

ter the merger weren't an end in itself but a tool used by FEFU leadership to introduce systemic changes in academic management.

Far Eastern Federal University has truly lived up to its federal status. It made it through hard competition and was named among the country's 15 leading universities that participate in the national excellence program. FEFU can now be seen as a corporation that unites students and academicians from both Russia and abroad, and as a platform for a civilizational dialogue between Russia and Asia Pacific which allows cultural, educational, scientific and business exchange, as well as public diplomacy. In fact, FEFU has developed into a systemic national academic project that facilitates faster economic growth and improvement of the quality of life for the people of the Far East and, therefore, helps consolidate Russia's position in Asia Pacific.

Associations of Higher Education Institutions: Types, trends and implications

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Much like in other sectors, higher education has witnessed an increase in the number of cooperative ventures in recent decades, national and international alike. Contemporary higher education institutions (HEIs) are more likely to sign agreements, enter joint projects, or to form associations, than their earlier counterparts. In this paper I will focus on the associations established and joined by HEIs, which have become particularly prominent in recent years, especially in the international domain.[1]

Associations of HEIs are as such not a novel phenomenon. Be they called rectors' conferences, networks, consortia, alliances, councils, or, simply, groups, associations of HEIs have been around for more than a century. Among some of the oldest examples would be the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities in the US, established as early as in 1899, the Rectors' Conference of Swiss Universities (est. 1904) or the Association of Indian Universities (1925).

Normally, associations are established by HEIs which share some characteristics, such as the category they belong to (e.g. university or polytechnic), religion (e.g. Buddhist or Catholic), disciplinary focus (e.g. technical universities), ownership (e.g. public or private), status, political, cultural or geographic border. Sometimes they are established by

a law and membership in them is mandatory, such as it is the case with some national associations. They may also be national and international, but also formed in specific regions within a country. To illustrate the variety of thus shared characteristics that bring HEIs together, we may think of examples such as the Association for European Life Science Universities, Eurasian Universities Union, Association of Universities in Portuguese Speaking Countries, or, for example, Association of Universities Entrusted to the Society of Jesus in Latin-America. However, a closer look at the variety reveals some important patterns.

Types

Once we look at the global-historical picture of the membership in associations, a rather straightforward typology emerges. The most common type of associations is the one which brings together all HEIs which can be grouped under the category "university." Typically, their purpose is to represent interests of all universities in their respective countries, regions or, as it is the case with the International Association of Universities, globally. They are concerned with issues such as university autonomy and academic freedoms and they typically engage in internal and public debates about the nature and purpose of higher education and science, as well as about their place in society and relationship with other sectors. Russian Rectors' Union, Czech Rectors Conference, European University Association or Baltic Sea Region University Network would be examples of this type. I refer to them as (a) generalist.

The second type is reserved for those associations formed by different kinds of HEIs and is accordingly called (b) specialist. Two sub-types emerge here. First, there are associations formed by HEIs which have some characteristic in common in addition to all being HEIs, such as ownership, religion, language, discipline and mission and they are hereby called (b-1) specialist-horizontal. Typical examples of a specialist-horizontal association would be the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, Asian Association of Agricultural Colleges and Universities or the International Association of Buddhist Universities. They come together not only as universities, but as a particular kind of universities, i.e. of applied sciences, agricultural and Buddhist, respectively.

Finally, the second sub-type is reserved for those associations formed by HEIs which claim to be of high status which are here called (b-2) specialist-vertical or simply elite. These associations are typically exclusive and invite-only clubs, usually of research-intensive universities which claim to be superior to the rest in terms of their quality and contribution to economy and society. Well-known examples of such high-status associations are Group of Eight in Australia, League of European Research Universities, German U15, Japanese RU11, African Research Universities Alliance and the previously mentioned Russell Group. All of them stress the importance of "excellence," in research in particular, and a "world-class" status, for which the position in global rankings is commonly taken as a proxy. For example, the main membership criterion

of the Young European Research Universities is to “have been included at least for one year, in the QS ranking Top 50 under 50 or the THE ranking 100 under 50.”

Trends

Much as the number of HEIs, the number of associations has also increased over time, although when we look into specific regions or countries, the relationship between the growth rates of the two is all but linear. This suggests that in order to understand where and why associations emerge, we need to look beyond the number of HEIs around. Factors such as types of HEIs present, legal framework, cultural specificities, national policies and international organizations, etc. play an important role, but so do broader trends and the narratives constituting them such as competition and internationalization. A closer look at the associations, the context and the time period in which they emerge reveals three sets of global institutional conditions which appear indispensable for certain types of associations to emerge and diffuse: (a) the 20th century university expansion and the consolidation of national higher education fields, which has been particularly important for the global institutionalization of the generalist and specialist-horizontal types in national contexts; (b) the intensification of cross-border interaction and the advent of international institutions, especially important for the international associations of the specialist-horizontal type; and, finally, (c) the formation of a global field and the rise of competition discourse, as vital for the rise of the specialist-vertical or elite type of associations.

Implications

Scholars of organizations have argued that associations are created in order to reduce the complexity and uncertainty in their environment. Affiliating with similar others is a well-known way of organizing the environment. In addition, many associations are active in advocating policies and promulgating standards of performance. On the other hand, for a single HEI, membership in several associations may, in addition to creating new opportunities for profiling and positioning, also create new kinds of complexity and tensions. This is in a way equally valid for any of the associational types, although elite associations emerge as an especially interesting case, given their prominence in recent years. International domain, and especially regions like Europe, has grown into a vibrant arena for the self-proclaimed “leading” universities’ lobbying activities and networking, somewhat similarly to the so-called “mission groups” in the UK. This trend clearly indicates that the European field is becoming increasingly stratified with an emerging elite tier of HEIs. Such behaviour is, however, not exclusive to the Western European universities. Not long ago, a group of “seven respected Central-European universities” [2], the so-called CE7, has reportedly also joined the trend. If we look at other empirical settings studied by scholars, such dynamics are not unheard of: high-status organizations tend to be more concerned with their actual status as such, especially

when the status order is contested and when there is some uncertainty about “who is who” in terms of quality and reputation. Certainly, rankings and competitive funding schemes play a role in both shaping and fuelling competition for status. Meanwhile, the expanding – yet still tiny – elite is becoming ever busier working its way to make sure the rest do not catch up. How any of this shapes the public discourse on higher education and not least how it affects higher education and its institutions – in Europe as anywhere else – are important questions which await further empirical investigation.

Notes

[1] This article is based on the book chapter “How do meta-organizations affect extra-organizational boundaries? The case of university associations” (by Brankovic, J.), forthcoming in the volume *Towards Permeable Organizational Boundaries?* (Book series “Research in the Sociology of Organizations”) edited by Ringel, L., Hiller, P. and Zietsma, C. Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018.

[2] <https://www.leru.org/news/leru-and-central-european-universities-team-up-for-better-research-education-policies>, retrieved on 13 February 2018.

When 2 Become 1. On the Cultural Aspect of University Mergers

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In the last 15 years, European higher education institutions including Russian have experienced more than 150 organizational mergers and acquisitions. We know from various country cases that they took different forms, varied in scope and scale, goals and means, depth of integrity and structuring. Although each merger is unique, common features have been identified, which provides important distinctions about voluntary and enforced mergers, vertical and horizontal, governed by state or universities and etc. [1] Moreover, it has been noted that merger is a multidimensional process. University managers should not underestimate the duration of the transition period [2] and take into account the long-term integration effect for organizational culture generally recognized as a ‘sense of community in a newly created university.’