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Steering by stealth? Influence of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Programmes in European higher education policy

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the interplay of European and national higher education policy in implementing a joint degree Erasmus Mundus programme on institutional level. We utilise the stakeholder approach to highlight and contrast the differing internationalisation rationales. Specifically, we analyse how the impact of external stakeholders (European Commission, national governments) and their policies are affecting higher education institutions at institutional and programme levels. As a particular case, we utilise the Finnish higher education system and the implementation of a joint degree Erasmus Mundus Masters programme 'Master in Research and Innovation in Higher Education' (MARIHE). We conclude that in Finland Erasmus Mundus programmes have not triggered significant legislative changes at national level supporting the goals attached to the Erasmus Mundus instrument. However, Erasmus Mundus provides important stimulus to institutions and their programmes to find unique ways to collaborate within the boundaries of existing legislative frameworks. The paper also shows that a detailed analysis of the Erasmus Mundus programme can be used as a concrete illustrative example of the multifaceted picture of the EU higher education policy.

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Introduction

As regulators and resource providers, national governments have been the most important external stakeholders for European public higher education institutions (HEIs) during the twentieth century. However, over the past two decades, the role of national governments has partly been replaced by more diversified external stakeholder groups, collaborative networks, various quasi-market type of incentive schemes and movement towards more multi-layered (local, regional, global) accountability relationships (Geuna 2001; Kitagawa 2003; Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno 2008; Defazio, Lockett, and Wright 2009). Simultaneously, the role of the European Union (EU) and particularly European Commission (EC) have significantly increased their policy roles as agenda setters and resource providers. It has been argued that by offering funding for

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programmes such as Erasmus Mundus (EM), EC has turned European universities into lobbyists promoting its higher education (HE) policies (Batory and Lindstrom 2011). From this perspective the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree Programmes (EMJMs), which are specific instruments of the wider EM programme, can promote indirect and undetected coordination – 'steering by stealth' – along with other EC policies targeting changes both at national and institutional levels.

The Europeanisation of HE policy refers to the processes through which systems and organisations adapt to European HE policy initiatives and to the institutionalisation of formal and informal rules developed with or by decision-making bodies of the EU (Vukasovic 2017). As such it is policy-driven 'internationalisation on a regional scale', where internationalisation means a process of being inter-national in the context of HE, that is, increasing cooperation and interconnectedness between HE systems (Beerkens 2004; Luijten-Lub 2007).

It also means the gradual integration of organisations, political institutions and structures in Member States needed for coherent EU policies (Moisio 2014). So far there have been few studies discussing the relationship between Europeanisation and EM (see Batory and Lindstrom 2011; Papatsiba 2014; Abebe and Ford 2019; Marques, Zapp, and Powell 2022). Despite this, the topic itself is important as higher education (HE) policy in the EU does not fall within the jurisdiction of the EU but of the Member States. Still, EU's role in shaping the European HE policy can be considered significant as its financial tools incentivising cooperation and networking have become institutionalised policy instruments over the past decades. In particular, we believe that the EM highlights the multilevel nature of EU education policy dynamics, and indirect impact of the EU – not only at national level but also at the institutional and programme levels. However, the effect of EU funding is not always easily recognised or visible as it is blurred with other policy tools impacting national HE policies.

Batory and Lindstrom (2011) also suggest that HEIs are poised to comply with the EC's requirements even in the absence of compatible national frameworks, thereby leapfrogging policy decisions on the national level. In this paper, we continue this discussion started by Batory and Lindstrom to highlight the complexities of multi-level stakeholder relationships (between EC, Member States, and HEIs) in European HE policy. We describe the main rationales of the EM programme which are strongly linked to EU HE policy and identify how they are manifested at the national and programme (EMJM) levels. Based on this, we discuss the potential impact of the EU on the internationalisation of Finnish HE nationally and institutionally.

We draw on our experiences in planning and implementing EMJM programmes and use the case of Finnish HE system, Tampere University and the implementation of the Master in Research and Innovation (MARIHE) EMJM programme as an illustrative example. Data we use are various types of documents from the years 2010–2021, such as reports, guidelines, policy papers and regulations that were produced at national, institutional or programme level (see the appendix for a complete list). The analysis method follows the principles of standard qualitative content analysis which aims at a conceptualisation of the phenomenon (e.g. Collier and Mahon 1993; Kolbacher 2006) within the objectives and analytical framework of this study.

The paper is structured as follows: In the first section, we discuss the main principles of HE in the context of the European Union and Member States. In the second section, we introduce the stakeholder approach and modes of influence which we use as an

analytical framework in our analysis. In the third section, we shortly summarise the Erasmus Mundus programme (EM) and the joint Erasmus Mundus Master's degrees (EMMJD). In the successive three sections, we conduct our analysis at national system level (Finnish HE policy), institutional level (Tampere University) and programme level (MARIHE). In the last section, we discuss our findings and offer conclusions as well as recommendations for further research.

European context of HE policy

In relation to the distribution of policy competencies between EU and Member States, EU plays a complementary role compared to the Member States. This means that the EU does not have the power to directly regulate the European higher education sector but is highly dependent on the national policies of Member States to achieve its policy goals (e.g. Agasisti and Haelermans 2016). In this context, EU's policy actions and decisions can be called 'soft law', in contrast to 'hard law' applied in policy fields where EU competence is broader (Moisio 2014). Although soft law has several meanings, it can be understood as non-legislative and non-binding measures, such as recommendations, policy opinions, reports and communications (e.g. Lange and Alexiadou 2010; Moisio 2014). Soft law measures are persuasive, not restrictive, and include forms of governance which emphasises horizontal, voluntary, and participatory processes in contrast to vertical, compulsory control mechanisms. The non-coercive nature of European HE policymaking has, however, been questioned based on the power asymmetry resulting from financial leverage of one particular EU organ, EC. EC's power to allocate or withhold financial rewards by selecting funding recipients in the wide range of programmes it administers, has had more influence than was assumed. By making the funding allocated to institutions and their programmes conditional based on their capacity of meeting certain objectives, the EC can extend its actual influence to a policy area where it has no formal competence (Batory and Lindstrom 2011).

The successful Erasmus mobility programme, launched in 1987, intensified the EC's involvement in European HE, particularly in the areas of credit transfer and university networking (Keeling 2006). Since the beginning of the Bologna Process in 1999 and the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EC has paid closer attention to the role of universities. The Lisbon Strategy and the subsequent Europe 2020 Strategy highlighted the economic framing of HE policies (Dakowska 2019). Gradually within three decades, many intergovernmental processes within European HE policy have become heavily dependent on the EC's input. The observable convergence between governmental initiatives of Member States and the EC illustrates the gradual shift of political authority towards EU institutions to the extent that this has been called a 'transgovernmentalist turn' (Walkenhorst 2008; Dakowska 2019).

On the other hand, some authors challenge this top-down-oriented narrative emphasising the role of the Member State governments and universities as strategic actors that directly interact with the EU. For example, Moisio (2014) discovered the new 'policy spin' process where Member States need initiatives from the EU in order to advance policy formation nationally, and therefore they also present their ideas to the EC to advance its initiatives.

EU's influence on European HE policy can be viewed through the analytical lens of the stakeholder approach. HE stakeholders, as 'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives' (Freeman 1984, 46) aim to advance their 'stakes' by exercising their formal, economic or political influence (Burrows 1999). Through its central role in European-wide policy formation, the EC has become an important *external stakeholder* in HE, not only to Ministries or other agencies in EU Member States, but to HEIs and their educational programmes, both within EU and non-EU countries (partner countries).

According to Burrows (1999) there are three distinct categories of stakeholder influence: formal, economic and political. Formal influence relates to the contractual or regulatory relationships between an institution and its stakeholders. A stakeholder's ability to contribute to or generate the required resources means that it has an economic influence, whereas political influence is related to the stakeholder's ability to affect the decisions or behaviour of a HEI through its status or its ability to negotiate (cf. Freeman 1984: Burrows 1999; Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno 2008; Lyytinen et al. 2017). The difference between formal and economic or political modes is in their coerciveness: formal modes of influence are coercive (i.e. punitive sanctions will follow non-compliance) whereas economic and political modes of influence are not. Economic and political modes of indirect influence can also constitute 'steering by stealth' and be used particularly in the context where there is no formal direct legislative influence the stakeholder may yield (Table 1).

When focusing only on the two most important external stakeholders of HEIs in EU countries, we can distinguish three forms (formal, economic and political) of influence (Burrows 1999). Due to the principles of national competences and EU complementarity, direct influence on HEIs lies solely at the national level. However, economic influence is an exception since the relationship between institutions (and their programmes) and EC is more punctual and contractual. EC funding programmes target universities more directly as they facilitate international networks, establish novel joint degrees, and drive cross-border exchange. As such they bypass the national level governance structures, such as the Ministries.

Batory and Lindstrom (2011) argue that the EC has extended its influence to a policy area where it has no formal competence in two ways: by offering economic incentives and political recommendations. These two modes of influence are persuasive and lack coercive nature of regulations and norms (formal mode, direct influence). However, through the 'power of the purse', that is making EU funding dependent on grant recipients meeting certain strategically selected conditions, the EC creates new incentives for a range of actors in Member States, most notably universities, to lobby governments

Table 1. The external stakeholder's, EC and nation states modes of influence on HEIs based on Burrows (1999).

	European Commission	Member State (Ministry)
Formal	No formal legislative powers	National legislation and norms
Economic	Incentives provided by EC coordinated funding programmes	Incentives provided by core funding for HEIs
Political	'Soft law'; promoting strategic EU priorities through communication and initiatives	National HE policy priorities and strategies

from below to pass legislation, which would allow them to conform to the EC's policy priorities. In this way, the EC can use other modes of influence to compensate its lack of regulative authority in the sphere of HE policy.

To summarise, the European HE policy is an interplay between the external stakeholders of EU represented by the EC and the nation state through the ministry providing the legal framework and funding to HE and the internal stakeholders of the institution, the programme and the staff and students involved in it. We use the stakeholder approach and modes of influence as an analytical framework in our analysis.

Erasmus Mundus and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Degree Programmes

As a driver of the Europeanisation of HE, EM can be considered as an example of the EU's ambition to incentivise university networking within Europe and beyond. The aim is to have more selective student mobility and to introduce a new logic of conferring transnational degrees. Both facilitate the construction of European identity in and through HE (Marques, Zapp, and Powell 2022). The EM cooperation and mobility programme was launched by the EC in 2003. The most important and well-known part of the EM programme are EMJMs, previously known as 'Erasmus Mundus Master Courses (EMMC)'. EMJMs are joint study programmes (60, 90 or 120 ECTS credits) delivered by a consortium of at least three European HEIs in different European countries (known as 'Programme Countries') over a course of a one- or two-year period. EMJMs include a mandatory mobility component in at least two European countries and lead to the joint recognition of the study programme in the form of double, multiple or joint degrees (Kivistö and Pausits 2020).

Throughout its existence, EM has had three important purposes. First, it is expected to contribute to the compatibility of European HE systems, as well as to the collaboration between HEIs, both key aspects of the Bologna Process. The establishment of a European-wide system of study credits (ECTS system) can be seen as means of promoting widespread student mobility, while the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees can be understood as promoting employability of graduates and international competitiveness of European HE. Secondly, EM aims at increasing the visibility and attractiveness of European HEIs in the global market (Kivistö and Pausits 2020). The implicit but nonetheless clear rationale for the programme was to make the EU more competitive in attracting the most talented among an expanding pool of international students (Batory and Lindstrom 2011).

EC manages the EM budget and sets the objectives of the programme and guides and monitors its implementation. Operating under the auspices of the EC, the Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency (EACEA) is responsible for the concrete implementation of the programme in the form of drawing up calls for proposals, selecting projects and signing agreements, managing finances, and monitoring the EMJM projects. Although EC and EACEA are the most important external stakeholders, national agencies (in member countries) or offices (in some partner countries) are also involved in the management of the programme. Erasmus+ national agencies and offices are responsible for providing information on the programmes, reviewing applications as well as monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the programme in their country, supporting organisations intending to participate, and promoting the

programme at local and national levels (European Commission 2016; Marques, Zapp, and Powell 2022).

EMJMs are financially and otherwise attractive for HEIs and academics involved in degree education at least for the following reasons. First, given the prospect of fully funded studies, EMJMs scholarships provide the participating HEIs with a steady supply of high-caliber applicants all over the world (lat. 'Mundus'). Being able to select high-quality fee-paying students has constituted a strong incentive for participating. In addition, the EM label has been promoted as proof of excellence thereby increasing the prestige of institutions participating EMJMs (cf. Papatsiba 2014).

Erasmus Mundus in Finland

Finnish higher education institutions have been actively involved in the Erasmus Mundus activities since the first call of the programme in 2004. Among the first 103 EMJMs selected in the first call, there were 11 with Finnish HEIs involved (Vellamo 2010). During the period of our interest, 2014-2020, nine Finnish HEIs participated in the EMJMs (EC 2021) generally, Finnish HEIS have more often been degree awarding partners than coordinators in the EMJMs (Vellamo 2010). Finnish Universities have been more active than Universities of Applied Sciences in the EMJMs possibly partially due to the requirement of work experience for applicants to UAS master's degrees. In addition, there may have been limitations in the interest or capabilities of foreign universities to collaborate with Universities of Applied Sciences.

System level analysis – Finnish HE

The system level is influenced by the EU and the institutions pertaining to it. It channels indirectly the EU policy priorities into national HE policy and sets the legal framework for institutions. We examine the formal, economic and political modes of influence in the Finnish HE which is closely connected to or affected by the EM programme.

With respect to the formal influence, Finnish legislation grants autonomy to HEIs in several aspects including their collaboration with (international) partners but sets some framework conditions that may be incompatible with the EU policy aims of internationalisation and Europeanisation. In Finland, the provisions pertaining to the degrees and the structure of the studies (on degree level) are legislated nationally. Within this framework, HEIs are allowed to establish and run programmes in certain fields of study, however, they are not restricted from offering degrees together with other HEIs that have different degree awarding rights (i.e. in different fields and with different titles). A university may procure teaching from a university of applied sciences, but the university must provide the majority of the teaching of the degrees and fields under its responsibility (Universities Act, 7a §). Finnish universities may also accredit studies completed in universities of applied sciences (and other institutions) to university degrees, but the Finnish legislation does not allow universities to issue degrees together with universities of applied sciences (polytechnics) or vice versa as the university and university of applied sciences have their separate Government Decrees on Degrees (794/2004 and 1129/2014, respectively). Finnish HEIs also need to issue a degree diploma in their official language of education (Finnish or Swedish according to the institution).

National higher education legislation was amended in 2016 when collecting tuition fees from non-EU/EEA students in international degree programmes was made possible. This change of legislation was partly affected by Erasmus Mundus as HEIs inability to collect fees from non-EU/EEA students in EMJMs was specifically referred to as one of the reasons for change in the legislation. We will return to these legal frameworks when discussing the institutional and programme levels.

Focusing on the economic mode of influence, there have been national-level incentives for internationalisation including rewarding universities for degrees completed by international students (1% of funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture). During the period of our focus, the financial incentives, although not directed at particular forms of joint programmes, did reward more for international degree education than other degrees. A small amount of additional funding was also allocated based on international mobility of students and staff. The additional internationalisation compensation has been discontinued in the new funding model of 2021–2024, which places more emphasis on degree completion but has no special focus on international degrees or student and staff exchanges unlike the previous ones.

In addition to looking at the formal steering through legislation governing internationalisation and degree education in Finnish HEIs and the economic steering through the funding model, there is need to consider the softer policy aims articulated in the national strategies for internationalisation. Internationalisation has been integrated into the missions and goals of national HE policies for the last two decades (Välimaa, Aittola, and Ursin 2014). Even though internationalisation is a leitmotif in HE policy, linked to both Europeanisation and globalisation, it is only superficially treated in the legislation governing HE but more visible in the political modes of influence.

Internationalisation and Europeanisation are seen as proof of quality of education and international networking in education as a means for it. The national strategy for internationalisation (for years 2017–2025) stresses the competition for excellence, profiling, high-quality in education, at the same time giving the 'freedom' or responsibility for internationalisation to institutions. Thus, universities are given the freedom to select the disciplines in which they focus their internationalisation efforts and choose their international partners which appears to be in line with the EM programme aims enhancing networking with different partners and in different disciplines, including interdisciplinary programmes. International rankings are seen as the main indicator of international success.

In addition to national political aims voiced in national strategies, there are other types of political modes of influence such as national recommendations. The Board of Education has together with Finnish universities developed instructions related to the implementation of EMJMs and other joint programmes, titled 'Planning and implementation of international joint degree programmes/degrees and diplomas'. The instructions are based on national legislation and benchmarking of university practices. The initiative came from the Association of Finnish Universities (UNIFI) and the guide and model contracts were prepared by a working group of university representatives including a representative from the University of Tampere in 2015 (Board of Education, 2015).

In summary, when looking at formal, economic and political modes of influence by the Finnish government, there do not seem to be major hindrances in the formal mode in carrying out activities according to the EM programme aims. Economic and

political modes of influence could even be seen as supporting the internationalisation and Europeanisation aims and thus parallel to the EM programme aims (see Table 2).

Institutional level analysis – internationalisation and the role of EM at Tampere University

In line with general observations of Batory and Lindstrom (2011), also in Finland there has been excessive focus on national-level responses overshadowing the actors working below these levels in institutional contexts. Batory and Lindstrom suggest that the EM programme is directly targeted at the institutions that are left dealing with the national legislation and consolidating practices with international partners. This led us to examine the institutional level in more detail drawing from our experiences in one particular Finnish institution, Tampere University.

At institutional level internationalisation is recognised as pivotal and the internationalisation of education has slowly but steadily been extended from mobility to structured programmes including transnational forms of education, student experience, curriculum, strategic education partnerships and global recruitment of students (cf. Jones and de Wit 2017; Weimer 2020; forthcoming 2022). Internationalisation is integrated into the missions and goals of HEIs as a mainstream activity and an integral part of university strategies (Benneworth et al. 2012) but it is not only an intrinsic aim of the institution but enforced by national HE policy and different funding mechanisms (national and EU), as discussed in the previous section. Institutions not only face the national expectations and modes of influence but are also involved in the EU progammes where the EU influences them more directly.

At institutional level, as Papatsiba (2014) has suggested the EM provides European and non-European HEIs with structured and sustainable academic cooperation which can improve the quality of their master's programmes; increase participating

Table 2. External stakeholder's modes of influence on HE.

	European Commission	Finland (Ministry)
Formal	No formal legislative powers	National legislation and norms – Universities Act 558/2009 setting the extent, structure and aims of the degree, recognition of study attainments, tuition fees and scholarship system, time to degree – Government Decree on University Degrees 794/2004
Economic	Incentives provided by EC coordinated funding programmes – Erasmus Mundus scholarship grants for students – Coordination grants for institutions	Incentives provided by core funding for HEIs – Compensation for foreign degrees and student mobility in the national funding formula (University funding model 2017–2020)
Political	Promoting strategic EU priorities through communication and initiatives – EHEA	National HE policy priorities and strategies – Internationalisation strategy of Finnish higher education (2008–2015 and 2017–2025)
	EC Communications (e.g. related to the modernisation of European HE) 'Soft law' – The aims set in EM programme and more generally in European HE policy	National guidelines and instructions – Board of Education (2015) Planning and implementation of international joint degree programmes/degrees and diplomas

organisations internationalisation and competitiveness and attractiveness towards talented students. Thus, in addition to financial incentives, the EM programme can also offer symbolic resources such as prestige and reputation. In addition to the benefits, EM is considered as contributing to the internationalisation policies of the institutions as such (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2021).

Formal mode of influence on the institutional level can be considered to reside with the degree regulations. However, most of the formal power within them comes from the national legislation and those aspects within the autonomy of the institution can possibly be negotiated within the institution with faculty or programme levels. In addition, institutions may try to influence the national level in line with Batory and Lindstrom's (2011, 313) suggestion that 'universities lobby governments from below to pass legislation, which would allow them to conform to Commission requirements in order to attract and retain EU funding'. To what extent this has taken place is unknown due to the covert nature of lobbying. However, in the Finnish context, there seem to have been relatively few explicit attempts from institutions to influence on matter at the national level. Finnish HEIs generally do not oppose establishing joint degree programmes as such but may lack institutional capacity and existing instructions for it, leaving the practicalities to the programme level with advice to follow legislation and institutional rules aimed at international programmes generally.

Complying with the EM preference of issuing one joint degree diploma, it has been one thing that EMJM programmes have been willing to promote in Finland. Although participation in EM and the issuing of joint diplomas (in the EMJM) have implied regulation changes at national level in several other countries (Gornitzka et al. 2007), this is not the case in Finland. At the beginning of the 2000s, Tauch and Rauhvargers (2002) discovered that only a few countries had legal provisions regarding joint degree diplomas (cf. Implementing joint degrees in the EM action of the Erasmus+ programme 2020). Whereas, according to the evaluation of the EM programme in 2019 one-third of the consortia provided one single, jointly awarded degree to their graduates, whereas more than 40% delivered multiple/double degrees. The remaining 23% awarded a combination of degrees (Implementing joint degrees in the EM action of the Erasmus+ programme 2020, 7; 38). Several countries have made legal provisions to accommodate specifically the EMJM diploma awarding in the last two decades. This would lead us to conclude that EU has in fact been reasonably successful in the harmonisation of the degree diplomas, but Finland is one of those countries still opposing this harmonisation process.

Institutional pleas (if there have been any) for issuing a joint degree diploma have merely led to the development of the National Board of Education recommendations for Joint Degrees which now allow issuing a supplementary joint degree diploma, which is not recognised as official. Thus, there has not been an actual policy change, but the leapfrog practices of institutions (programmes) have led to the recognition of this informal practice on a non-regulatory basis and institutions (programmes) try to comply with the EC's requirements even in the absence of compatible national frameworks (Batory and Lindstrom 2011). Thus, the programmes operate in a grey zone between national legal frameworks and European-level integration ambitions (Gornitzka et al. 2007).

According to Benneworth et al. (2012) the economic rationale of income generation has gained in importance in the last decade, especially in countries where foreign

students pay full-cost fees. This may have unintended consequences in making students a resource for the institutions which implies, that student numbers have financial implications through either direct tuition fees or through state funding or possibly both (Papatsiba 2014). It has been mentioned in the internationalisation strategies that the introduction of tuition fees was prompted by the needs of Finnish EM programme partners. To some extent it seems that Finnish EMJM programme partners might have been willing to benefit from the revenue collected through the EMJM participation fees, but Finnish HEIs expressed strong doubts in the viability of education export and the tuition fee system (Cai, Hölttä, and Kivistö 2012; Juusola 2020). Since the introduction of tuition fees, the views of the HEIs may have changed, whereas EMJMs have been faced with new challenges concerning tuition fees or participation costs in the EMJM.

When considering the economic mode of influence, tuition fees can be an important source of direct non-governmental funding in the context of educational programmes (including EMJMs). When the EM programme was launched with its presumptuous scholarships for students together with the possibility to collect participation costs, it was still not possible legally charge tuition fees in Finland. Finnish participants in EMJMs had to either allow the other partners to benefit from the funds or to use them in somewhat inventive ways for organising other activities not connected to education or the programme administration directly. Since then, the situation has drastically changed in Finland through the introduction of tuition fees in 2016. The tables have turned also in the sense that the level of tuition fees set by the Finnish universities sometimes exceeds the participation fee cap set in the EM programme of 9000€ per annum. Thus, Finnish universities may have to compensate the gap between the EM scholarship with tuition fee waivers or additional programme level agreements.

There has also been a subsequent shift in the institutional strategies in relation to tuition fees where the number of (full or partial) tuition fee waivers and scholarships has been constantly declining in an effort from the institutions to gain more revenue from tuition fees. This strategy of lowering the percentage of fee waivers and increasing the number of fee-paying students was also adopted by Tampere University rather soon after the introduction of tuition fees despite opposition from degree programmes. At the institutional level the number and amount of tuition fees gained from the EMJM may not appear attractive, whereas, at the progamme level, they may be a way of gaining more tuition revenue through an external scholarship system, which may be quite rewarding depending on the internal consortia-level distribution of funds. Thus, the EM funding (student scholarships and coordination grant) has been more directly an incentive at the programme level. The EMJM programme needs to negotiate the fee policies not only with the consortium partners, but also with the home institution and the institution may need to adapt its fee policies accordingly.

From a political influence perspective, the EM programme has also been placed within an ideology of 'global hyper-meritocracy' (Brown and Tannock 2009) where the prestige and international visibility through the programme and its association as a label of quality are seen as important to the institution. However, EMJM programmes are not specifically defined as a strategic tool for institutional educational reputation building, at least in Tampere University (or for most other Finnish universities for that matter, an exception being Aalto University). Furthermore, the level of utilising the EMJM

programmes for highlighting the quality of international education in the university or using them in promoting other international programmes, has been surprisingly low. Finnish universities increasingly recruit students internationally and look for ways to attract the best students. New opportunities could open through networks and alliances at global level enhancing competitiveness, finding new market areas and gaining from the student recruitment and marketing efforts of renowned partners (cf. Marques, Zapp, and Powell 2022). The recruitment of top students through the competitive selection of the EMJM programme should be considered institutionally important if the stated aim is to attract good students in the EMJM programme as well as to other international programmes in the same institution.

Programme level analysis – EMJM implementation: case MARIHE

MARIHE is organised by the consortium of Danube University Krems (DUK, coordinator), Tampere University (TAU), Hochscule Osnabrück (UASO) and Etvos Lorand University (ELTE), accompanied by non-EU, non-degree granting partners Beijing Normal University (BNU, China) and Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology (TIET, India). The programme is a two-year 120 ECTS Master's programme which started as an EMJM in 2012 and was re-selected for 2019–2023. The awarded degree depends on the student's mobility path and different degrees are awarded accordingly: Joint degree diploma (between TAU-DUK) and (DUK-UASO) double degree (TAU-ELTE). It should be noted that a Finnish national degree diploma is always awarded when TAU awards the degree, even though an additional and officially recognised degree diploma is awarded jointly with DUK (where the joint degree diploma is the only one awarded).

Generally, joint programmes follow institutional regulations or negotiate them. MARIHE consortium partners have made several compromises in securing aspects of 'jointness' in the programme, as issuing a joint degree diploma as a single certificate and with all degree-granting partners turned out to be impossible. As discussed earlier, Finnish legislation does not recognise joint degree diplomas as legally valid certificate documents, and for this reason, the only valid degree document is a degree certificate issued by TAU. However, a joint degree certificate is printed and signed by TAU and DUK rectors. Due to the Hungarian national legislation, only issuing a double degree is valid, so a TAU-ELTE joint degree diploma is impossible. According to Finnish legislation, Finnish universities cannot issue joint or double degree with universities of applied sciences in other countries, particularly in EHEA. For this reason, awarding any form of TAU-UASO degree is not possible, as German Hochschules are equivalent institutions to Finnish universities of applied sciences. However, ELTE-UASO and DUK-UASO degrees are possibly creating troubling inconsistencies between EHEA countries taking part in EM programme. These examples have shown that there are both institutional and national hindrances in implementing a truly joint European master's programme.

In addition, the joint curriculum poses some challenges that need to be negotiated between the EMJM programme and the host institutions as there are national differences in grading (comparative vs. absolute) and study and evaluation practices (e.g. the times allowed to re-take exam, need to validate semester/academic year), differences in thesis practices (requirements for thesis, defence, etc.). These are not defined in detail in the

legislation, but Finnish universities have internal regulations on these. In grade conversion, the ECTS grade scale is applied but converting national grades to ECTS and then back into another partners' grading scale has resulted in some inconsistencies and unexpected difficulties. In addition, ECTS credit measurement and course grading practices have been difficult to harmonise even between European partners due to different traditions. In MARIHE, allocation of credit points follows ECTS in principle but there is difference in their implementation (e.g. how the student workload is calculated). Additionally, the master's thesis supervision processes, thesis requirements and the extent of the thesis (both in terms of length and ECTS) have required 'innovative' solutions between partners rather than harmonisation of the thesis requirements.

Lastly, in admission procedures, the consortium was forced to follow TAU's tighter admission regulations (e.g. in Austria the admission criteria are not as rigid) concerning the language requirements as it is at the discretion of the institutions to determine their admission criteria in Finland and Tampere University was not willing to adjust its criteria even though it would be possible within the autonomy of the institution. In principle, the practice has been in MARIHE that the strictest partner's requirements are applied, unless they are in direct conflict with national legislations or the regulations of another partner.

The following Table 3 summarises the discussion on the different stakeholders' modes of influence and their capacity to affect the key features of the EMJM

Discussion and conclusions

This article aimed to examine the 'steering by stealth' of the EU as manifested in the EM programme and how it is experienced by the institution and the EMMJ programmes and the (perceived) impact it has on national legal, economic and informal modes of influence To explore this, we looked at the institutional and the programme level, bringing examples from our case MARIHE in Tampere University and compared them to the aims of the EU (Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education) and nationally (Finnish HE policy). The aim was to highlight and contrast the differing internationalisation rationales of the EU, the nation (Finland), the institution (TAU) and the programme (MARIHE).

European-wide changes in HE policies national policies require that Member States, institutions and programmes adopt measures and actions pointing to the same direction (Agasisti and Haelermans 2016). Participation in EM and implementing an EMJM often requires negotiating and converging institutional regulations and policies of which many are at the core of university autonomy, as well as negotiating national regulatory frameworks of education policy and legislation (c.f. Batory and Lindstrom 2011; Papatsiba 2014). The national legislation sets the framework, within which the institutional regulations are defined. However, the EMJM programmes have affected the institutional rules and led to the creation of institutional and national recommendations on joint and double degrees which deviate from the general institutional and national level policies. In addition, there are some deviations to national level legislation for EMJM programmes, including the possibility to collect tuition fees from EU students (through the EC participation fees and scholarships system) and to issue joint degree diploma, although additional and unofficial in Finland. These represent examples of 'steering by stealth' where the EC through

Table 3. Summary of the different stakeholders and their capacity in the key features in EMJDMs.

	EU	Nation (Finland)	Institution (TAU)	Programme (MARIHE)
Modes of influence	Economic Political	Formal Economic Political	Internal rules, policies and practices (formal, economic and political)	Academic freedom
HEI collaboration	No distinction between HEIs	Collaboration mainly within Binary System. Institutions responsibility for the degree awarded.	Freedom to choose partner HEIs according to institutional profile and policy	Negotiating partner choice on institutional level
Credit transfer	ETCS as defined officially	ETCS compatibility interpreted according to national credit and grading system	Transfer of credits and accreditation of grades as defined on institutional instructions	Negotiating within consortia and with own institution the interpretations of ECTS, national and institutional systems.
Degree diploma	Joint degree diploma strongly preferred	National (Finnish) degree diploma required by legislation.	Authority to issue additional (unofficial) degree diplomas and to modify degree diploma texts.	Possibility to negotiate within consortia and with own institution. Combining EU expectations, national legislation and institutional practices.
		Binary system enforced in degree awarding (responsibility of degree conferring)	General rule for accrediting and transfer of credits from abroad and the Instructions on Joint and Double Degrees in Tampere University	Credit transfer instructions
Tuition fee	Fees and Scholarships defined in the EM programme. One fee for the programme (EU and non-EU students) collected by coordinator and distributed to partners.	Legislation on fees and scholarships (minimum fee 1 500 €/semester). Fees only for non-EU/EEA students in international programmes.	Institutions' freedom to define fees within the legislative limit and freedom to set scholarship systems. Benchmarking with national and international HEIs. Aim of increasing proportion of fee-paying students. Distribution of collected fees decided by institution. Tuition fees of 10 000€ for social sciences programmes. Maximum 40% tuition fee waivers in programme. Instructions on Joint and Double Degrees in Tampere University	One fee for the programme collected by the coordinator and internal distribution of finances. Freedom to use funds on programme level
Curriculum	Joint curriculum	Degree minimum (90 or 120 ECTS for Master's) defined, but content only loosely regulated (major or equivalent, learning outcomes, etc.)	120 ECT for Master's. Degree structure models. Instructions for Curriculum planning.	Academic freedom in curriculum. Combining existing or developing completely new joint curriculum.

EM and the implementation of EMMJs have been able to have the programme level change institutional policies and to affect the national policies.

The interest of the institutions to lobby at the national level would require first and foremost that the institutions find the EM programme and their EMJMs strategic and important enough to lobby for. At least in Finland the joint degree diplomas have apparently not been a topic that the institutions have felt important enough to lobby for even if there are wishes for such a policy change at the programme level (EMJMs). Institutions have made modifications to their internal rules (e.g. on tuition fees, credit transfer) to accommodate better the needs of the EMJM. However, there is reluctance to change some institutional rules which are within the institutions' autonomy, such as admission criteria, even in the case where they would be beneficial to the joint degree programme.

It has been identified in previous research (Batory and Lindstrom 2011), that the EU (through EC) aims to use joint degree programmes as change agents to target policy changes at the institutional (internal stakeholders) and national level (other external stakeholders such as nations and those associated with national HE policy). Much of this is hidden in the sense that push for changes is not explicitly stated policy objective, but rather an indirect outcome of funding joint degree programmes. We however, by looking at the Finnish case, discovered 'steering by stealth' to be a more multifaceted process, where EU influences the programme level more directly than the institutional level. Whereas the programme level tries to influence the institutional level and the institutional level either allows the programme level to negotiate regulations (with partners), leapfrog (create inventive solutions) or act within the (academic) freedom it has with relatively little strategic interest or direct support to the individual EMJM programme. The institution also seems reluctant to lobby the needed changes at national level for the programme to comply with EM requirements. This makes the process of negotiation and lobbying much more complicated than expected by the EU (or theoretically discussed by Batory and Lindstrom 2011) as depicted in figure 1.

There is an economic mode of influence, but it is directed differently in the case of EMJMs than what would be expected based on the presumptions of Batory and Lindstrom's study. If the economic influence does not affect the institution but the programme, the institutional interest in influencing the national legislation is not strong. The lack of institutional lobbying suggests weak political influence on the national level and does not lead to changes in national HE legislation and effectively to formal influence as expected in the model.

Finland has generally been compliant in adopting European HE policies, such as the ECTS system and the two-cycle degrees, through the political mode of influence. However, there seem to be certain characteristics typical for the Finnish HE system that persist despite the EU efforts to influence them, including the separation of dual system of HE in degree awarding as well as the persistence of a national degree diploma. We argue that some key aims that the EU has promoted through EM are still not realised as national HE policy has persisted in Finland and institutional lobbying has presumably been relatively weak.

Most of the other aspects in need of European-level consolidation from the perspective of the EU are left to the discretion of the institutions (institutional autonomy) or even programmes (academic freedom). The programmes are thus often left to consolidate the joint curriculum within their academic freedom and to try to figure out other

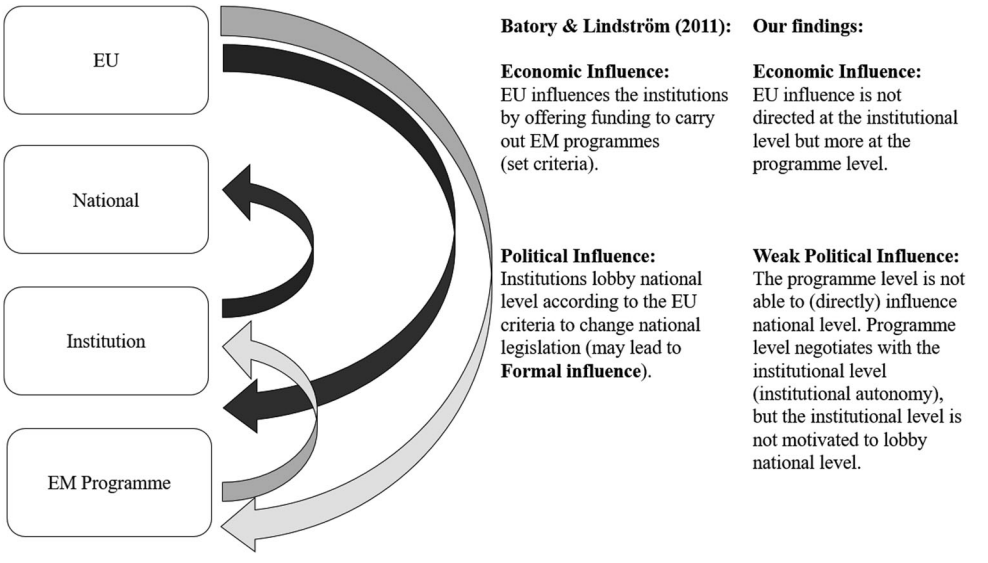

Figure 1. The expected pattern of influence (Batory and Lindstrom 2011 in dark grey) and the pattern we discovered (in light grey).

prominent features of jointness (e.g. ECTS grading, examination practices, language requirements) by negotiating with the partners and the institutional level with their own university.

This paper shows that a detailed analysis of the EM programme (particularly EMJMs) can be used as an illustrative example of the multifaceted picture of the EU HE policy. As a result of our analysis, we demonstrated that the impact of the EU might not be always as self-evident and straightforward as it has been assumed, and therefore it can be considered as 'steering by stealth'. However, the findings and insights of this paper are to a large extent limited only to the Finnish HE system and policy, one particular institution and one EMJM programme and therefore lack potential generalisability. However, we recommend that further studies should be conducted which would include other national contexts, institutions and EMJM programmes. This would allow drawing comparisons and shedding light to the presumable national and institutional variance in their responses to EU HE policy.

Disclosure statement

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

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Appendix

Data analysed

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