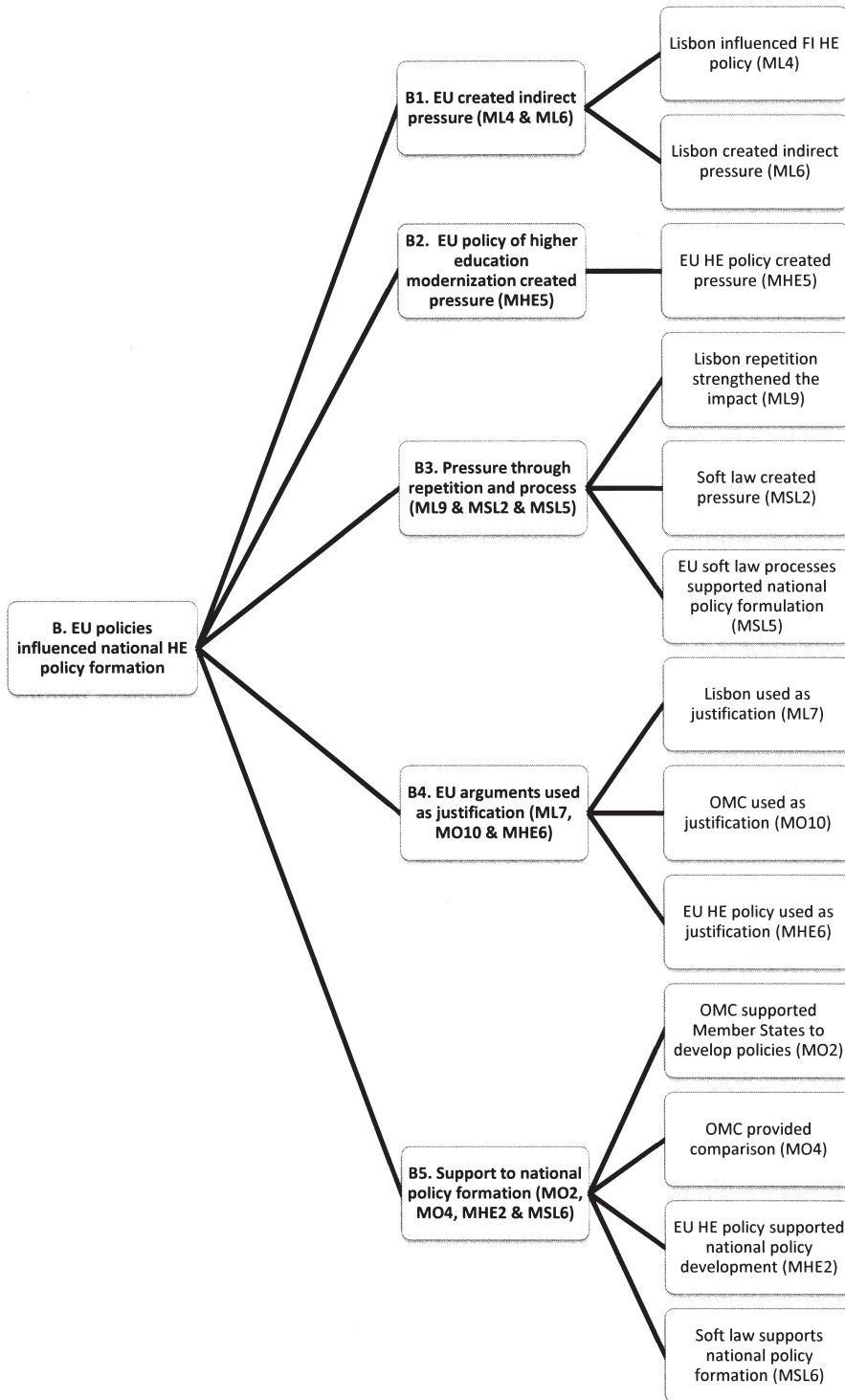
Figure 8. Variation of meanings in category B.

5.3 Fusion of sources

Since the Finnish HE experts here understood that Finland used various external and internal inputs in national HE policy formation, the third category of description (C) is "The EU cooperation in HE is part of a fusion". EU HE policy was one of these sources, but it was not the only one. Second, the experts pointed out that they were not quite sure of the origins of HE modernisation initiatives as it all seemed like a mélange of different ideas, sources and actors. In category C, the understandings indicate both the role of EU cooperation in national HE policy formation and how the Commission acts as a mediator of preferences. In this category, then, the levels of analysis are nation state and EU level.

Unlike the previous categories, there are only two subcategories in category C, connected with only three categories of meanings (under the themes Lisbon, EU HE policy and soft law). The utterances behind the meanings are recorded in Appendix 10. The referential and structural aspects constituting the main results for this category are shown in Table 8. The deduction in this category C is that national policy is not formed in a vacuum but may be influenced by a wide variety of external arguments. The European Commission may be among the mediators of messages, but EU soft law is considered "too soft" to cause direct change in the Member States.

Table 8. Referential and structural aspects of category C.

Category of description C: Fusion	
Referential aspect – What is the meaning	**Structural aspect – How is the phenomenon seen**
C1. EU arguments can be used like other external arguments in national policy formation.	It is difficult to separate the significance of EU cooperation from other forms of external influence.
C2. EU has multiple influence methods.	Soft law alone would not have caused anything in the Member States.

5.3.1 EU arguments are one part of a larger context

It was argued that all the discussions on the role of the universities in last decade were of a piece or in a same "bundle" like one of the interviewees put it. Some referred to the Lisbon Strategy as justifying the need for university reform while others noted the discussion that took place at the European rectors' conferences or within the Bologna context (ML10).

We must really go there where we were about to launch the university reform, which curve can be returned to the discussion in the beginning of the 21st century. That there was this Lisbon, how much it affected then the EUA processing and our rectors' councils alignments about increasing autonomy, away from government office status. So I think it is little that kind of bundle.[51]

Even though most of the interviewees understood that there was a connection between EU HE policy and the national discussion, and some of them thought that the EU discussion in particular had a significant impact on national HE policy, most of them also understood that the EU agenda was only one of the factors affecting Finnish HE policy formation. The Finnish HE debate was seen to be more like a fusion of various sources at the international and national level, and the EU level discussion was not the only external influence that had an impact (MHE8).

Many previous discussions and developments in national higher education policy, as well as international assessments, the work of OECD and the Bologna process also impacted on Finnish university reform and the structural development of the HE sector. It was understood that civil servants, who deliver the messages to the politicians and universities, are generally familiar with such EU level discussions. It was considered to be sometimes wise, and sometimes not that necessary, to use the EU argument as a broader context, depending on the audience.

I have tried to put it on a slide, that there become quite many forces. It depends little who you ask and what perspective you have. This is hindsight, but I have this kind of belief that the modernisation of HEIs had not succeeded if the forces from the higher education community had not wanted it (…).[52]

It was one thing among others; one cannot say that this is one above all other. And then it is part of the game to say that the universities themselves have emphasized the greater autonomy. But you cannot ignore that either.[53]

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51. OF: "Pitää mennä ihan oikeasti sinne kun yliopistouudistus päästiin käynnistämään niin kylhän sen kaaren voi ihan selvästi palauttaa siihen 2000-luvun alun keskusteluun. Et siinä oli tää Lissabon, miten paljon se vaikutti sitten EUAn käsittelyyn ja meidän rehtorineuvostojen linjauksiin siitä, että enemmän autonomiaa, irti tilivirastostatuksesta. Niin musta se on vähän sellaista yhteen kietoutuvaa nippua."

52. OB: "Mä oon jollekin kalvolle sitä yrittänyt laittaa, että aika monta vaikuttajaa siihen tulee. Se riippuu vähän keneltä kysyy ja mistä perspektiivistä tarkastelee. Tää on jälkiviisautta, sellainen usko mulla on, että korkeakoulujen modernisaatio ei olisi onnistunut ellei korkeakouluyhteisön vaikuttajat olisi sitä halunnut."

53. S3: "Se oli yksi asia muitten joukossa, ei voi sanoa niin, että tää on ylitse kaiken. Ja sit siinä on tietynlaista pelisilmää sanoa, että yliopistot ovat itse korostaneet suurempaa autonomiaa. Mutta ei sitä myöskään voi sivuuttaa."

> Then it all, international and national will have same direction. The motives were different, but the will was to the same direction, that kind of more autonomy to the universities.[54]
>
> Circle, where it is kind of difficult to separate any one's roles, it is kind of joint effect of different actors most likely.[55]

In a soft law sector such as EU higher education policy, it seems impossible to measure the implementation or straight causality of such external policy influence because, in a modern, globalized world, domestic policies are not developed in a vacuum to the exclusion of other influential forces. This was emphasised by several officials.

> But it is awfully difficult to point out that what comes from the EU agenda, Bologna agenda and what its then national, we do not have that kind of vacuum where you could observe that had happened if we had only EU cooperation, Bologna process or only this national developing in its own vacuum.[56]

The significance of OECD cooperation was underlined in several interviews, in which interviewees saw that the OECD, as an organisation focused on industrialised countries, was even more significant to Finland than the EU. The OECD had already raised similar issues, in the 1990s, with particular regard to the quality and funding of higher education. The OECD also had tools that the EU did not have: The Reviews of National Education Policies and the Thematic Reviews. The OECD conducted its first higher education policy assessment in Finland in 1994, and most recently in 2006 (OPM 2005; OECD 2006). The OECD was able to make country-specific and policy-specific recommendations for its member countries, something that the EU was unable to do until in 2012 because of the subsidiarity principle.[57] The OECD documents were therefore more precise and more detailed in their observations on

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54. S5: "Sitten se kaikki, kansainvälinen ja kansallinen tahtotila osoitti samaan suuntaan. Motiivit oli erilaiset, mutta tavallaan tahtotila osoitti samaan suuntaan, että ikään kuin yliopistoille enemmän autonomiaa."
55. S6: "Kehä, josta ikään kuin vaikee erotella kenenkään rooleja, yhteisvaikutus sitten ehkä enemmänkin."
56. OA: "Mut hirveen vaikea osoittaa sitä, että mikä on niinku EU-asialistan vaikutusta, Bologna-asialistan vaikutusta ja mikä sit sitä kansallista, meillä ei niinkun ole sellaista tyhjiötä, jossa voisi tarkastella, että mitä olisi tapahtunut, jos meillä olisi vain EU-yhteistyö, vaan Bologna prosessi tai vaan tää kansallinen kehittäminen täällä omassa tyhjiössä."
57. In 2011 and 2012, economic policy coordination was strengthened and the European Semester started to follow the Member States' performance in Country Specific Recommendations. The DGEAC launched a first rehearsal based on country-specific observation in education policies in 2012.

the Finnish system than the EU documents, which were political statements rather than assessments or studies and never really that profound on a country level.

On the other hand, Finns had already been using comparative information from different education systems with some enthusiasm. Several interviewees mentioned that there had been a tradition of following international statistical comparisons closely.

> In Finland we have a classic view on the indicators and benchmarks, already from the OECD times, that those are good assistance.[58]

Now, a decade after the launch of Lisbon and Bologna processes, the interviewees perceived that those two concurrent processes had rather different goals. Even though higher education experts, in particular at the universities, confused the two processes – especially in the beginning, and sometimes even on purpose[59] – the interviewees could now identify the different purposes and impacts of these two processes (Lisbon and Bologna). The interviewees understood that the Lisbon process, and the EU HE policy agenda that followed it, differed from the Bologna process in terms of content. The EU focused on the role of the universities as engines for the economy and therefore emphasised the HE system. The Bologna process, on the other hand, was more student-oriented from the beginning, focusing on higher education and degree structure.

5.3.2 Multiple dimensions

When asked about the connection between EU soft law in higher education and national policy formation, most of the interviewees argued that they did not believe that EU soft law on HE introduced by the Commission and the Council alone would have made any difference in Member States (MSL3).

Instead, they saw that the Commission plays a role as a mediator of policy messages. First, it was noted that the Commission is an interactive organisation that absorbs information from a wide range of sources (cf. Shattock 2010 in 2.3.6), and the Commission is a popular target of lobbying. As mentioned previously, the Commission

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58. OD: "Indikaattoreista ja vertailuarvoista meillä on Suomessa sellainen klassinen näkemys, jo OECD-ajoista, että niistä on apua."
59. SiVL 2/2000 and E55/2001: The Bologna process was presented to the Finnish Parliament as an EU process in 1999. The interviewees estimated that this was done either accidentally or on purpose, since Parliament needed to be informed about participation in an intergovernmental process that was evidently leading to a certain level of harmonization. The EU coordination system proved useful for this purpose.

needs support, but it also needs ideas for policy development. It is easily forgotten that the staff involved with higher education policies at the Commission amount to only a handful of people. The fact that the need for university reform was a message that came from various sources to both the Commission and to the Member States may have played a role in making the connection between EU level discussion and the national discussion more apparent. The universities and their lobbying organisations as well as industry all played an active role in bringing that message to EU level.

> But yes probably that those influence methods are extremely multiple. That is not that, the EU is not a monolith, so does the impressiveness goes also here on the soft law side that when they have those parties involved awfully a lot. When they use those lobbying organizations. For instance EUA and LERU[60] probably existed already there about that time. They receive different channels for influencing and then it is noticed that that pressure to develop different things is parallel according to the understandings of many involved. Those small streams create the larger effect. That would the soft law only have worked through the Member States, probably not.[61]

> Yes it has arrived often from multiple directions, like we just discussed, the EU has rarely proposed and decided anything that was not heard sometime before the process. In the EU it takes quite long time before we get to the Council.[62]

Interviewees also mentioned that the universities' associations were actively contacting and even lobbying the Commission, especially in the preparation phase of initiatives. It was stressed that the Commission appreciates these direct connections with the universities because they do not want to form "tripartite" links with the Member States and the Universities. On the other hand, these direct connections with the actors are difficult for Member States because they do not know who the Commission consults

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60. European University Association and the League of European Research Universities.
61. OF: "Mutta kyllä varmaan sitten se, että ne vaikuttamisen tahot on niin tavattoman moninaiset. Toihan ei sit kuitenkaan oo, et EU ei monoliitti, sillä tavalla se vaikuttavuus sitten tällä soft law puolellakin menee, et kun sillä on niitä keskustelukumppaneitakin hirveen paljon. Kun ne käyttää näitä lobborganisaatioita vaikka EUA:ta ja LERU oli silloin varmaan jo olemassa about noihin aikoihin et ne saa niitä eri vaikutuskanavia ja sitten huomataan, että se paine kehittää eri asioita samansuuntaista monien mielestä. Et erillisistä puroista tulee sitten se iso vaikuttavuus. Oliskо se ollut pelkästään tehtävissä sillä että soft law olis purrut pelkästään jäsenvaltioiden kautta niin ei varmaankaan."
62. OG: "Tullut montaa kautta usein, niin kuin äsken oli puhetta niin harvoin EU on esittänyt tai päättänyt mitään mistä ei olisi kuultu joskus enne sen prosessin alkamista. EU:ssa ne kestää yleensä aika kauan aikaa ennen kuin päästään neuvostoon saakka."

when preparing the initiatives, a fact underlined by most of the civil servants. In these circumstances, it is quite difficult to track the source of certain EU initiatives and whether they are created solely by the Commission, derive from the wishes of certain Member State(s) or even result from active lobbying by universities or stakeholder organizations and/or industry.

Second, it was understood that the Commission disseminates the message of EU HE policy through several channels, including the European Council, Member States, university associations, the Bologna process, Business Europe and labour market organisations. For the Commission, this was a wise tactic in the case of the HE modernisation agenda, and it seemed to turn out quite well. The interviewees noted that this was a new tactic that the Commission probably started to use only after the Lisbon Strategy.

Figure 9 below illustrates the understandings of the multiple dimensions of influencing from the viewpoint of the Commission. The key message of this category emphasises the role of the Commission as a mediator. The soft law introduced by the Commission and the Council would not have had an effect unless it was created in cooperation with relevant parties and then mediated to national policy formation through various channels.
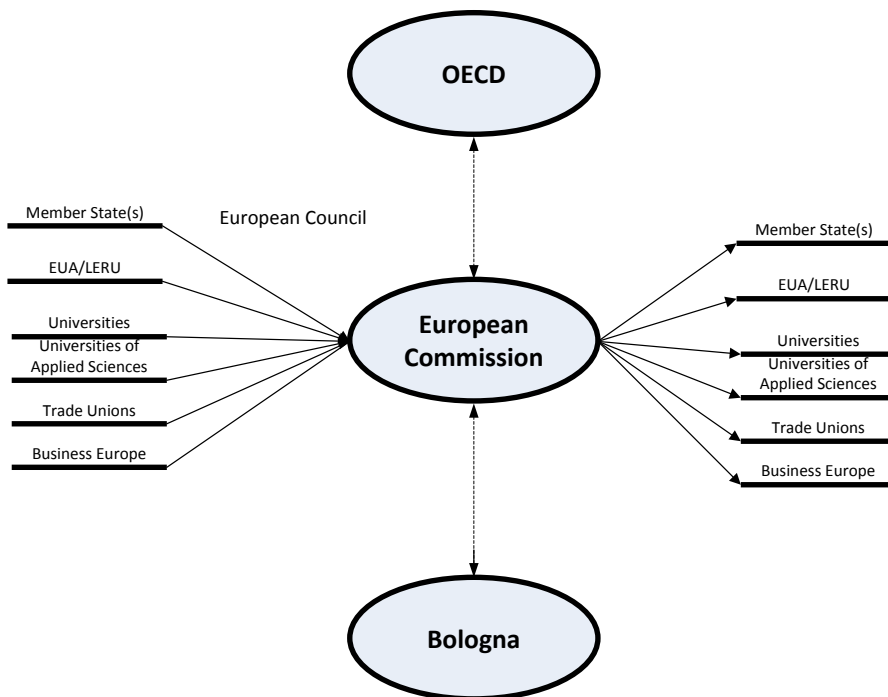
Figure 9. European Commission as a mediator.

In conclusion, category C (see Figure 10) describes understandings of the EU as one factor among other external and internal factors influencing national policy formation. Furthermore, the understandings in this category highlighted the mediating role of the Commission and the multidimensional way in which EU initiatives are formulated and then promoted at European and national level.
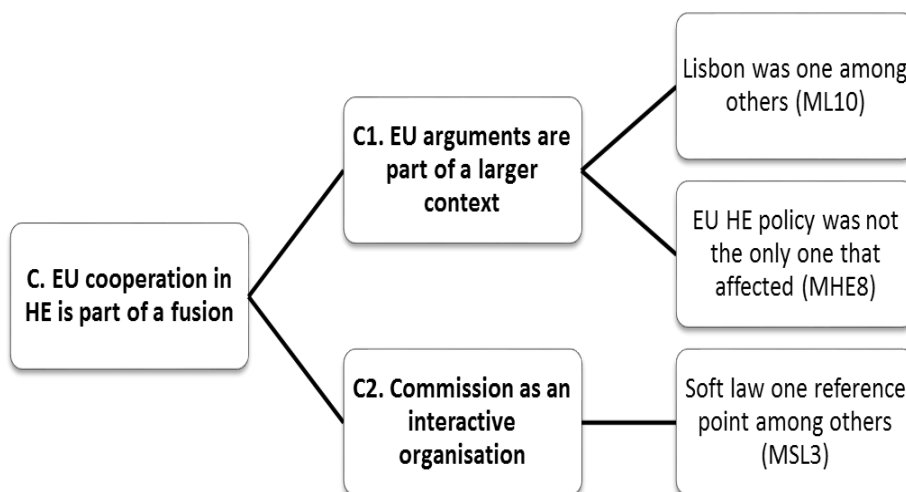
Figure 10. Variation of meanings in category C.

5.4 Irrelevant and resisted EU cooperation

The fourth category of description (D) comprises perceptions describing the EU cooperation in HE policies as either a threat or irrelevant to national policy formation, and therefore resisted or rejected. This category is given the name "EU cooperation in higher education is irrelevant and resisted". It is also noteworthy that some interviewees were unable to assess the relevance of the OMC, which is why the meaning "unknown" falls also under this category.

The category is divided to three subcategories that describe the failure of EU HE policy cooperation. Utterances for the categories of meanings are listed in Appendix 11. The referential and structural aspects of this category (Table 9) indicate the reasons for irrelevant forms of cooperation. There was a fear of EU cooperation, but on the other hand, the cooperation was seen as too vague, and the influence failed.

Table 9. Referential and structural aspects of category D.

Category of description D: Irrelevant and resisted	
Referential aspect **—What is the meaning**	**Structural aspect** **—How is the phenomenon seen**
D1. EU cooperation in HE is perceived as a threat.	Some people feared the results of engaging in EU cooperation in the field of education.
D2. EU's influencing methods failed.	The attempts of the EU to influence are vague.
D3. Impact of the EU rejected.	EU has no impact on national policy formation.

5.4.1 EU cooperation seen as a threat

In some of the interviews, there were understandings of perceived threat. Here, however, this means that the interviewees did not see new EU HE policy as a threat to the national higher education system, but rather that some other people may have seen it as a threat (MHE4). The ideas of the Humboldtian and the entrepreneurial university also divided different generations, both at the ministry and in the universities.

Another perceived issue related to a possible threat from EU cooperation was that Finnish negotiators in the Council had to make sure that the formulations in Council conclusions were always reasonable for the Finnish HE system. The Commission's initiatives were able to state what the Commission wanted, but the formulations on which the Member States agreed had to be acceptable to all. It was argued that Finns were careful to ensure that there were no incentives on tuition fees or accreditation systems in the Council conclusions because both were politically sensitive issues, and there was no desire to make the national discussion more difficult.

Three officials and one stakeholder mentioned that some Finns also saw the Lisbon process as a threat (ML5). There was a fear that, because of the Lisbon Strategy's emphasis on innovation, the universities would be seen as serving only the economy in the future and that they would not be encouraged to fulfil their duties to education. The Parliament also stressed that improvement of the economy is not at odds with other goals in education (SiVL 1/2005).

The fears, however, mostly concerned the nature of the process, that is, the OMC (MO8). In particular, the Parliament had discussed the issue of ET2010 follow-up, using indicators and benchmarks and comparisons between Member States, on many occasions. The threat of increasing bureaucracy, in the form of annual reporting to the Commission, was another reason behind the hesitancy about the ET2010 and Lisbon

process.[63] In 2005, Parliament emphasised that the OMC exercise should not mean that competence in education policy would move to EU level, away from national decision making (SiVL 6/2005). In 2008, the climate in Parliament had become more positive about EU cooperation in education policy and ET2010 (SiVL 3/2008).

> So how much to follow these soft sectors, where to use the indicators, must the national administrations oblige to report – does it become bureaucratic and heavy process. And as a matter of fact, the competence questions were raised as well…I cannot remember…yes, indicators and especially benchmarks were discussed at the Parliament.[64]

Two interviewees noted that the "hype" of Lisbon remained only a discussion among the elite, and many members of the service at the Ministry were afraid of the new European influence.

> The staff at the MOE was little polarized in that sense that there were those who saw a connection to Europe and that European higher education policy could be something that had a role and those who thought that this is system we constructed, which has its own characteristics and it should not be exposed too much to that interaction.[65]

In relation to the Lisbon Strategy and its follow-up with the ET2010, the Finnish Parliament began to remind the government regularly that the development of education systems falls within the competence of each Member State, and that the national circumstances must always be taken into consideration (see e.g. SiVL 15/2002, SiVL

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63. In SiVL 1/2004 and in SiVL 15/2002, the Education and Culture Committee stresses the need to use already existing statistics (OECD) in the creation of indicators and emphasises the right to decide at national level the right measures in reaching those benchmarks. Altogether, the Committee heard 15 different stakeholders when forming its opinion on the OMC structure in education in 2002. This is nearly ten times the number of experts it hears nowadays when forming an opinion in EU affairs.
64. OD: Eli missä määrin sitten seurata täällä pehmeemmillä sektoreilla, missä määrin voidaan hyödyntään indikaattoreita, pitääkö kansallisia hallintoja velvoittaa raportoimaan – tuleeko siitä kovin byrokraattinen ja raskas prosessi. Ja kyllä ne itse asiassa nousi ne toimivaltaan liittyvät kysymykset…mä en muista..kyllä indikaattoreista ja varsinkin vertailuarvoista käytiin eduskunnassa keskustelua.
65. S3: " OKM:n [OPM:n] virkamieskunta oli hieman polarisoitunutta tai kahtiajakautunutta siinä mielessä, että oli niitä jotka näki että yhteys Eurooppaan ja eurooppalainen korkeakoulupolitiikka on jotain jolla voisi olla joku rooli ja sitten oli niitä, jotka ajattelivat, että tämä on meidän rakentamamme järjestelmä, jossa on omat erityispiirteensä, eikä sitä pidä liikaa altistaa sille vuorovaikutukselle."

1/2004). Here, again, is a sense of the fear of losing competence in education policy to the EU.

5.4.2 Methods of cooperation failed

As described earlier, industry and the leaders of the universities emphasised the importance of the Lisbon goals, but the message remained fairly abstract for most, especially at the university level:

> It changed the discussion a little, but this general remained and still is that it was discussion of a very limited group of people. (…) If we asked now and made a survey, that what is the relevant content of the Lisbon strategy to universities, I would say that 60-70 % would not know.[66]

It should be noted here that several stakeholders were unable to assess the concrete significance of the Lisbon Strategy for higher education institutions, having followed neither EU policies nor higher education policies that closely when the strategy was topical. Neither were they able to assess how useful the OMC had been in education (MO7) as they had never encountered it.

Irrelevant soft law

In most of the interviews, interviewees were asked whether anything might have been different in Finland without the soft law of EU HE policy and its various outcomes. This question was posed to encourage interviewees to consider the significance of both the Commission's initiatives and the decisions made in the Council of the EU. Even though they saw the soft law as relevant, they were realistic about its influence (MSL4).

> Do you think something would have been different in Finland without this soft law, the modernization agenda?
> Well, that is an interesting thing, because it is quite soft. So that it is filtered for instance to the HEIs, political decision-makers through us, civil servants. That then it is that how we have put it to the reasoning and we do put there always

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66. OG: "Kyllähän se muutti sitä keskustelua jonkin verran, mutta semmonen yleinen jäi ja on edelleenkin, että se oli hyvin suppean piirin keskustelua. (…) Jos nytkin kysyisi ja tekisi kyselyn, että mikä on Lissabonin strategian olennainen niinkun sisältö korkeakoulujen kannalta, niin sanosin 60-70 % ei tietäisi."

whether it has first been on the national or international agenda. So that reasoning is always formed quite similar.[67]

Some officials were more hesitant than the stakeholders to make a connection between the EU level and national level discussions (MHE3). It was argued that it may be politically wise not to clearly connect national developments to the EU process, but instead to highlight that the initiative came from the universities themselves.

> But it is always a two-sided thing – does it help your political argument that you say that this is done also elsewhere or would be more of a hindrance than a help.[68]

It was understood that actors in the higher education sector, especially at the institutional level, confuse the various levels of discussion and the sources of ideas. When the processes are unclear, the origin of the idea can be confused and there may be a greater risk of misunderstanding. This understanding of the significance of soft law may also be one reason for the vague transfer of EU messages at national level: there is a fear that the messages would be misunderstood and that EU policies would be viewed as mandatory despite their purely informative and supportive nature. On the other hand, several interviewees saw that the university sector does not follow the EU level discussion, nor they can put the discussion in the right context.

> It depends partly of that that one does not understand if this is an EU action or minister's project or both. I used to say in the old days that it would be good if there were at each university one to two persons who were well informed in these issues.[69]

It was widely understood that the responsibility to bring forward the EU agenda in a Member State lies with the Ministry of Education, with civil servants transferring ideas and discussions to the national level. This task was also questioned, and it was

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67. *Olisiko Suomessa ollut jotakin erilailla ilman tätä soft law'ta, modernisaatioagendaa?* OF: Jaa-a, se on kiinnostava juttu, koska tietysti se on aika softia. Et tota, suodattuu esim korkeakouluille, poliittisille päättäjille aika paljon meidän kautta, virkamiesten kautta. Että sitten se on sitä että miten me on puettu sitä perusteluihin aina ja mehän helposti laitetaan siihen aina, että onko se ollut kansallisella agendalla ensin vai sitten kansainvälisellä agendalla ensin. Niin ne perustelut muokkautuu aina vähän sitten samankaltaiseksi.

68. OB: "Mut se on aina kakspiippunen juttu – auttaako se sun poliittista argumentaatiota, että sanot et näin tehdään muuallakin vai onko se sille haitaksi."

69. OG: "Se on osittain kiinni siitä, että ei ymmärretä onks tää EU-hanke vai ministerihanke vai molempia. Mä ennen vanhaan aina sanoin, että olisi hyvä jos jokaisella yliopistolla olisi kaksi viiva kolme henkilöä, jotka olisivat hyvin perillä näistä asioista.

argued that it should not be the mission of national officials to bring forward the Commission's ideas.

> (…) they say to us, that take care that this issue is spread in your country to wider knowledge. Yes, alright, we do take care of that to certain extent, but I do not know if that is really our job to bring it the last [the Commission's agenda].[70]

According to their interest, then, Member States may either use or dismiss the EU arguments in HE policy. A few interviewees also noted that the relevance of soft law may be quite minimal because it does not include sanctions in the field of education. The effects of Council decisions are vaguely followed, and the only sanction is the "naming and shaming" in the Commission's future initiatives.

A clear result, perhaps unsurprising, was that the Council's decisions – resolutions, conclusions and sometimes even recommendations – basically have no significance to Member States – that is, to the Ministry of Education, according to most of the Finnish HE experts interviewed. When the interviewees talked about EU HE policy, they commonly mentioned the initiatives of the Commission. When asked about the significance of Council's decisions, their answers were clear: there is no perceived impact on national policy. The experts did not understand the Council's work as having really any impact.

> But sometimes one thinks really that if we wanted to improve the competitiveness of Europe, that this kind of immensely heavy machinery runs and awful amount of people is busy and flying and holding meetings and stating and reasoning and then comes those conclusions [of the Council] and those have now basically no impact (…) that I did sometimes wondered a bit.[71]

> That I do not know anyone that would actively read the Council conclusions.[72]

It was noted that the Council negotiations include only the representatives of Member States; it is up to each Member State to consult its stakeholders on national viewpoints.

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70. OC: "(…) meille sanotaan, että pitäkää huoli, että tämä asia leviää teidän maassa tietoisuuteen. Niin, okei, kyllähän me tiettyyn rajaan asti pidetään huoli, mutta en mä tiedä onks se niinkun meidän tehtävä viimeseen asti viedä [komission agendaa]."
71. S6: "mut välillä mietti kyllä, että jos halutaan Euroopan kilpailukykyä parantaa niin se, että tämmöinen valtavan raskas koneisto pyörii ja hirvee määrä ihmisiä työllistyy ja lentää ja kokoustaa ja lausuu ja päättelee ja sitten tulee ne päätelmät ja niillä nyt ei käytännössä oo mitenkään suurta merkitystä (…) kyllä mä välillä vähän ihmettelin.
72. S3: "Et en mä tiedä ketään, joka lukis aktiivisesti neuvoston päätelmiä."

As compared to the Bologna process, where all stakeholders are participants even at Ministerial level meetings, the Council of the EU does not look sufficiently transparent, or even legitimate, to discuss issues concerning the autonomy of the universities. This was identified as a weak point in EU decision-making process by several interviewees.

> (…) Ordinary EU preparation is awfully lead by the civil-servants (…) the minister speaks in the Council and the speeches are prepared by the officials, when they have looked at and listened to the sector.[73]

The failure of the OMC

Education and Training 2010 programme (ET2010) was not seen to be as relevant to higher education policy as to other levels of education. The Finnish experts estimated that the ET2010 strategy had basically no relevance to national higher education policies (MO5).

> (…) it is difficult to see that it [ET2010] had in any revolutionary way been apparent in our national debate for instance.[74]

> I am not sure was it there the ET, it had impact, but on the follow-up of the whole system, but this role of the universities was brought as its own, as its own thing forward. And yes it was then brought to the conclusions of the European Council. But could it have been, that in a sense that those, universities could have been brought up despite the ET2010?[75]

The stakeholders mentioned in particular that the EU objectives deriving from ET2010 were irrelevant to actors at the higher education institutions. There was an overall view that the Member States, especially the administrations, may have benefitted from ET2010 in general – especially from the different reviews and studies on the

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73. OB: "(…) varsinainen EU-valmistelu on hirvittävän virkamiesvetoista (…) neuvostossa puhuu ministeri ja ministeripuheet valmistelee virkamiehet, tietysti katseltuaan ja kuunneltuaan sitä kenttää."
74. OF: "(…) on vaikea nähdä, että se olis mitenkään mullistavalla tavalla näkynyt esim. meidän kansallisessa keskustelussa."
75. OB: "Mä en oo ihan varma, että oliko siinäkään sitten se ET, sillä oli merkitystä, mut koko järjestelmän seurannan kannalta, mutta tämä yliopistojen rooli vietiin myös ihan omanakin, ihan omana asiana eteenpäin. Ja kyllä se tuli sitten Eurooppa-neuvoston päätelmiin. Mutta olisiko se sitten kuitenkin ollut niin, että se olisi tavallaan ne, yliopistot nostettu siitä ET10:stä riippumatta?"

performance of different education systems – but there were reservations about the usefulness of the entire ET2010 process to actors in the field.

One reason for this might have been that EU HE policy was deliberately kept somewhat separate from the larger ET2010 program. ET2010 focused largely on generic issues and skills, and the Bologna process was such an important activity that there was no need to emphasise higher education issues in ET2010.

> And then I think, that it may have happened, that the Bologna landslide was recognized, that it makes pretty right things anyways. That degree structures, quality assurance and then later this social dimension came along, and the [qualifications] framework, that it overrode with quite a big force. So higher education went through that (…).[76]

Those who knew the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) were rather critical about its significance as a method in relation to higher education policy, and to Finland (MO6).

> So I would not exaggerate, I would not keep the method there awfully important. It is in a sense important to us, those who do all the paper work, but I do not and I don't think the community is that indignant at it (…)[77]

This is an interesting discovery because, as already noted, it was the OMC in particular as a comparative method that led to fears about EU involvement in national policy formation. Many of the interviewees noted that the fears of the national Parliament concerning harmonisation during the launch of the OMC have not been realised (MO9).

> Yes, there was a harsh debate on it at the Parliament.
> *Were the fears justified?*
> Well , mainly not, in my opinion (...)[78]

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76. OF: "Ja sitten kun mä luulen, että siinä on saattanut käydä niin, että tunnistettiin toi Bolognan vyöryntä, että se tekee nyt aika oikeita asioita kuitenkin. Että tutkintorakenteet, laadunvarmistus, ja sit myöhemmin tuli vielä tää yhteiskunnallinen aspekti mukaan, ja [tutkintojen] viitekehys, et se jyräs aikamoisella voimalla. Et korkeakoulutus meni sitä kautta (…)."
77. OB: "Eli en mä liioittelisi, en pitäisi hirveän tärkeänä sitä itse metodia siinä. Se on eräällä tavalla meille tärkeätä, me ollaan niitä papereita pyörittämässä, mutta en eikä yhteisö varmaan oo siitä niin kauhean tuohtunut (…)."
78. OG: "Kyllä eduskunnassakin oli raju keskustelu siitä." *Olivatko OMC-pelot aiheellisia?* OG: "No pääosin ei mun mielestä.(…)"

If we look at those indicators or that discussion, there were only obvious things brought up. There was absolutely nothing to be afraid of. That has the power or the competences been moved somewhere, I believe not.[79]

The OMC was seen ineffective also because of the benchmarks. They were not seen relevant or challenging enough for Finland.

It was seen that those indicators, which were used for comparison, were not going to be difficult for Finland. It was not believed otherwise, that Finland would succeed very badly.[80]

Those benchmarks were quite useless for us.[81]

One reason given for the OMC failure was the voluntary nature of the process. There was little follow-up on the OMC, the Education Committee discussed ET2010 only at a very general level and there were no country-specific observations within ET2010. Furthermore, every country can choose the activities it joins and who it assigns to those activities.

Those groups have been established completely on a voluntary basis. Then there is no such a pressure. That is little so that if there is no political pressure that this is an important thing and an important exercise, then one does not prioritise it very high here. So does it go.[82]

One reason for the failure of OMC mentioned by the interviewees was the ineffectiveness of cluster/working group activities; many of the interviewees felt they had not been influential either at the decision-making level or at national level. Neither did the Council of the EU (specifically, the Education Committee) follow the discussions or inputs of the various informal working groups. The Commission organised and

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79. S3: "Jos kattoo niitä indikaattoreita vaikka tai sitä keskustelua niin siellähän tuotiin ilmiselviä asioita esiin. Et siinä ei todella ollut siinä mielessä pelättävää. Siitä, että onko valta tai päätöksenteko siirtynyt jonnekin niin musta ei."
80. S3: "Nähtiin se, että indikaattorit, joilla maita vertailtiin, ei tuu olemaan Suomen osalta hankalia. Muutenkaan ei uskottu, että Suomi pärjäisi kovin huonosti."
81. OF: "Ne tavoitearvot ovat meidän kannalta vähän yhdentekeviä."
82. OF:"Ne ryhmät ne muodostuu täysin vapaaehtoisuuden pohjalta. Niin siinä ei oo ollut semmoista painetta. Sehän on vähän sillain, että jos ei ole poliittista painetta että tää on tärkeä asia ja tärkeä harjoitus niin sitä ei kovin korkealle täällä priorisoida. Niin se vaan menee."

funded the meetings, but the link to developments at Member State level has remained weak. One interviewee did not believe the working groups to be that useful for the Commission either. The "learning" in the groups has remained a privilege for only those officials who took part in the seminars, and this was mentioned both by the participants themselves and by their supervisors at the Ministry.

> I well, do think, that those big reforms do not start by that kind of expert cooperation. So there is government commitment needed and there is no government commitment if those issues are not discussed in a recognized forum, so such as the Education Committee in the EU structure.[83]

> In a long run we do probably get smarter and wiser officials but that has not been realized at the political level, in my opinion.[84]

This ineffective organisation of the thematic working groups has been noticed also by the Commission, which tried to reorganise the OMC groups in 2013 and 2014 (European Commission 2013b; COM 2013b; European Commission 2014).

It was noted that the effects of the OMC impacted only at the expert level at the ministries responsible for higher education. Those who participated in the PLAs, reporting on the Finnish developments to the Commission, probably gained most from the OMC. The process however, was less used by the (political) management of the ministry and by actors at the HEIs.

> So that proved to be, it has turned out to be, such a little guiding and ineffective tool, that those political processes, political declarations, which of course is interesting, so those have brought the development forward much more [refers to Bologna].[85]

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83. OA: "Tota ajattelen näin, et ei nää isot uudistukset, ei ne niin ku lähde liikkeelle pelkästään semmoisella niin kun asiantuntijoiden välisellä yhteistyöllä. Et siihen tarvitaan tää hallitusten sitoutuminen ja sitä hallitusten sitoutumista ei tapahdu, jos ne asiat ei käy keskusteltavana jossakin tämmöisessä ns. tunnustetulla foorumilla, eli just esimerkiksi EU-rakenteissa koulutuskomiteassa."
84. OF: "(…) me saadaan varmaan pitkällä juoksulla fiksumpia ja tietävämpiä virkamiehiä mut et ei se politiikkatasolla mun mielestä ole realisoitunut."
85. OF: " Siis se osoittautui, se on osoittautunut niin vähän ohjaavaksi ja vaikuttavaksi työkaluksi, että ne poliittiset prosessit, poliittiset julkilausumat, mikä sinänsä on tietysti jännä, niin ovat vieneet paljon enemmän kehitystä eteenpäin [viittaa Bolognaan]."

Two interviewees noted that it is up to national governance of education policy to decide whether to take issues forward or not. The objectives should be relevant to all engaged actors, and the HEIs' management should be properly included in the process.

> The EU offers a forum, it offers tools, and it offers such provisions, how it stays, some bring those forward, some not, it depends on the political culture, political culture of management and national priorities.[86]

> Well, it is a joint project where must be probably the ministry and the management of the universities. Yes it should be like that. So so they do have to feel that the objectives are theirs.[87]

5.4.3 Impact rejected

Some interviewees held the view that the EU HE modernisation agenda was not of great significance to Finland (MHE9). They emphasised the importance of other developments, highlighting either the importance of OECD cooperation, which was voluntary and lacked any decision-making power that would rule the future actions of Member States, or of national circumstances that eventually created pressure to reform the system.

> Had there been University Reform in Finland without these communications of the Commission? I believe that there had. My argument is the national context (…) the diminishing of young generations, that we have too many HEIs, that it would have become sooner or later anyway. It was that national pressure.[88]

From another viewpoint, interviewees saw some connection between the EU agenda and national policy development in the EU agenda for higher education policy, but they said that there was no particular need for external arguments in Finnish HE

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86. OG: "EU tarjoo foorumin, tarjoo aseita, tarjoo sellaisia eväitä, kuinka sitten se jää, jotkut vievät eteenpäin, jotkut eivät, riippuu poliittisesta kulttuurista, poliittisesta johtamiskulttuurista ja kansallisista prioriteeteista."
87. S1: "Varmaan se on yhteinen hanke, jossa pitää olla tota varmaan ministeriö ja korkeakoulun johto. Kyllähän se näin pitää olla. Et et kyllähän näiden pitää kokea ne tavoitteet omakseen."
88. S5: "Olisiko Suomessa tehty yliopistouudistusta ilman esim näitä komission tiedonantoja? Mä uskon, että olisi. Mun peruste on kansallinen konteksti (…) nuorisoikäluokkien määrän väheneminen, että meillä on liikaa korkeakouluja, että kyllä se olisi tullut ennemmin tai myöhemmin joka tapauksessa. Se kansallinen paine oli."

policy. It was also pointed out that, in certain circumstances, it may be wiser to say only that this is beneficial to our system.

> Yes you may use those [EU arguments], but of course it may be wiser to motivate in another way, that these things are just beneficial to us. And then find what is like sensible here, that is also one kind of characteristics in Finland that we have used sense here on the way, meaning that we have always looked at what is meaningful for us.[89]

A few interviewees argued that there has been no particular need to use external or international arguments for national reforms (ML11).

> I think that we do not, like in this national implementation, do not talk about anymore that now we do these reforms in the name of Lisbon or now we do according to EU agenda or according to Bologna agenda like this.[90]

One official and one stakeholder made the point that some people were not sure whether the Lisbon Strategy really brought anything new for Finland, saying that the country had already been stressing the importance of knowledge and skills for a long time, and that the benchmarks set within the OMC and followed within the Lisbon process also seemed rather easy for Finland. This may have caused some self-satisfaction in Finland and perhaps a belief that it was not necessary to develop the Finnish system any further.

> (…) It was not new in Finland like that, since we had emphasized the knowledge[91] for long time and we had been praised for that and so on.[92]

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89. S2: "Kyllä niitä voi käyttää, mutta tietysti kyllä ehkä viisaampi ehkä on motivoida muulla tavalla, et nää on nyt hyödyksi ihan meille itsellemme. Ja löytää sit et mikä tässä on niinkun järkevää, se on myös yks semmonen Suomen piirre, et kyl me nyt järkeekin on käytetty tässä aina pitkin matkaa, et katsottu mikä on meidän kannalta mielekästä."
90. OA: "(…) mä luulen, että me ei niinkun tässä kansallisessa toimeenpanossa sitten puhuta enää, että nyt me tehdään Lissabonin strategian nimissä uudistuksia tai nyt me tehdään EU:n asialistan mukaisesti näin tai Bolognan asialistan mukaisesti näin."
91. Finnish osaaminen = know-how, but in this context it refers to EU level discussion that uses term knowledge or skills, meaning the outcomes of good quality education. Later term is more connected to vocation education and training, thus knowledge chosen here. Equally the knowledge triangle is translated as "osaamiskolmio" in Finnish.
92. OG: "(…) Ei se Suomessa sillälailla ollut uutta, kun me oltiin osaamista korostettu hyvin pitkään ja meitä oli kehuttukin siitä ja niinpäin pois."

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policy cooperation in Finnish higher education policy

In conclusion, EU cooperation was perceived as a threat, as a failure, or was completely rejected as useless for Finland. The transfer of EU level discussion depends a lot on individual civil servants, who may or may not bring ideas and discussion from the EU to national policy formation. EU soft law was perceived as "too soft" to have any real impact on national education policies, and Council decisions were seen as irrelevant to Member States.

Those interviewees who did not see the significance of OMC either did not know it or argued that the OMC methods were unsuccessful in spreading information. Furthermore, the officials who knew the ET2010 process well found it disorganised or unsuccessful. It was also found that the benchmarks decided for the ET2010 follow-up process were not challenging enough for Finland, and EU cooperation in this category was seen as somewhat irrelevant to national HE policy formation.
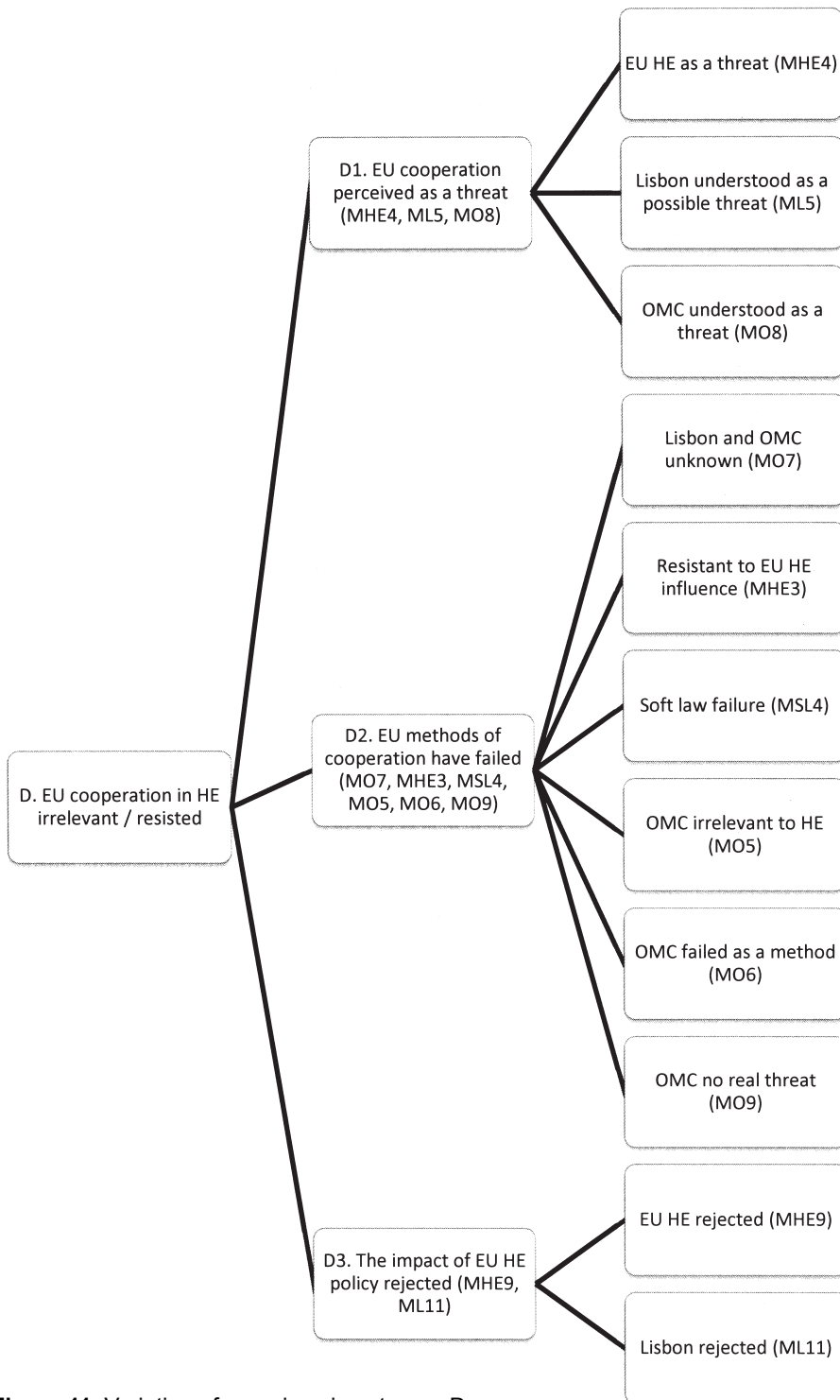
Figure 11. Variation of meanings in category D.

6. THE ALIGNMENT TO THE FRAMEWORK

Phenomenographic analysis attempts to describe the various forms of thought and categories of conceptions relevant to research questions (see for instance Heikkilä 2002). In this study, the purpose was to find understandings on the significance of EU HE policy cooperation in the last decade. In the analysis, four categories of description became apparent. They described the *change* the Lisbon Strategy caused, the *influence* of EU cooperation in HE, the role of this cooperation as one part of a larger *fusion* of internal and external influence, as well as the *irrelevance* of the EU HE cooperation and *resistance* to it in national policy formation.

This chapter connects these different categories to the framework of policy transfer theory and the previous literature. Policy transfer theory may help to comprehend what is significant in EU cooperation and what methods of EU cooperation transfer policies to national level. Exploration of the previous research helps to connect the results to an even wider context. The theoretical framework offers an approach to combining the different findings and observations and can be used as an "overcoat" for the study, but theory alone cannot explain all results (Maxwell 1996, 33). The other purpose of this chapter is to present the outcome space that emerges as the overall product of the research. This outcome space represents the collective anatomy of Finnish experts' awareness, indicating the collective understandings through which EU cooperation in HE is experienced and the relationships between those understandings. The results are presented in the outcome space at the end of the chapter.

6.1 Change in EU cooperation

The first category of description described the change in education policy cooperation at the European level. There was significant change understood at the turn of the century because of the Bologna process and the launch of the Lisbon Strategy, as has already been noted in earlier research (cf. Maassen & Musselin 2009, 9; Van Vught 2011, 65; Walkenhorst 2008, 573). It was understood here that Finland as well as other Member States had previously tended to resist European influence on national policy, but after 2000 the new European emphasis on education, and especially on the importance of the HE sector, was also seen as supporting national goals. This change does not mean, however, that the power of the EU vis-á-vis the Member States increased but rather that the EU level cooperation became more relevant than before.

According to the findings of Capano and Piattoni (2011), the Lisbon Strategy seemed to have a mainly spiritual or 'ideational' impact on education policy actors, and it could therefore be said that its impact was more aspirational than behavioural (Hill 1997; Hill & Hupe 2002). However, it was also seen to have a great impact on HE policy in Finland, as has been noted in other countries (Coate & McLabhrain 2009; Stremfel & Lajh 2010). The new emphasis on the importance of education policies at the EU level created excitement, but it also divided generations. Contrary to Capano and Piattoni's (2011) results, which suggested that the real impact of Lisbon was difficult to assess, the Finnish experts judged the main impact of Lisbon to be that it made EU cooperation in education policy more strategic than before and paved the way for the new EU emphasis on HE policy. The aim to change the significance of EU level cooperation on education policy is also supported by previous research on the OMC (cf. Blomqvist 2007; Štremfel and Lajh 2010; Lange & Alexiadou 2010). Thus, even though the interview data in this research are fairly limited and do not allow generalisations, it is possible to contextualise the results with the outcomes of previous research.

As has already been witnessed in previous research (cf. Blomqvist 2007, Rinne et al 2008, van Vught 2011), the Lisbon Strategy made a significant input to EU education policy, seeing its potential for the continent's competition for global markets. The turn of the century saw concern that Europe would not keep up with the United States of America or the rising Asian economies (COM 2003; SiVL 1/2004). The Finnish experts saw in the interviews that the fear of falling behind had resulted in systemising education cooperation by the EU and the launch of the OMC and the ET2010 process, in which new performance goals for education systems were

agreed. As Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 347–349) note, *indirect coercive transfer* occurs when a country is indirectly pushed towards policy transfer to avoid falling behind its competitors. As noted by Grek et al. (2009, 10), *comparison* is also a form of indirect coercive policy transfer. On the other hand, Lange and Alexiadou (2010, 452–454) point out that quantitative comparison conducted within the OMC leads to competitive policy learning. Erkkilä (2014) notes, that the European Commission deliberately used global university rankings and competition with other continents to drive reform in the higher education sector.

Even though the OMC was a voluntary process, none of the countries opted out, as was noted in the analysis. It has been suggested that if the countries adopting an EU policy achieve a critical mass, the remaining countries may feel more strongly motivated to join in (Featherstone & Radaelli 2003, 42). The interviews revealed that, despite strong criticism of the launching of the ET2010 process, Finland did not opt to stay out, as confirmed by the pronouncements of Parliament (SiVL 15/2002; SiVL 1/2004). In short, mimetic isomorphic mechanisms (Bulmer et al. 2007, 18) were apparent in education policy cooperation in the aftermath of the launch of the Lisbon Strategy.

6.1.1 From voluntary cooperation to negotiated governance

As described in the framework, Bulmer et al. (2007, 19) argue that governance by negotiation leads to policy transfer by consent. Negotiation is characterised by problem-solving, and this may shape the preferences of Member States. Information is exchanged between participants and the national actors may eventually re-evaluate their initial positions, which "opens them up to policy models drawn from other member states, and thereby creates the conditions for *emulative* policy transfer" (Bulmer & Padgett 2004, 110). Governance by negotiation is based on a voluntary policy transfer process, but use of qualified majority voting (QMV) in decision-making may even produce some elements of coercive transfer (Bulmer et al. 2007, 19). If, however, bargaining is involved in QMV decision-making, the resistance to "alien" policy models will produce weaker forms of policy transfer outcome, such as *influence*, with a high possibility of abortive transfer. According to Bulmer and Padgett, unanimity in decision-making will lead only to influence (Bulmer & Padgett 2004, 110).

Since the new ET2010 program and the new EU HE policy were negotiated in the Council on the initiative of the Commission, followed by the Commission and,

above all, linked to the follow-up of the overall Lisbon Strategy, the relevance of EU level cooperation was understood to be increasing. According to Finnish experts, it became more significant to Member States and to the EU than the completely voluntary soft law previously introduced in the Education Council and for the education sector alone. The new role of education policies was understood as strengthening EU HE policy in particular, given that the work at the Council was now connected with the idea of the knowledge triangle and innovation policy. These understandings seem to support the view that, in policy transfer terms, EU cooperation in education after the launch of Lisbon Strategy may have transformed from *voluntary cooperation* to more *negotiated governance* than before. In particular, the connection to the Lisbon Strategy follow-up strengthened cooperation, as also noted in previous research. Since negotiation in the EU Education Council is, however, characterised by unanimity in most of the soft law decisions, the impact of policy transfer remained no more than *influential*, but according to the understandings in this category, it can be said that the Education Council became an important platform for policy learning and transfer at the turn of the century. This is supported by the results of Enders et al. (2011) that the change in European cooperation in education policy around 2000 also finally launched integration in HE policies and created horizontal Europeanization of HE (Featherstone & Radaelli 2003, 41).

The understanding of the increasing importance of the EU cooperation in the first category, and the Member States' role there as negotiators, resembles to some extent the liberal intergovernmentalist approach outlined in section 2.3: states have their own national interests, which they defend, and behind the negotiations, the diversity of Member States' policies plays a more important role than the logic of continuous integration (cf. Moravcsik 1991, 1998). As also described previously, European integration can be described by the concepts of spillover, spill-around or buildup (Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg 2011, 1002). It can be argued that the understandings in this category supported the view that the Commission was building up its power in education policy. On the other hand, it could also be seen that the change in education policy caused spill-around as it permitted the Commission to increase cooperation in the field of education policy without any changes to the formal competence.

6.1.2 Interdependence

One of the main results from the analysis was the finding of a new kind of interdependence. First, the novel cooperation form of the OMC, adopted to strengthen the education policy, was understood creating a new kind of interdependence between Member States. The OMC has improved understanding about education systems, making it a tool for *policy learning*, as discussed by Lange and Alexiadou (2010).

Second, the initiation phase of policy (the agenda-setting function), the Commission's initiatives and the negotiation process at the Council were seen as more important to the Member States than the outcomes (i.e. the Council's resolutions) in this category. The finding on the impact of soft law prepared by the Commission is supported by the work of Mäenpää (211, 220), who found that the Commission's informal steering is very effective. This also seemed to be the case with the new emphasis on HE, and most of the interviewees readily recalled the discussion on the Commission's initiatives, emphasising the importance of initiating the discussion. It was understood, however, that the Council's soft law directs the Commission's future actions, making those decisions relevant to the Commission. The Commission also needs the Council in order to advance policy issues. Examining the history of the EC education policy cooperation (2.3.5), Blitz (2003) observed that the Commission used Member States' or Council's resolutions as "a base upon which the Community's interest in education could be further grounded and lead to further proposals." The findings here support the notion that the Commission has always been good at finding grounds for its proposals and actions while also using the vague phrasing of the Member States.

An important result in category A, then, is the understanding of the *complex interdependence* between the different actors in the process: Member States and the Commission. According to Radaelli (2000, 26; 38), policy transfer is a rational process, followed by rational decisions made by the policy-makers. Table 10 presents the understandings of three ways in which the Member States and the Commission may choose to use policy transfer in EU education policy cooperation in order to advance or improve policies.

Table 10. Policy transfer tools in interdependence.

Action	Policy transfer method
1. Member States need information from each other and the OMC activities work as a learning environment for these purposes.	→ *Policy learning*
2. The Commission needs support from Member States in order to succeed with policy initiatives and it also welcomes successful ideas for those initiatives from Member States and relevant stakeholders.	→ *Policy borrowing*
3. Member States may need initiatives from the Commission in order to advance policy formation nationally, and therefore they also present their ideas to the Commission.	→ *Policy spin*

The role of a Member State in EU education politics or in soft law formation in an international organisation has attracted relatively little interest in previous research. This deficit in the previous literature may reflect the fact that international organisations are seen as external actors, not as institutions where countries participate as members. For this reason, this aspect of influencing the decision-making process at the supranational level may not even have arisen in research before. For instance, López-Santana (2006), Grek et al. (2009) and Kallo (2009) observe that policy transfer occurs only *to* the Member State, and they look at processes on the implementation side but neglect the initial policy-formation phase, where international cooperation may also play a role.

However, Keohane (1988, 283) has argued that it is not sufficient to treat the preferences of actors as given "exogenously", from outside or from international organisations. Rather, preferences are affected by institutional arrangements, norms and the discourse among parties involved in international discussions. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, 14–15) also point out that each EU Member State influences the adoption of a policy, actively and also voluntarily informing EU politics and policies. As mentioned in the framework, countries may be obliged to adopt policies as members of the EU, but as active members who joined the Union voluntarily, it can be said that policy transfer in the EU is both obligated and negotiated.

One of the key characteristics of EU policy formation is the influencing activity in the preparation phase. Mäenpää (2011) notes that the preparation phase of policy decisions involves hundreds of different kinds of working groups and committees, and they all include representatives of the Member States: "Notably via this the national administration can participate the design of the decisions" (Mäenpää 2011, 22). This is also the case with the Education Committee of the EYC as the Committee also has decision-making power in selecting the issues that will be presented to the Ministers

of Education. The understanding that Finnish civil servants strongly influenced the advancement of the EU HE modernisation agenda in the Council in 2005 and 2006 is evidenced by the fact that the national Science and Technology Council pushed for university governance and funding reform as early as 2003. The arguments for the need to reform the HE system are similar in the Science and Technology Council's guidelines and in the Commission's HE initiatives, and in fact the effort to influence EU policies related to innovation was encouraged by government.[1] Clearly, then, the negotiators had a mandate to participate actively in higher education policy preparation and policy formulation at EU level.

The concept of *policy borrowing* may explain the behaviour of the Commission in consulting with Member States and stakeholders. According to the understandings in this study, the Commission welcomed support and ideas in relation to HE policy, and there was positive interaction between EU and national levels. Dale (1999) notes that policy borrowing is a relatively rare phenomenon because "we don't usually `borrow' something we don't know we have a use, even a need, for, or indeed, that we won't return!" (Dale 1999, 9). In this case, it seems clear that, several times in the last decade, the Commission in fact borrowed successful ideas and returned those ideas in the form of a communication on HE modernisation. The role of stakeholders, the European associations and organisations in the field of higher education and research has also been noted by Beerkens (2008): these actors try to influence international organisations, but also assist them in acquiring information, expertise and legitimation and so reinforce their authority (408).

Furthermore, it can also be said that the policy transfer framework for the most part addresses transfers occurring in the EU, facilitated by the Commission or by the interaction between the Member States (i.e. facilitated unilateralism).[2] However, previous research on the Bologna process has found that the Ministers signing the Bologna Declaration saw an intergovernmental agreement as an opportunity to impose reforms in their own countries. National governments have entered the international intergovernmental sphere in order to gain influence at the domestic level (Martens & Wolf 2009, 83), indicating that countries have previously exported their reform ideas from national level to European level, and back (*policy spin*).

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1. TNN (2004). Still in 2009, the Science and Innovation Council pushed the Finns to be active in forming EU-innovation policies: Finland must be an active participant and a driving force in EU RDI-policy. TIN (2009), 23.
2. Bulmer & Padgett 2004, 104–105, 110 and the conclusions of this chapter.

It can also be said that the present data indicate an understanding of more *complex interdependence* between EU level and national policy formation than has perhaps been found in EU (education) policy research before. Dale (1999) defines the concept of installing interdependence by arguing that there is a policy transfer mechanism dealing with issues that go beyond national borders, such as environmental concerns or human rights. This kind of policy transfer is often a persuasive bottom-up approach, broadly inclusive of civil society. Dale's concept clearly differs from the interdependence described here, but it is similar in the sense that, as Dale observes, "one might expect that its effects on education will be relatively direct and focused on sectoral, or more likely, organisational, levels, where the agenda setting possibilities of the mechanism might be most effective"(15). Here, as noted above, the agenda-setting function of the Commission played a vital role in policy processes. In this category, the understanding of interdependence was that the Commission and a Member State needed each other in order to succeed with higher education initiatives. As well as *policy learning*, especially between Member States in the context of the OMC and the Council, there seemed to occur *policy borrowing* from the Member States and from national level to the Commission. Above all, it can be said that there was an incidence of *policy spin* when Finland influenced the content of the HE policy transferred by the Commission in order to succeed nationally with HE reform. Here, national policy development seems to have been spun through Brussels in the quest for supportive ideas. It follows that policy transfer theory is complemented by this notion of complex interdependence, which in this case seems to have increased in the last decade. Besides, this idea of interdependence endorses the result of the first category on the change, since increasing interdependence confirms that EU HE cooperation had become more significant and relevant than before.

6.2 Influencing policy transfer methods

Category B focused more on the significance of EU policies at national level than the previous category, which described change at EU level. As a high-level strategy, Lisbon was a useful tool in arguing for change in the status, steering and governance of universities. This argument was used as required. The Lisbon Strategy messages served as "neutral truths" in Finland (cf. Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 346), and comparisons to the rest of the world (cf. Lange & Alexiadou 2010, 452-454; Grek et al. 2009,

10). The Strategy was almost like a "political weapon" for those arguing for the need to reform the Finnish HE system. In policy transfer terms, *indirect coercive transfer* (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 347–349) is applicable here to describe the impact, as the EU level emphasis on knowledge in the Lisbon Strategy was perceived as a source of external pressure on Finland to develop its higher education system.

The *influence* of EU HE policy varies, according to the Finnish experts' understandings, from pressure to justification and support. In policy transfer theory, influence is a weak form of transfer where inspiration for a new policy is gained from an external party (Bulmer et al. 2007, 17). Here, however, influence is a concept that entails all the different forms of influencing in national policy formation. Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 350) have identified that policy goals, structure and content, policy instruments and administrative techniques, institutions, ideology, ideas, attitudes and concepts and even negative lessons can be transferred. According to the understandings in category B, the influence of EU HE policy on the form of the Lisbon agenda, and later on the so-called EU HE modernization agenda, took the form of ideology, ideas, content and support for policy goals in Finland.

In this category too, EU soft law on higher education – especially the initiatives on HE by the Commission (DGEAC) – were understood to be relevant and useful for Finnish discussions. In particular, the EU higher education modernisation agenda, launched in 2006, was timely for Finnish purposes. Stakeholders saw the connection even more clearly than officials, some of whom were hesitant in using external arguments for national reforms. The connection of EU HE policy to the larger Lisbon Strategy made these arguments especially useful and strong. EU HE policy cooperation of that time was seen as direct *pressure* because it was accelerating Finnish university reform. But as it was soft law, the pressure was still *indirect*. As previous research has established, "non-domestic pressure" seems to be an important variable when studying the influence of soft European policy on domestic settings (Lopéz-Santana 2006). Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 347) have suggested that domestic problems may prompt policy actors to search for policies they can borrow, and international cooperation may reduce uncertainty.

The form of governance in EU HE policy can also be seen here as negotiated governance, as identified earlier, given that policy models and ideas from a Member State were incorporated into EU norms at the Council (Bulmer & Padgett 2004, 104–106). In policy transfer, "governance by negotiation" is a process between the Council and the Commission, associated with "policy transfer by consent" (Bulmer et al. 2007, 55). Bulmer et al. argue that the EU's policy transfer capacity is restricted

by the interests and preferences of the Member States, and so they try to negotiate a result that will reduce the adaptation pressure of EU proposals on domestic policies (55). It has also been noted that to the extent that outcomes of a policy or a program are predictable, policy transfer becomes easier (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 354). According to the understandings in category B, this was common in EU education policy in general, but in the case of the negotiations on the EU HE modernisation agenda, Finland also tried to influence the Commission and negotiate a result that would optimally support national policy development. If the outcome of an EU level policy is, so to say, "preordered", it is naturally easier to transfer it to national circumstances. This is probably also why Finland has started to emphasise influencing in the Commission's preparations and agenda (VN 32/2009; Hyvärinen 2009).

Global rhetoric can be used for national purposes – sometimes even by policymakers to further necessary (but unpopular) reform agendas, as Elken and Stensaker (2011, 298) point out. In Finland, the Commission's initiatives on HE modernisation were deployed as useful rhetoric and were even seen as a *justification* for university reform. There is an interesting and thought-provoking contradiction in the data, where it was mentioned that, as a negotiator at EU level, one had to be conscious of any formulations on private funding and accreditation (MHE4) – yet some interviewees revealed that the Commission's ideas for diversification of funding were particularly useful for Finnish purposes (MHE6). This is clear evidence of the complexity of policy-making and the controversial role of civil servants working with politics. The civil servants need new initiatives and input for national debate, but on the other hand they must follow the prevailing policy, which lends importance to the informal discussions with other Member States and the Commission in seminars and informal meetings, where discussions can be run freely and without fear of undermining national policy.

López-Santana (2006) has also noted that *repetition* of issues, over and over again, in various initiatives (e.g. COM 2003; COM 2005; COM 2006a; COM 2011c) and discussions (Council meetings, high-level meetings, conferences, peer learning activities) seems to be an influencing strategy adopted by the Commission. As a supportive policy transfer tool, repetition is particularly important in policy areas coordinated by soft law as it will gradually spread the effects to all parts of the EU. One example of the supportive effects of repetition emerged in the interviews: Finland wanted the Commission to bring the EU modernisation agenda to the table one more time in 2006, because the timing was useful for domestic discussions.

The main actors who used these arguments and brought Lisbon goals to Finnish awareness were officials, who were excited about the new role of HE in EU politics. Rectors and other stakeholders also transferred the Lisbon message directly to Finland, and to relevant decision-makers. These policy actors can be seen "policy brokers", located at the interface between national and European policy areas and translating "the meaning of national data into policy terms in the European arena"; they also "interpret European developments in the national space" (Grek et al. 2009, 6). As described above, however, the understanding of *interdependence* completes this picture, since it seems clear that the policy-brokers may also bring ideas in the opposite direction, from national policy formation to EU level.

The new EU HE policy was also discussed by the university organisations themselves at European level but never really reached other actors within the university sector. As Rautio and Saari (2006) note, integration has created new elite. They also see that Europeanization has increased the power of officials as compared to politicians (241). EU affairs, also in higher education sector, are highly complex and sophisticated, and time constraints for policy formation are often so tight that they exclude the real participation of the Parliament and most politicians as well as sector actors.

6.3 Fusion of policy transfer methods

As previous research has indicated, the "massification" or "generalisation" of higher education (García Garrido 2002, 54–58), global competition (Teichler 2010, 52–53) and globalisation (Dale 1999) have positioned HE as a universal commodity that indirectly forces countries to react to this external pressure[3] and improve their HE systems.

In category C, there was an understanding that EU HE policy was probably only one of the things affecting the Finnish reforms, in the sense that EU level discussion, OECD reviews, the developments in Bologna and in Finland together formed a fusion leading to certain developments in Finland. Echoing the conclusions of Štremfel and Lajh (2010, 76), the interviewees suggested that it is hard to distinguish the influence and impact of EU policies from the influence of other factors, and it is also difficult to retrace the influences the EU/OMC may have had on legislation (cf. Lajh & Stremfel 2011, 520–521).

The term "fusion" was selected for the third category to describe different sources for policy transfer. Policy transfer theory uses the word "synthesis", which connotes

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3. Dale 1999, bandem, indirect coercive method in policy transfer, see Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 347–349.

a slightly different kind of transfer, "combining elements of policy from two or more different jurisdictions" (Bulmer et al. 2007, 17). The term "fusion" was adopted to describe the complexity of international and national influences arriving from different sources, without specifying the content of the influence. Other terms such as "merger" and "integration" were considered for the description of the category as well, but those terms were already used elsewhere in this research (i.e. university mergers, European integration), thus there was a risk of confusion.

Enders and others (2011, 4) point out that the Bologna process, the Lisbon Strategy and the HE modernisation agenda have not been the only influences on European higher education institutions. In line with this data, they argue that, in many European countries, a series of reforms was already underway in the 1980s and 1990s, and that many current reform initiatives have their roots in those actions. In the present study, it has already been illustrated (as confirmed by the interviewees) that Finland has had a tradition of gradually developing its education system. In the 1980s, the issue of the governance and steering of the universities had already been advanced, and the binary higher education system with the polytechnic structure was subsequently created, indicating a reforming dynamic. Finland had been active in benchmarking other countries and systems, and has traditionally tracked development and reforms elsewhere. According to the understandings in this category, then, university reform in Finland was evidently internally and nationally driven, supported – but not imposed – by EU higher education policy. Clearly, it is a delicate issue to decide whether to use external arguments; as one of the interviewees said, "Does it help the political argumentation to say that same kinds of reforms are done elsewhere or does it hinder".

Benchmarking or comparing has often been used to improve national education policies, especially since statistical cooperation has increased comparisons (see Lange & Alexiadou 2010, 452–454; Lawn & Lingard 2002, 300) and universal rankings of international competition (Erkkilä 2014). Benchmarking is a tool for imitation and learning from successful behaviour, and as such it is a form of policy transfer. From the data of this study, it can be concluded that there is a long tradition of benchmarking in Finland, but since the launch of the Bologna process and the Lisbon process, it has been conducted more than previously within a European context.

Any assessment of the implications of soft law in domestic processes must take account of traditions of international cooperation and learning from elsewhere. Based on her findings, López-Santana (2006) points out that a country that has actively been exposed to a set of regional or international ideas before the introduction of soft law may shape domestic responses to soft regional mandates. She notes that

previous provision of monetary and technical resources seems to positively affect implementation. In the Finnish case, the tradition of using OECD initiatives and resources as grounds for policy argumentation may have been a factor in utilising EU HE modernisation policy for national purposes.

According to Raunio and Saari (2006), European integration has speeded up institutional changes in Finland. They argue that Finnish society and its institutional structures would have developed for the most part in the direction it has now taken even if Finland had stayed outside the EU or even outside the core of the Union (i.e. monetary union and the Schengen agreement) (235). In their view, if Finland had stayed outside of the EU, the country would have followed the model of other OECD countries already common in the 1980s, adapting its own processes and structures to needs and possible threats from globalised markets. Like the interviewees in this category C, Raunio and Saari believe that the EU was only one option for policy transfer among other more global examples that might have been followed.

As also noted by Elken and Stensaker (2011, 298), the EU is seen to play an important role as a mediator of global reform trends, but it also delivers its own agenda. It was also emphasised by the Finnish experts that the Commission plays the role of mediator or policy entrepreneur when it adopts ideas from other sources – including Finnish government and stakeholders – and transfers these ideas further into societies by repeating messages in relevant documents and in particular circumstances. It was noted that this mediator role is very effective because the Commission is also a relatively small organisation. One possible conclusion from this data is that EU soft law may achieve optimal effects in the systems of Member States when formulated in conjunction with all relevant parties and transferred via several channels to national level.

6.4 Irrelevant and resisted cooperation

According to the understandings in the category D, the new EU policy emphasis on higher education and HE systems as important parts of an innovation system was also seen as a threat in the higher education sector. As Bache and Olsson (2001, 218) argue, *resistance* is a reaction to external pressure, aimed at protecting established values. Here, the understanding was that some people saw the "Humboldtian" university model threatened by an "entrepreneurial" university idea, as adopted by the Commission. Most of the resistance was, however, directed to the practices of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

As already outlined, phenomenography aims to reveal variation in human experience and to provide a description of this variation (Yates, Partridge, Bruce 2012, 100). As mentioned, Marton & Pong (2005) use on-off ventilation as an example of creating a contrast so that one becomes aware of both circumstances: "there is no discernment without variation" (336). Similarly, Keohane (1988, 283) observed that the nature of cooperation is easier to understand through its absence or failure. This implies that it may also be important to elucidate understandings of the situation where this cooperation did not exist. In this study, the interviewees were asked if anything would have been different in national higher education policy without the EU soft law of the last decade. This question appeared to be quite important: most of the interviewees admitted that even though the discussion, and especially the HE modernisation agenda, was relevant, it was still very soft and weakly transferred to the universities. In this category, the Education Council's (Council, EYC) outcomes in particular came under fire for their lack of utility. In the first category, interviewees had already noted that the Commission's initiatives made an impact in launching the discussion, but in this last category, the collected understandings underlined the problems relating to the work of the Council. The soft law formed in the Council was seen to be somewhat irrelevant to the Member States. In this category, the Council's soft law is seen as an example of *voluntary cooperation*, where Member States coordinate policy only via EU institutions. This kind of "facilitated unilateralism" works with soft and flexible norms and tries to influence the redefinition of policies, but there is a high risk of abortion (Bulmer & Padgett 2004, 104–106, 110) As already noted, when soft law formation in the Council included negotiation in forming the new policy on HE, it was also perceived as "more negotiated governance" than before. Most of the soft law in the Council (resolutions and conclusions) is, however, formed with unanimity, and so the voluntary governance model seems to dominate there. Furthermore, none of the interviewees mentioned soft law introduced by the European Parliament (EP). It must also be noted, however, that the EP was not even raised as an actor by the interviewee. Nevertheless, it is interesting that no connection was made to the EP in relation to higher education policy.

Previous research, mostly written when the Lisbon process was still active, stressed the importance of the OMC in the field of education policy and argued that it has changed EU education policy (see Blomqvist 2007; Olsen & Maassen 2007; Lange & Alexiadou 2010; Lajh & Stremfel 2011; Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg 2011). Although the Lisbon Strategy changed EU cooperation in education policy and the OMC was adopted as a tool for improving cooperation, neither the method itself nor the Commission's follow-up on the achievement of goals agreed in the Council (Education

and Training 2010 process, ET2010) was mentioned by interviewees. They did not recall these elements, or did not perceive them, as really effectual or functional. Only two interviewees saw the OMC as a significant supporting instrument for higher education in the Member States. Pépin (2011) has also noted that "higher education had quite a weak position in the ET2010 in the beginning", because of the parallel Bologna process, but it quickly strengthened its role in relation to the Lisbon process (27).

Interestingly, the interviewees noted that although the OMC was, at the outset, criticised and strongly resisted in Finland, time has shown that these fears may have been overstated. The resistance, within the understandings of interviewees, seemed unnecessary because the OMC as a method has not influenced the higher education sector, at least not in Finland. Rather, it was held that the EU higher education modernisation agenda could still have been advanced without the OMC and ET2010 programme. The OMC also seems to be a good example of *voluntary policy transfer* (Bulmer & Padgett 2004, 104–106, 110), in that the Member States chose to participate in OMC activities in order to reduce uncertainty (cf. Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 347). The idea is that the Member States follow comparative results, search for policies to borrow and try to learn from other countries' lessons through peer learning. But as a voluntary from of cooperation, the OMC as understood in this category has failed as a policy transfer method because any learning was not seen to have had an impact on national policy formation. Bache and Olsson (2001, 218) argue that *immunity* occurs in a situation where the state or organisation is not receptive to new ideas delivered through the policy transfer mechanism in use.

The understanding of the uselessness of comparative information such as benchmarks, indicators and reporting is not that new: it has already been seen as burdensome and rather inefficient from the point of view of Member States (Pépin 2011, 28). It is, however, a thought-provoking result because the ET2010 did, in fact, follow national achievements in higher education reforms every two years. For instance, in 2006, the Council and the Commission highlighted national higher education reforms that "increasingly support the Lisbon agenda". The focus was on the Bologna process and achievement of its goals, but new forms of governance of HEIs were also mentioned, listing those countries that have "introduced various forms of contractualisation to regulate the relationships between higher education institutions and the State, as a basis for internal resource allocation" (Council 2006, 4–5). The need for sufficient funding for higher education, for mobility, for strengthened collaboration between higher education and industry and for lifelong learning were also mentioned in the joint report (ibid.). Apparently, this reporting was not challenging or interesting

enough for those Finnish experts interviewed, since for the most part they did not perceive significant development, or did not recall it. Furthermore, one can assume that either the ministry in charge of reporting on achievements did not consult widely, or that the results were not sufficiently novel to require praise at national level – or, as several interviewees mentioned, because the same issues were already dealt with elsewhere (category C), this was really nothing new.

Policy transfer experts have already questioned the capacity of the OMC to achieve policy transfer because learning mechanisms have been weakly implemented within the OMC and "peer review sessions are truncated and superficial" (Bulmer et al. 2007, 8). The results are also supported by the findings of Idema and Kelemen (2006), who argued that the impact of such modes of governance has been greatly exaggerated. They claim that, rather than enhancing the legitimacy of EU policy making, the OMC threatened to weaken it, and they identify the same problems in the OMC as did the interviewees here: insufficient levels of participation in OMC activities and the OMC as only one among many sources of learning. One of the weaknesses of the OMC seems to be the level of discussion. The interviewees perceived that OMC has remained on the expert level only, since the participants at the Commission's OMC working groups and seminars have mostly been government representatives. Significant reforms are not achieved by experts alone: as Stremfel and Lajh (2010, 78–79) have also argued, the cluster member is often just an expert without any decision-making power on national policy. The Commission has recently engaged with the problem and tried to present some results of the OMC working groups at Directors General level (COM 2013a), but there the challenge is that the Presidency of the Council decides the agenda of informal meetings.

For these reasons, ET2010 was not seen as a functional or effective framework contributing to HE policy discussion, nor was the OMC seen as a useful tool, except as a way to increase the amount of policy learning. As indicated above, this perception of the OMC as an unsuccessful method is not that new (cf. Stremfel & Lajh 2010), but the perceived irrelevance to higher education policy of the entire ET2010 framework is another matter. However, as Beerkens and Vossensteyn (2011) have noted, it is quite difficult to assess the impact of a European policy initiative on national policies, since policy documents and interviews rarely specify how issues are connected. Additionally, in this research, the understandings are multiple, and the categories of descriptions present only the variety of ways of experiencing the significance of EU cooperation in HE policy. All categories and all understandings are equally important. Table 11 below summarises the connections between the results and the framework, showing

clearly that the policy transfer tools in categories A and B were more significant forms of cooperation than in category C – where EU cooperation was seen only as one form of cooperation among others – and in category D, where cooperation was seen negatively.

Table 11. Categories of descriptions connected to the policy transfer framework.

Results: understandings of significance	Contextualisation and possible policy transfer models
A. Change	
• EU would fall behind	• Indirect coercive transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996)
• FI joined ET2010	• Mimetic isomorphism (Featherstone & Radaelli 2003, Cai 2010)
• OMC > ET2010 > Lisbon Strategy follow-up	• From voluntary cooperation to more negotiated governance (Bulmer et al. 2007)
Comparison	• Form of policy transfer (Grek 2009), competitive policy learning (Lange & Alexiadou 2010)
• Interdependence OMC MS, stakeholders → Cion MS → Cion → MS	• Policy learning (Dale 1999, Lange & Alexiadou 2010), facilitated unilateralism (Bulmer et al 2007) • Policy borrowing or teaching (Dale 1999) • Policy spin (new)
B. Influence	
• Lisbon created pressure	• Used as a 'neutral truth' (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996), indirect coercive transfer (ibid. and Grek et al. 2009)
• EU influence Pressure speeded up Justifying Support	• Indirect pressure (López-Santana 2006) • Governance by negotiation, "uploading" of preferences to supranational level (Bulmer et al. 2007) • Global rhetoric useful (Elken & Stansaker 2011) • Repetition (López-Santana 2006)
C. Fusion	
• Various sources	• Hard to distinguish EU influence (Štremfel & Lajh 2011), EU influence one option (Raunio & Saari 2006), previous provision will positively affect implementation (López-Santana 2006), habit to benchmark, compare (Grek 2009, Lange & Alexiadou 2010)
• European Commission	• Mediator role (Elken & Stansaker 2011)
D. Irrelevant and resisted	
• Threat	• Resistance (Bache & Olssen 2001)
• Failure	• Voluntary transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, Bulmer et al. 2007)
• Rejected	• Immunity (Bache & Olsson 2001)

6.5 Conclusion: the utility of policy transfer

Finally, Bulmer and Padgett's (2004) typology of various forms of governance and policy transfer may serve to explain the policy transfer forms in EU policy cooperation in higher education (see Table 12 below), not least because they show that EU policy transfer is not restricted to the OMC. As a matter of fact, stronger forms of transfer are also found in this case in negotiated governance. Since the data in this study are limited in the number of interviewees, previous research and the policy transfer framework contextualise the categories of this research and may, in part, increase the reliability of the results.

Bulmer and others (2007, 9) note that governance by negotiation amounts to policy transfer by consent, centred on the Council of the EU. Common rules and norms are agreed there by the Member States and thereby adopted by the EU. In the process, Member States have the opportunity to "upload" their policy preferences to supranational level. The Commission is the agenda-setter, and it also "controls the access points at which policy ideas enter the EU system" (Bulmer et al. 2007, 55), as Member States also try to influence the ideas adopted by the Commission for transfer. "Self-interested Member States can be expected to compete to shape EU norms according to domestic preferences and practices, thereby reducing the subsequent adaptation pressures" (Bulmer et al. 2007, 20). In a soft law sector such as education, as noted above, adaptation pressure is minimal, which may in part explain why Finland was active in the HE modernisation talks, seeking to direct the discussion in the Council to favour the purposes of national policy formation.

"Under facilitation sovereignty remains vested in national arenas, but is overlaid by interaction between national policy-makers *facilitated* by the EU" (Bulmer et al. 2007, 23). Facilitation as a mode of governance offers only soft and flexible means to persuade Member States to reassess their policy practices; the OMC and ET2010 are good examples of such means. The role of the EU is to work as an enabler of exchange and a mediator between Member States (24). A low level of institutionalisation means that policy transfer is restricted only to influence, and there is a relatively high incidence of abortive measures (ibid). As seen above, according to the Finnish experts, this was the case with OMC and ET2010 in higher education policy.

Table 12. Governance of education and policy transfer.

Mode of Governance	Institutional variables	Range of likely transfer outcomes	*Instrument* in education policy
Negotiation	Decision rules/Mode of negotiation: **QMV + problem solving** **Unanimity + bargaining**	Emulation-Synthesis Synthesis-Abortive	Recommendation of the EYC Resolution/conclusion of the EYC
Facilitation	Institutionalization: Treaty incorporation of objectives **Specificity of guidelines** **Quantifiable benchmarks** **Density of exchange networks**	Influence-Abortive	ET 2010 OMC

After Bulmer and Padgett 2004 and Bulmer et al. 2007 (25).

Policy transfer can be a useful explanation tool, but it is clear that no theory can explain all outcomes. Other explanatory models can also be useful, such as international cooperation, policy networks, advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities, which also develop and promote various policies and ideas (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000, 21; Radaelli 1999) and could be another way of studying the phenomenon at hand. According to Enders (2004, 374), Europeanized policy responses in higher education may also be an example of mutual adjustment: Governments continue to adopt their own national policies, but, in so doing, they reflect the policy choices of other governments or perceived European developments. It remains possible to conclude, however, that policy transfer can be useful when explaining the outcomes of the four categories of description here. Moreover, the results suggest that development of the theory could be further improved by introducing the concepts of *interaction* and/or *policy spin.*

The outcome space shows how the significance of EU cooperation arises in the understandings of Finnish HE policy experts, from category D (irrelevance and resistance) to category A (change) – that is, from entirely voluntary cooperation (OMC) to semi-coercive negotiated transfer (Lisbon Strategy implementation). The categories are different and separate, but their contents support each other. For instance, the notion of a new kind of interdependence in category A supports the understanding of the variety of influences on a Member State from EU cooperation. Category C describing fusion, on the other hand, supports category A in characterising change

in EU level cooperation: other forms of cooperation (OECD and Bologna) were seen to be important, but the relevance of EU cooperation increased at the turn of the century. The understandings in category D of the irrelevance of the OMC and soft law can also be supported by category C, where interviewees observed that EU is only one form of international cooperation. Clearly, although they can be introduced separately, the categories are also interconnected.

Figure 12 presents the completed outcome space for the four result categories. The preliminary outcome space is improved with the scale of policy transfer (according to Bulmer et al. 2007). EU HE policy cooperation does not reach the point of entirely coercive transfer, moving from completely voluntary policy transfer to semi-coercive policy transfer when connected with overall EU goals such as the Lisbon Strategy. To date, there has been no direct imposed implementation of EU HE policy, and so the outcome space stops at semi-coercive transfer. Here, the term "to date" is of relevance as the new EU2020 strategy and its follow-up, with the European semester and new financial regulation, may change the situation in the near future. This may be a theme for further research.

Perfectly Voluntary   Semi-Coercive   Entirely Coercive
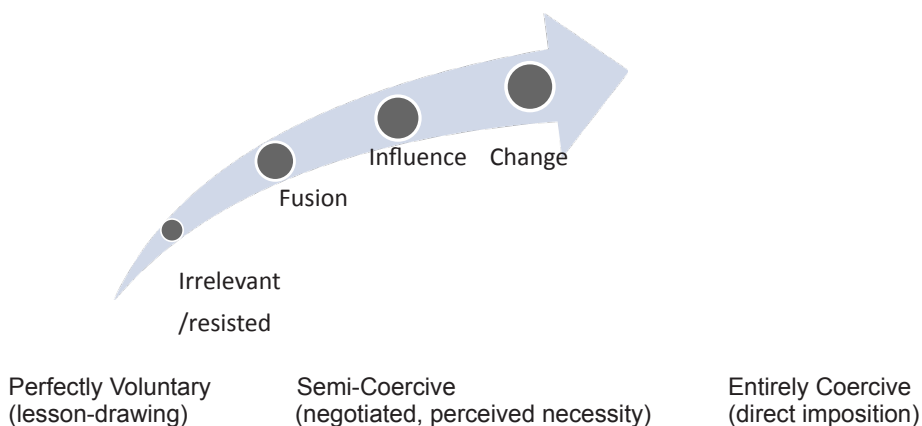(lesson-drawing)   (negotiated, perceived necessity)   (direct imposition)

Figure 12. Outcome space: from voluntary to semi-coercive transfer.

With reference to the scale of policy transfer (from Bulmer et al. 2007, 15), EU HE policy cooperation has changed from voluntary to semi-coercive policy transfer, but it has not as yet become entirely coercive.

7. CONCLUSIONS

"I believe these things have a connection, but it is not causality"

An interviewee

The present study has explored the significance of EU level cooperation in the field of higher education policy. The purpose of this research was to elucidate understandings of the significance of EU higher education (HE) policy cooperation. The research focused on the perceptions of Finnish higher education experts because Finland commenced university reform concurrently with the HE modernisation discourse in the Council of the European Union (EU). The main research question asked what kinds of understandings exist among Finnish higher education experts in relation to EU cooperation in the field of higher education. In particular, the study explored the perceived connection between EU cooperation and national level policy formation in HE. The aim was to discover what kinds of cooperation methods were significant or insignificant from national actors' viewpoints, which should also reveal how, within EU HE cooperation, knowledge about policies and ideas from one political setting can be transferred to another.

At the beginning of the research process, with the help of context description, it was established that the focus should be on the significance of EU cooperation, given that the implementation of soft law in higher education policy is difficult to follow due to the minimal competence of the EU in the field (see 2.3.7). Previous literature and research helped to establish that EU cooperation in higher education takes various forms (see 2.3.5). First, there is the influence of the European Council and horizontal policy guidelines such as the Lisbon Strategy. Second, the education policy sector (DGEAC and EYC) tried to influence this high-level discussion, as well as the national policy formation phase (see 2.1), through the Education and Training 2010 program (ET2010), which also adopted the Open Method of Coordination (OMC),

a new method of cooperation. Third, the Commission's initiatives (communications) and the drafting of Council resolutions or conclusions were also seen as aspects of EU level cooperation. For this reason, the interviewees were asked to describe how they perceived the connection between these actions and cooperation methods and national policy formation (see 4.3.3). These understandings were analysed by use of the phenomenographic method, and the results consist of four categories of description, presenting the variation between conceptions of significance of EU cooperation in HE (Chapter 5).

As Keohane (1988) has noted in relation to the nature of international cooperation, the significance of cooperation is easy to measure when looking at the level of change and the situation before cooperation coordination (280–281). The first result (the category of description) of this research supports earlier research findings that the Lisbon Strategy and the discussion about higher education policy in the last decade crucially *changed* EU HE policy cooperation as compared to the previous decades. In policy transfer terms, it can be said that the spiritual impact of the Lisbon European Council decisions in 2000 and its follow-up process caused indirect coercive transfer by comparing the European HE systems to more successful HE systems. The launch of the ET2010 and adoption of the OMC also changed and *systemised* EU education policy cooperation, and as the new EU goals of the education sector were linked to the overall Lisbon agenda, *the significance of EU level cooperation in education increased* in Finland. It can be argued in policy transfer terms that EU cooperation on education policies transformed from voluntary cooperation to more negotiated governance from a Finnish perspective. This is not to claim that the cooperation was desirable in all cases, or that the course of action was necessary in all circumstances (cf. Keohane 1988, 280–281).

The *Commission's role* (with the country holding the EU Presidency) in defining the agenda for discussion and decision-making was understood to be very important. Since the interviewees emphasised the importance of launching the discussion and the weight of the Commission's initiatives in national discussions, it can be argued that the Commission's role as an initiator seems even more important to the experts interviewed than the decision-making role of the Education Council in the field of higher education. The Council's outcomes do, however, make a difference when deciding on the future actions and mandate of the Commission. Therefore, the Council's outcomes are of greater significance to the Commission than to Member States, but the Education Council became also an important platform for policy learning between Member States in the last decade.

The complex *interdependence* of policy processes, as identified in this research, seems to be a new finding, and may make the EU policy formation process more transparent than before. It was understood that Member States need information from each other, and OMC activities are one of the *policy learning* platforms. But the Commission also needs support from the Member States (the Council) in order to succeed with initiatives, and successful ideas, both from the Member States and from stakeholders, are therefore welcomed in Brussels. This can be seen as a form of *policy borrowing*. A final but no less important feature of interdependence is *policy spin*, in which Member States supply the Commission with policy ideas in order to get EU level support for those ideas in national policy formation. This concept has not previously been introduced in the policy transfer literature. The role of the Member States in EU policy formation has attracted little interest in (higher education) policy research before, and these understandings of interdependence may contribute to the discussion of the importance of soft law in other international organisations as well. In this context, it seems that the Member states did not desire to diminish the powers of nation states, but rather "cherry-pick" the optimal aspects of cooperation (for more, see Martens & Wolf 2009, 90).

The second result category was the identified *influence* of EU cooperation. *The influence was significant*, and it varied, according to the Finnish experts, from *pressure* even to *justification* and *support* to national policy formation. The Lisbon Strategy worked as a "neutral truth", pressuring national authorities to consider the state of the Finnish HE system. External pressure also speeded up the national discussion of university reform in Finland, and European level rhetoric was used mainly to justify changes. The Commission's tendency to *repeat*, in various contexts, the need to reform European HE systems was seen as a particularly effective method of policy transfer.

On the other hand, in the third result category, one group of Finnish experts saw that EU discussion of HE was probably only one of the things that affected Finnish HE policy formation: the incentives of previous national discussions, the OECD and developments within the Bologna process were also seen to have had an influence. The category describing the *fusion* claims that it is not possible to form national HE policy in a vacuum, where external influences would be completely excluded. But for the same reason, it is also *fairly difficult to assess the significance of EU influences*, since it was only one policy transfer method among others. It was, however, observed that the Commission is efficient in delivering messages by various means, and it was seen as a *mediator* between different levels of policy discussion. Soft law was also seen

as effective when prepared with wide participation from Member States and other stakeholders and transferred back to Member States via several channels.

The last result category indicated that there are some *irrelevant* and *resisted* forms of EU HE cooperation. In general, it was felt that soft law in education policy *may have little relevance* or policy transfer capability because of its position as a voluntary form of cooperation, and as a tool excluding sanctions. However, when connected to a wider context – for instance, to discussion taking place at the highest decision making level, such as the European Council – it may have a significant impact. Stakeholders tend to use soft law when it provides support for their arguments, but like the administration, they also use EU documents as only one source among others.

There was a wide understanding that the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) as a cooperation method in higher education was *insignificant*, and there appeared to be some uncertainty about its policy transfer capability. A further interesting finding was that, although the OMC was resisted and perceived at the outset as a possible threat to the national HE system, both by the ministry and the Parliament, it was understood that in fact no real threat emerged. It can therefore be said that the fear of harmonisation through OMC at the beginning of the decade was overstated.

In line with the results of Raunio and Saari (2006, 239–241), one may say that the non-desired effects of EU policy in higher education have been averted. Instead, Finland has been able to participate actively in EU HE policy-making, and to influence the issues and substance of discussions, particularly during the EU presidency in 2006, which was timely for national developments. Thus, the understanding provided by one of the interviewees in this research summarizes the findings quite well: there was an evident connection between the EU HE policy cooperation and Finnish HE policy formation in last decade, but it is impossible argue that there was some causality existing. The processes were rather interconnected and interaction between international, European and national levels was a reality. National HE systems are not developed in a vacuum.

7.1 Contribution to the research

The distinguishing feature of EU education policy is that it is complementary rather than competitive with national policies. According to previous research (Pépin 2006; Enders 2004), EU education policy, for most of its history, was based on a classic

intergovernmental regime. But as described in chapter 2, it seems that the evolution of EU education policy has followed a typical pattern of gradual expansion (and spillover or spill-around) in European integration. The developments in education policy cooperation and change, especially in the last decade, can be seen with the outcomes of this research together with previous research as a logical solution in which states bargained for best outcomes. Economic interests and the need for an effective and efficient higher education sector were emphasised by the Lisbon agenda, and Member States therefore chose to discuss the need for HE modernisation at the EU level as well. These results may be seen to support the liberal intergovernmentalist perspective in which the role of the state is emphasised (cf. section 2.3).

Interview data and phenomenographic research methodology proved useful in gathering understandings that could not be established from documents. As mentioned in section 4.3.1 on the data collection, national positions are classified but discoverable to some extent from the statements of the ECC of the Finnish Parliament. The interview data sample proved to be optimal in elucidating variations in conceptions but at the same time was manageable. By the tenth interview, the same types of conception were being repeated, suggesting that a saturation point had been reached. As appendices 8 to 11 indicate, the number of utterances and conceptions (N=400) connected to second-level categories, categories of meanings, was extensive and provides enough variation in the data.

The understandings helped to illuminate the connection between EU level discussion on HE modernisation and Finnish HE reforms in a way that would not have been possible from documentary data. In particular, the concept of interdependence was a result that documents could hardly have revealed. It became apparent, however, that the studied connection was seen differently by different interviewees, or even differently by the same interviewees under a different theme. Phenomenography was therefore a useful method of analysis, focusing as it does on perceptions rather than on the people providing them.

The limitations of this study relate to external validity (see 4.5). Although the understandings within a certain population may be relatively stable over time (cf. Uljens 1989, 42), it remains the case that with a small sample from only one country the results cannot be generalised. The purpose of the study was not to provide a full picture of the understandings but to form an outcome space of the categories that may help to comprehend the different ways of understanding the phenomenon. The theoretical observation with the results of previous research, however, contextualises and complements the research (cf. Huusko & Paloniemi 2006, 169). Another limitation of

this study, again a deliberate choice made at an early stage, was to focus on cooperation itself rather than on the content of EU policies. For this reason, the study offers observations of what was significant in terms of cooperation rather than unequivocal answers about the relevance of HE policy.

The outcome space of the four categories (change, influence, fusion and irrelevant/resisted) clarifies the level of policy transfer. Policy transfer theory was found suitable for identifying useful cooperation methods, but analysis of the interviews and formation of the categories of description contributed the new concepts of *interdependence* and *policy spin* to the framework. The research was an analysis *for* policy (Hill 1997, 5), meaning that it focused on studying what works in EU HE policy cooperation. A further function of the research, then, was to provide information for improving policy-making systems. Some suggestions for developing EU cooperation in education policies or in other soft law sectors are set out in the following section.

7.2 Implications for EU cooperation and national policy formation

Effective policy analysis requires knowledge of how policy works. If reformers do not understand causation in public policy, they cannot assess whether or not their choices will work. A failure to understand decision-making procedures and the context within they work often causes inappropriate choices when transforming methods of policy-making (John 1998, 10). Tierney and Clemens (2011) have claimed that qualitative researchers have been largely unconcerned with issues of policy reform – or that when they have, the work has focused on critiquing processes or outcomes rather than suggesting alternatives or making recommendations (60). Having worked for a decade as a civil servant dealing with EU affairs, the researcher feels able to make some observations on EU cooperation in education policies. This research process took nearly four years and has augmented the researcher's knowledge of the implications of EU cooperation, and it is now possible to present some reflections arising from that process.

There was a wide and thought-provoking understanding in the interviews that the Commission's initiatives and the discussion taking place after release of the communication were more important to national policy formation than the Council's decisions on the issue. The Commission's soft law and informal steering were seen

to be important as a conversation piece in national context, but when the issue proceeded to the Council and the Council finally decided on following actions, very few tracked the outcomes. It was an interesting understanding, however, that the Council's decisions constitute a mandate for the Commission to prepare future initiatives. The question that arises is whether the Member States know and follow systematically all the mandates they have given to the Commission. Furthermore, it should be considered whether the momentum after release of a new Commission initiative is also optimally used in national discussion.

The difficulty is that EU cooperation is dealt with separately from other daily policy issues, both in the national administration and at the HEIs. If EU affairs are merely something that "has to be dealt with", perhaps even by someone quite removed from actual decision-making, it is impossible to make the connection between EU level discussion and national discussion or to see the added value that cooperation may bring. The consequence is that planning and pre-influencing the policy formation process at EU level also becomes difficult. This can turn out to be a vicious circle: without enough efforts to pre-influence the Commission, the initiatives of the Commission will seem irrelevant to national preparations, with no ensuing interest in discussing them nationally. EU cooperation then looks irrelevant, and the resources for cooperation remain minimal. It is hardly credible that this is only a problem for the administration in soft law areas; it can also be an issue at the HEI level. The more distant we make EU cooperation, the more distant it remains. There was a good suggestion by one of the interviewees, however: each one of the HEIs should designate at least one person as a contact point for the ministry in EU HE policy, making it easier to distribute information to relevant parties.

The above-mentioned issue relates to the transparency of EU affairs. As the interviewees indicated, it was not even worth asking politicians about the effects of EU HE policies, as the interviewees did not believe they would have an opportunity to follow the EU HE policy discussion in detail. Finland has a unique structure for national EU coordination that includes both the Parliament and all relevant stakeholders, but the EU still remains rather distant for higher education actors and Members of Parliament. This problem of the level of participation also became apparent when the interviewees were asked to assess the Open Method of Coordination in the EU. The clash between the ideas and understandings of the elite (EU HE experts in this case) and criticisms of the EU in Finland may soon become such a difficult question as to require further consideration. Although there is a sub-committee system for EU affairs, it is worth asking whether the administration should hear, or at least

inform, relevant actors – i.e. the universities – directly and more carefully in respect of issues relevant to them and so increase participation in EU policy formation. One good example is the Bologna process, where the HE sector was concretely included in the process.

Furthermore, from the viewpoint of the Member States, perhaps the rather time-consuming and even publicly criticised work at the Education Council (see 5.4.2 and van Waarden 2014) could be reorganised. This might, for instance, include an internal decision that the Council drafts decisions only when preceded by an initiative of the Commission. In this way, Presidency conclusions that were criticised useless would disappear. Furthermore, within the OMC more resources than before could be allocated to close partnerships between small numbers of countries in selected areas of cooperation. This could also mean EU cooperation "á deaux vitesses, abgestufte integration, two-tier community"[1] as already suggested in the 1980s (Morachevic 1991, 33) and would save resources in EU education cooperation. As a consequence, this would also force Member States to review the resources they allocate to EU affairs, and they would need to choose to participate, or not, in any intensified cooperation. The Commission should remember that national policy development is always prioritised, at least in soft law sectors. Unless there is a clear perceived advantage in EU cooperation (such as the use of the EU HE modernisation agenda from 2006 onwards in Finland), Member States' willingness to participate in EU cooperation will not increase.

In fact, one interesting result was that EU funding of higher education was not raised as a policy transfer tool. Only the Commission's funding role within the Bologna process was mentioned, as was also the case in previous research (Muller & Ravinet 2008), along with the fact that the OMC exercise is ineffective in view of its expense. The recently increased funding for EU education cooperation in the new Erasmus + program should be exploited carefully if the intention is to make an impact at the national level. Primarily, it should be considered how Erasmus + funding might help to increase the significance of EU soft law. At the moment, there is little linkage between the policies formed in the Council and the Erasmus projects run by HE actors. As in the case of structural funds, Member States could, for instance, make proposals for national programs intended to implement EU education policy decisions, and they could also use the funding for new interactions between small numbers of countries, as mentioned above.

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1. It is noteworthy that two-track integration is translated slighly differently in different languages. In Finnish, the term would be "kaksitahtinen integraatio", which means two-stroke integration and is close to the French term.

Another issue is that the Commission must know the *fusion* method in policy transfer, and could therefore also benefit from the use of various sources (i.e. universities) more effectively than at present in driving the interests of education policies, especially in their relation to employment policies. The problem, however, seems to be that divisions between different Directorates General, the personalisation of issues and rotation in the Commission make it difficult to achieve continuity in policy development.

The results support the view of Pépin (2011) that Education and Training 2010 (ET2010) was a well-established European framework, but that there was weak ownership at the national level (29). It follows that, unless severe modifications are made to the ownership of similar processes in the future, such processes will end up with vague outcomes. At times when resources are scarce, it is certainly worth asking whether resources for this kind of cooperation are well allocated. It might be fair to question the purpose of massive reporting and participation if the results are not interesting and the entire method seems ineffective. Perhaps the fear of heavy bureaucracy and reporting was justifiable after all. If ET2010 reports were not really useful nationally, it seems reasonable to ask why. Perhaps the whole purpose of the ET2010 was, after all, to contribute to the discussion at EU level. Besides, it is impossible to evaluate from this data the importance of ET2010 and the OMC to other countries. A conception was, however, presented that ET2010 and the OMC have supported the Member States in creating mutual understanding, which is of course priceless. The benefits of this cooperation to the entire Union should be presented more concretely by the Commission in the Member States.

During the interviewing and analysing stage, the future of EU education policy cooperation and the OMC became topical with the commencement of the European Semester (COM 2012; SiVL 8/2013; Council 2013b), the new steering system set up by the European Commission for economic policy coordination. In spring 2014, the Commission launched a consultation on the future of Education and Training 2020. It has adopted the same working methods as ET2010 and has also been criticised as ineffective. The Commission is under pressure to find new methods of cooperation, and the hope expressed by Member States is that it hears the experiences of the Member States rather than listening only to consultants. It is to be hoped that this research will contribute to that discussion.

These thoughts are naturally bound by the context of the research and the understandings of the Finnish HE experts. It is clear that the national implications of

EU policies and the impact of cooperation varies enormously across different countries, according to position in the EU, political system and regional politics. The purpose of this research is not to make generalisations, but rather to make some observations based on the data. However, there is no reason to assume that the deepening or the spill-around of EU cooperation in the field of (higher) education policy will stop. On the contrary, the results of this research suggest it is possible to consider how the various forms of EU level cooperation might evolve. Teichler (2004) wisely asks whether globalisation of higher education has to be viewed as a manifestation of turbo-capitalism or instead as a move towards global understanding. The purpose of EU integration may sometimes have been lost, and the quest for a better understanding of each other's education systems could perhaps be given more emphasis in the EU cooperation, beyond merely highlighting the benefits for the economy.

7.3 Recommendations for further research

The results identified a new form of policy transfer, the concept of *policy spin*, describing how Member States (or other national actors) may influence the policy formation process at the Commission in order to advance initiatives beneficial to national policy formation. This concept suggests an interesting direction for further research. For instance, how much policy spin is used in Finnish policy formation, and in other soft law areas? Are there differences between countries in different policy fields in terms of how they influence the Commission? Who are the actual policy entrepreneurs in Brussels, and what is the role of national stakeholders?

Another question about the policy spin concerns how the new European Semester and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) have changed Member State approaches to influencing the Commission: are countries already using CSRs actively for policy spin, and if so, where? How much have these countries influenced CSRs, and how might they also use them in sensitive soft law areas? It might also be asked whether the future of soft law is its development for stronger use as a policy spin format, leading eventually to better and more targeted use of EU funding. It is also apparent that the new EU2020 strategy and the launch of the monitoring process of national education systems, linked to the new European cycle, have further deepened EU cooperation in the field of education policy. EU policies and policy-making changed

so dramatically at the turn of the decade that it would seem worthwhile to study how the role of education policies has changed under the new guidance of the European Semester and the implications of CSR in (higher) education for Member States.

As indicated in section 2.1, policy analysis can be a useful tool for evaluating the success of certain policy instruments (Hoogerwerf 1981). It would be interesting to use the methodology of policy analysis to properly investigate the intended actions and consequences of EU soft law in education, as well as in other fields such as social affairs, culture, youth policy and even sports. In particular, such evaluation could assist policy-makers in assessing policy, in observing closely the values driving policy, in the reformulation of policies and even in developing new problem-solving strategies (e.g. Dunn 1994). There might even be room for a cost-benefit analysis of the Open Method of Coordination, in a quantitative survey of the advantages and disadvantages of OMC measures to date. The OMC has been in use for more than a decade in education policy cooperation, and so there should be sufficient evidence about resources allocated and outcomes in Member States.

Furthermore, research on the significance and effectiveness of policy cooperation as well as on the significance of different policies seems even more important than before. In particular, one should pay attention to the significance of EU level policies and cooperation since EU collaboration requires an extensive amount of resources. Currently there are observations on the effects and implementation of policy decisions, i.e. legislative changes, but serious consideration should be given to the effectiveness of policies resulting without formal legislation. One example of this observation could be the EU2020 strategy; how effective is it in directing Member States, for instance, in the field of education policy. The policy transfer framework appears to assist well in this kind of effectiveness observation since it identifies how different cooperation methods may transfer policies and ideas from one political setting to another.

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Interviews

nro	Title during the interview	Name	Current and relevant former posts
1.	Senior Adviser	Ms Marita Aho	Confederation of Finnish Industries EK.
2.	Counsellor of Education	Dr Erja Heikkinen	Department for Higher Education and Science Policy, Ministry of Education and Culture.
3.	Counsellor, EU Affairs	Ms Johanna Hulkko	Prime Minister's Office. Previously National Expert, European Commission, DG Education and Culture 2005-2007 and Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU 2007-2011.
4.	Director of Policy and Foresight	Mr Jari Jokinen	Aalto University. Previously Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU 2003-2007.
5.	Doctor of Administrative Science (h.c.), President of the strategy group for Lapland University Consortium	Mr Arvo Jäppinen	Previously Director General, Ministry of Education (2001-2006).
6.	Director General	Ms Anita Lehikoinen	Department for Higher Education and Science Policy, Ministry of Education and Culture.
7.	Secretary General	Mr Juuso Leivonen	Association of Business Schools Finland. Previously Academic officer at the National Union of University Students in Finland and Member of the board at European Students Union ESU 2007-2010.
8.	Executive Director	Dr Timo Luopajärvi	The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences.
9.	Director for Education	Ms Heljä Misukka	Trade Union of Education in Finland, Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö OAJ. Previously State Secretary at the Ministry of Education 2007-2010.
10.	Vice rector, Chairman of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council	Prof. Riitta Pyykkö	University of Turku.
11.	Executive Director	Mr Simo Pöyhönen	Social Science Professionals. Previously Advisor, educational policy at the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland 2006-2010.
12.	Executive Director	Dr Liisa Savunen	Universities Finland UNIFI.
13.	Secretary General	Mr Ilkka Turunen	Research and Innovation Council, Finland. Previously Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU and at the Permanent Delegation of Finland to the OECD.
14.	Counsellor of Education	Ms Birgitta Vuorinen	Department for Higher Education and Science Policy, Ministry of Education and Culture.

Appendix 1. Sub-committee EU30 (education) in Finland

OFFICIALS (15 representatives)	Ministry of Education and Culture (7 representatives) Ministry of Finance (1 representative) Ministry of Employment and the Economy (1 representative) Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (1 representative) Prime Minister´s Office (1 representative) The Åland Government (2 representatives) FNBE, The Finnish National Board of Education CIMO, Centre for International Mobility
STAKEHOLDERS (15 representatives)	TRADE UNIONS (4 representatives) SAK ry, The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions STTK ry, The Finnish Confederation of Professionals AKAVA ry, The Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland OAJ ry, Trade Union of Education in Finland
	EMPLOYERS' ORGANIZATIONS (5 representatives) KT, Local Government Employers The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities EK, Confederation of Finnish Industries Federation of Finnish Enterprises MTK, The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners
	STUDENT UNIONS (3 representatives) SYL ry, The National Union of University Students in Finland SAMOK ry, The Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences SAKKI ry, The Union of Vocational Students of Finland
	RECTORS COUNCILS AND EDUCATION PROVIDERS (3 representatives) ARENE ry, The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences UNIFI, Universities Finland AMKE ry, The Finnish Association for the Development of Vocational Education and Training

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, June 2013.

Appendix 2. Timeline of EU HE actions 2000-2010

2000   Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000

2001   Strengthening cooperation with third countries in the field of HE
Communication from the Commission

2003   The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge
Communication from the Commission

2005   Mobilizing the brainpower of Europe: enabling higher education to make its full   contribution to the Lisbon Strategy
Communication from the Commission
Resolution of the Council

2006   Further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education
Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council

                    Delivering the modernization agenda for universities: education, research and innovation
Communication from the Commission

2007   Modernizing universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy
Resolution of the Council

2008   Report of the Council Resolution on Modernizing Universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy
Report from the Commission to the Council

2009   A new partnership for the modernization of universities: the EU Forum for University Business Dialogue
Communication for the Commission

2010   The internationalization of higher education
Conclusions of the Council

Programs supporting higher education

Erasmus + (2014–) Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC.

Erasmus Mundus (2009–2013) Decision N° 1298/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 action program (December 2008).

Action program in the field of lifelong learning (2007–2013) Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an action program in the field of lifelong learning (November 2006).

Erasmus-Mundus (2004–2008) Program for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries Decision No 2317/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (December 2003).

Erasmus (2000–2006) The second phase of the Community action program in the field of education 'Socrates' Decision No 253/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (January 2000).

Appendix 3. Invitation for an interview

Hei

Lähestyn haastattelupyynnöllä. Haluaisin keskustella kanssasi EU:n korkeakoulupolitiikan vaikuttavuudesta Suomessa. Haastattelu liittyy väitöskirjatyöhöni, jota teen Tampereen yliopiston Johtamiskorkeakoulun Higher Education Groupin (HEG, Jussi Kivistö ja Seppo Hölttä) ohjauksessa.

EU:n nk. heikkojen politiikka-alueiden (soft law) vaikutusta kansallisesti ei ole liiemmin tutkittu. Tutkimukseni tarkoitus on selvittää, mikä vaikutus on EU:n korkeakoulupolitiikkaa koskevilla päätöksillä kansallisesti. Tutkimukseni keskittyy EU:n neuvoston päätöksiin ja nk. avoimen koordinaation menetelmään, mutta haluaisin kuulla näkemyksiäsi samalla myös Bolognan prosessin ja EU:n välisestä suhteesta.

Haastattelen tänä vuonna tutkimukseeni korkeakoulupolitiikan toimijoita ja asiantuntijoita. Kuten tiedätkin, olen työskennellyt vuodesta 2005 opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriössä mm. erilaisissa EU-tehtävissä. Teema on siis minulle tärkeä ja toivon, että sinulla on käyttää kertaluonteiseen haastattelutuokioon tunti tai puolitoista xxx.

Haastattelu toteutetaan puolistrukturoituna teemahaastatteluna ja nauhoitetaan. Vastaukset käsitellään tutkimuksessa niin, että henkilöllisyyttä ei yhdistetä antamiisi tietoihin. Annetuista vastauksista muodostettava sähköinen tutkimusaineisto arkistoidaan pysyvästi Yhteiskuntatieteelliseen tietoarkistoon aihetta koskevan tieteellisen tutkimuksen ja opetuksen käyttöön.

Teen tutkimusta pääsääntöisesti osa-aikaisesti työn ohessa, mutta olen saanut tutkimusvapaata varten rahoitusta Suomen valtiotieteilijöiden liitolta (nykyään Yhteiskunta-alan korkeakoulutetut), Akavalta ja Pohjolalta.

Toivottavasti haastattelumahdollisuus järjestyy, kiitos jo etukäteen vastauksesta!

Johanna Moisio
Hum. kand., YTM

HAASTATTELU elo-/syyskuu 2012/JOHANNA MOISIO, TAMPEREEN YLIOPISTON JOHTAMISKORKEAKOULU

Valmisteltavan väitöskirjan aihe: EU:n korkeakoulupolitiikan vaikuttavuus kansallisesti, ohjaajat dosentti Jussi Kivistö ja professori Seppo Hölttä

Tausta:
EU:n koulutuspolitiikassa viime vuosikymmenellä keskeistä olivat EU:n kilpailukykyä painottanut Lissabonin prosessi ja avoimen koordinaation metodi (OMC). OMC:llä Eurooppa-neuvoston määritelmän mukaan tarkoitetaan EU-yhteistyössä laadittuja lyhyen, keskipitkän ja pitkän aikavälin tavoitteita, sovittuja suuntaviivoja, indikaattoreita, vertailuarvoja ja vastavuoroisia oppimisprosesseja.
Toisaalta viime vuosikymmenellä oli EU-yhteistyössä myös nk. korkeakoulupolitiikan omia aloitteita eli komission tiedonantoja ja EU:n neuvoston päätelmiä tai päätöslauselmia korkeakoulutuksen modernisaatiosta (kts. alla). Toki EU:n korkeakoulupolitiikkaan vaikuttivat myös Elinikäisen oppimisen ohjelma (Erasmus) ja yhteisten tunnustamista helpottavien instrumenttien kehittäminen (ECTS, EQF jne.), samalla kun Bolognan prosessi vahvisti yhteiseurooppalaista korkeakouluyhteistyötä hallitusten välisissä puitteissa.

Haastatteluteemat ja alustavat kysymykset:
Lissabonin prosessi ja yliopistojen roolista käyty kansallinen keskustelu

1. Millä tavoin mielestäsi Lissabonin prosessi muutti vai muuttiko korkeakoulupoliittista keskustelua EU:ssa tai Suomessa? Millainen yhteys oli kansallisella keskustelulla yliopistojen merkityksestä ja Lissabonin agendalla?
EU:n korkeakoulujen modernisaatioagendan ja Suomen yliopistouudistuksen välinen yhteys

2. Mikä yhteys oli EU:n korkeakoulujen modernisaatioagendalla Suomen yliopistouudistuksen kanssa? Mikä vaikutus EU:n korkeakoulutuksen uudistamista koskeneilla neuvoston päätelmillä (kts. liite) oli kansalliseen korkeakoulupolitiikkaan? Avoimen koordinaatiometodin ja kansallisten toimien välinen yhteys

3. Entä avoimen koordinaation metodi – pystytkö arvioimaan mikä merkitys sillä on mielestäsi ollut kansallisessa korkeakoulupolitiikassa?
Neuvoston nk. heikkojen päätöksien (soft law) ja kansallisen kehittämisen välinen yhteys

4. Mitä merkitys EU:n neuvoston päätöslauselmilla tai päätelmillä mielestäsi on?
Bolognan prosessin ja EU:n korkeakoulupolitiikan välinen yhteys kansallisesta näkökulmasta

5. Mikä merkitys Bolognalla on mielestäsi ollut Suomessa?
Miten näet EU:n roolin Bolognan prosessissa? Millainen yhteys EU:lla on ollut Bolognaan?

Appendix 5. Interviews

The duration of interviews in minutes	
S1	61
S2	61
S3	100
S4	55
S5	62
S6	47
S7	79
S8	70
OA	63
OB	69
OC	58
OD	74
OF	76
Min	47
Max	100
Avarage	67,30769
Total	875
Pages	167

Appendix 6. Transcription codes

italics	talk by the interviewer
[squere brackets]	comments or clarifications added by the interviewer
(…)	quotation cut
(--)	unclearly articulated speech
££	laughter
underline	emphatic word

Appendix 7. Code families

The purpose of this appendix is to present the various code families or themes created for the analysis: the codes they consist of and the amount of quotations for each of the theme. The original number of the code families identified was larger, but the analysis focused only to those issues relevant to research questions. Furthermore, the code families EU HE modernization agenda and EU HE policy were merged.

Code Family: EU HE modernisation agenda
Created: 2013-03-31 19:17:51 (Super)
Comment:
Includes themes and issues related to the EU HE modernisation agenda as indentified by the interviewees.
Codes (29): [Accountability] [Autonomy] [benchmarking] [Comparability] [Competitiveness] [diversity] [Efficiency] [EIT] [entrepreneurship] [Equality] [Excellency] [Funding] [governance] [harmonisation] [innovation] [knowledge triangle] [Management] [massification] [Mobility] [Multidisciplinary] [Quality] [ranking] [Regional impact] [Steering] [Structural development] [Third mission] [Universities_industry] [universities_work life] [usa]
Quotation(s): 116

Code Family: EU HE policy
Created: 2013-06-14 12:32:25 (Super)
Codes (10): [Bologna_EU] [Clark] [Commission and unies] [EU HE policy_threat] [EU HE significance] [EU HE significance to ministry] [EU HE significance to unies] [Modernisation agenda_FI] [Structural development] [University_reform_Finland]
Quotation(s): 169

Code Family: Lisbon
Created: 2013-03-31 18:44:43 (Super)
Comment:
Includes codings related to Lisbon process and its significance.

Codes (8): [Eu future] [EU_heads of states] [EU2020] [innovation] [knowledge triangle] [Lisbon_influence] [Lisbon_significant] [Lisbon_threat]
Quotation(s): 57

_____

Code Family: Official
Created: 2013-05-02 16:28:28 (Super)
Codes (2): [female_official] [male_official]
Quotation(s): 229

_____

Code Family: OMC
Created: 2013-04-01 14:57:54 (Super)
Comment:
Includes codings related to the Open Method of Coordination and the Education and Training 2010 programme which defined the OMC in the field of education policy.
Codes (10): [benchmarking] [ET2010] [ET2010_not relevant] [OMC] [OMC actors] [OMC benchmarks] [OMC peer learning] [OMC significant] [OMC threat] [OMC_not significant]
Quotation(s): 84

_____

Code Family: Soft law
Created: 2013-04-01 14:59:20 (Super)
Comment:
Includes codings that indicate the soft law formation, actors in it or its relevance.
Codes (16): [Cion_repetition] [Commission] [Commission and unies] [Commission_initiative_significance] [Council] [DG meetings] [EQF] [EU risk argument] [EU_legitimacy] [Ministers] [national parliament] [OECD] [Soft law] [Soft law_in Member States] [Soft law_not significant] [soft law_significant]
Quotation(s): 183

_____

Code Family: Stakeholder
Created: 2013-05-02 16:27:56 (Super)
Codes (2): [female_stakeholder] [male_stakeholder]
Quotation(s): 205

Appendix 8. Categories of meanings related to category A Change

Utterances and conceptions	Category of Meaning
Huge thing (OF), great leap (S3) New status of the (higher) education sector (OB, OC, OD, OF, S3, S5) Competition and comparison with North America and Asia (OB, OC, OF, S1, S2, S3, S7)	Lisbon significant to EU cooperation in education policy (ML1)
Lisbon and ET2010 brought structure and goals to EU cooperation (OA, OB, S3)	Lisbon systemized EU cooperation in education policy (ML3)
ET2010 brought long-term plans and strategies (OA, OB, OD, S3)	OMC systemized the EU cooperation in education policy (MO1)
Changed crucially (OB, OC, OD) Political decision-makers started to think university matters (OF) The Lisbon strategy changed the discussion on the role of the universities in society (OA, OB, OC, OF, OG, S1, S2, S3, S6, S7)	Lisbon changed the role of HE in EU politics (ML2)
How to save the Europe –kind of stuff (OF) HE has remained on the high-level agenda (OD)	EU HE policy was strengthened (MHE1)
New kind of interdependence emerged between countries (S3, OD) All the MSs want to participate the OMC (OD) The OMC significant as a supporting instrument for the Member States (S3, OD, OG)	OMC created interdependence (MO3)
Drafting process matters at the Committee level (S3, OA) Council a forum for policy learning (OD) Council's decisions give mandates to the Commission; Council's outcomes less significant to MS but significant to Cion (OD, OG, S3)	Soft law significant to EU cooperation in education policy (MSL1)
FI made an active contribution to EU level discussion, supported Cion (OF) Finland made a contribution (OB, OD, S3) Cion needs support (OF, S3) Interaction btw Cion and MS (OD)	EU HE policy created interdependence (MHE7)
Total 57	

Appendix 9. Categories of meanings related to category B Influence

Utterances and conceptions	Category of Meaning
Connection to national HE policy (OA, OB, OC, OD, OF, OG, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S7) EU level support to higher education policy (OB, OC, OF) EU agenda was beneficial particularly to national higher education and science policy (OB, OD, OF, OG) Lisbon connected to FI university reform and to FI structural development of HE system (OA, OB, OC, OF, S1, S3, S6) Knowledge triangle idea (OA, OB, S1, S3) Autonomy (OF, S5) Better exploitation of HE and research (S4) Funding (S2) Efficiency (OC)	Lisbon influenced FI HE policy (ML4)
Forced Finnish government to have a closer look of the university system (OF, S6) EU emphasis on innovations, knowledge and competitiveness was significant to FI HE policy (OB, OF, OG, S6) Education was presented as an investment (OD) Had to learn from elsewhere (S3) Came timely for Finnish needs (OA, OC, OF, S1, S3)	Lisbon created indirect pressure (ML6)
EU HE policy speeded up national developments (OB, OC, S3, S7) EU level discussion kept HE reforms topical (OB, OC) European peer pressure kept on developing (OB) External support was also needed (S3)	EU HE policy created pressure (MHE5)
Repetition of the message creates pressure (OD, OF)	Soft law created pressure (MSL2)
Repetition of the Lisbon message (OD, OF)	Lisbon repetition strengthened the impact (ML9)
Rather than some initiatives, the entire process significant (OB, OC, S3, S4, S7, S8) National process (FI position formulation) strengthens the transfer of EU level message (S3, S7) Something the stakeholders were able to use and to lean on, EU has power as an institution (S1, S4, S5, S7, S8) Cion initiatives launch the discussion and that makes a difference (OA, OC, OF, S1, S3, S4, S5, S7, S8)	EU soft law processes supported national policy formulation (MSL5)
Easy to refer to since decided on the highest political level (OF, S7) Stakeholders started to use the Lisbon goals as arguments in lobbying (OF, S7) Central thing in lobbying (S7) Lisbon strategy came timely for Finnish purposes (OA, OC, OF, S1)	Lisbon used as justification (ML7)
HE benchmark became relevant and useful argument when brought to EU2020 strategy (OD, OF)	OMC used as justification (MO10)

Brought up issues that were difficult to discuss, such as funding (OF) EU papers were means to raise issues (S3) Easy to appeal to (OF) Used as an argument in reasoning (S6) Useful arguments for MPs and the rectors (OC, OF, OG, S3, S7) FI university sector brought the EU level message directly (OF, S3) Insurance for civil servants (OB)	EU HE policy used as justification (MHE6)
Administration may have benefitted from the ET2010 (OB, OC, OD) Some ET2010 objectives relevant (OB,S3) Supports Member States with reviews and studies (S3, OD) Mutual understanding has increased (OG)	OMC supported Member States to develop policies (MO2)
Tradition to use statistics from various sources (OA, OD, S3) ET2010 had some interesting objectives (OB, S3)	OMC provided comparison (MO4)
Objectives of University Reform arose from there (S1) Roots for University Act, funding basis and structural development (S2) EU HE policy (modernization agenda) connected to University Reform (OC, OF, S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, S7) and structural development (OF, S2, S3, S7, S8) Strong connection btw the EUHE and national developments (OC, OF, S1, S2, S3) Emphasized following: mobility (OF, OB, OD, S1), quality (OD, OF, S2, S8) and 3rd mission (OC, S1, S2, S5, S7), autonomy (OF, S3, S5) etc.	EU HE policy supported national policy development (MHE2)
Something the stakeholders were able to use and to lean on, EU has power as an institution (S1, S4, S5, S7, S8) EU soft law, in particular commission's initiatives useful (S1, S4, S7) EU soft law is a benchmarking tool (OB) Stakeholders do also lobbying to influence the content (S1, S4, S7)	Soft law supports national policy formation (MSL6)
Total 168	

Appendix 10. Categories of meanings related to category C Fusion

Utterances and conceptions	Category of Meaning
Some used EU, others EUA and Bologna for reasoning - kind of bundle (OB, OC, OF, OG, S3, S5) Effectiveness and quality discussed already earlier (OB, OG)	Various sources used – Lisbon was one among others (ML10)
EU was not the only thing that affected (OA, OB, OC, OD, OF, OG, S3, S5, S8) Joint effect (S3, S5, S6, OB) People at the universities used to refer to various sources (OC, S2) Tradition to develop the system (OA, OB, S3, S5, S7) Things do not develop in a vacuum (OA, OB, OC, OG) OECD cooperation significant in HE (OB, OG, S5, S8) There had been a tradition to follow closely the OECD statistics (OA, OD, S3) Difference between the EU policy and the Bologna process (OA, S2)	Various sources – EU HE policy was not the only one that affected (MHE8)
The EU soft law on HE alone would not have caused anything in Member States (OA, OB, OC, OF, OD, OG, S7, S8) One thing among others (OF, OG, S3) A benchmarking tool, another reference point (OB) Cion puts on the message through various channels (OB, OF, S1, S4, S7) Direct connections with the universities (S1, OB, OD) Unclear how the Cion consults (OB, OC, OD, OG)	Various sources – Soft law one reference point among others (MSL3)
Total 63	

Appendix 11. Categories of meanings related to category D Irrelevance and resistance

Utterances and conceptions	Category of Meaning
Humboldtian vs entrepreneurial university (OD, OG, S5) Discussion on private funding (OD, S6) or accreditation needs (OD)	EUHE understood as a threat (MHE4)
Bureaucratic and heavy process (OD) Competence issues, fear of harmonization (OC, OD, OF) Universities serve only the economy and HE seen as commodity (OC, OF, S3)	Lisbon understood as a possible threat (ML5)
Method was feared (OB, OD, OF, OG, S3, S5)	OMC understood as a threat (MO8)
Not able to estimate the significance of Lisbon strategy (S4, S5, S8) Not able to estimate the usefulness of OMC (S2, S4, S5, S6)	Lisbon significance and OMC unknown (MO7)
Hesitant to connect EU HE policy and national developments (OA, OB, OG) University sector does not follow the EU level or they can put the discussion to the right context (OC, OG, S2, S3)	Resistant to EUHE influence (MHE3)
Council's decisions have no impact (OA, OC, OF, OG, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7) No sanctions included (OD, S7) The cycle is too long before the Council (OG) The Council does not look very transparent or legitimate to discuss issues that belong to the autonomy of the universities (OA, OB, S5) Council decision-making includes only administration, stakeholders excluded (OA, OB, S5)	Soft law failure (MSL4)
The ET 2010 not relevant to national HE policy (OB, OF, S1, S5, S6, S7) The role of universities was brought up as its own (OB) or in Bologna (OF, OD) The OMC not important to HE actors (OB, OC, OD, OF, S1, S2)	OMC irrelevant to HE (MO5)
Not apparent in national debate (OB, OF, S1, S5, S6, S7) Clusters unsuccessful (OA, OB, OC, OF) Not useful as a method (OA, OB, OC, OF) Benchmarks irrelevant to FI (OF, S1, S3)	OMC failed as a method (MO6)
FI did well, targets easy (S3) No effect really (OF) Fears were not realized (OB, OC, OD, OF, OG, S2, S3, S5) No pressure created, voluntary (OF)	OMC no real threat (MO9)
Other developments more important (OG, S5, S8) No need to use external arguments (OA, OB, S3, S8) Prioritize other arguments (S2, S3)	EUHE rejected (MHE9)
No need for external arguments (OA, S8) Lisbon brought nothing new really, FI successful already (OG, S6)	Lisbon rejected (ML11)
Total 112	

Appendix 12. Issues mentioned in MHE2

ISSUES OCCURANCE	official	total	stakeholder	total	All	no connection
accountability	OF	1	S3	1	2	
autonomy	OF	1	S3, S5	2	3	
excellence		0	S2, S3	2	2	OF, S5
regionalism		0	S1, S3, S7	3	3	
mobility	OF, OB, OD	3	S1	1	4	
intenationalisation	OD	1		0	1	
quality	OD, OF	2	S2, S8	2	4	
funding	OF	1	S1, S7	2	3	
efficiency	OF	1	S8	1	2	
3. mission	OC	1	S1, S2, S5, S7	4	5	
comparability	OB, OC	0	S3	1	1	
knowledge triangle	OB	1	S1, S3	2	3	
university-business		0	S2	1	1	
employability		0	S2	1	1	