

CENTER-PERIPHERY LEGACIES AND STATUS ANXIETY: COMPARING HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS AND HIERARCHIES IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

OBJECTIVES: 1) To compare current challenges in policy contexts, organizational strategies and cultural frames of research universities in Russia and Ukraine shifting from the post-Soviet paradigm of higher education (i.e. centrally controlled, bureaucratic, isolated, indoctrination-focused) to a global higher education paradigm (i.e. open, competitive, market-oriented, multiversity-driven); and 2) To re-conceptualize center-periphery legacies under the lens of emerging knowledge hierarchies and status anxiety in the process of higher education reforms moving universities from local to global levels. **MAIN PERSPECTIVE:** The center-periphery model of higher education is undergoing major transformations (Altbach 2011; Hayhoe et al. 2011), but the analysis and reconceptualization of its effects in various regions of the world has remained scant. Globalization and increasing status anxiety have urged nation-states and universities to handle center-periphery divides at multiple levels at the same time. For example, in most nation-states, capital cities and major industrial centers offer higher living standards and creative environments that attract intellect and ingenuity. Within the framework of neoliberal competition for scarce resources in education, faculty and students are pressed to seek more favorable places, and the major urban centers are better positioned to compete for talents. Inside universities, some academic departments and disciplines tend to play a more central role in times when public subsidies decline and economic stakeholders favor market-hot areas of study. Tensions between social sciences, business schools, and engineering and technology departments grow, as income generation becomes disproportionate, giving some more power in university decision-making. Center-periphery stratifications have transpired at all levels through uneven accumulation of resources, talents, prestige, and influences in the society, and have stimulated immense status anxiety for a more central place in various local, national, and international hierarchies. **METHOD:** This is a mixed-method study that has engaged qualitative and quantitative data collected in major Russian and Ukrainian cities (St. Petersburg, and Nizhny Novgorod; and Kyiv and Lviv). The study triangulates variables from literature review and content analysis of the policy documents and statistical reports produced in the two countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as interview data from administrators and faculty members in major universities of the four cities. **DATA SOURCES:** Data have been collected from public sources: institutional web-sites, reports from the ministries of education and science, local media including newspapers, scholarly publications, UNESCO and World Development Indicators, Thomson Reuters. In each city, 25 interviews have been conducted. **PRELIMINARY RESULTS:** 1) Russian and Ukrainian higher education systems have been transforming with different velocities determined by antagonistic cultural and political interpretations of the post-Soviet legacies in the two countries; 2) Russia has ceased to be a center for the Ukrainian higher education; unlike Russia, Ukraine has remained resistant to the local, regional or global hierarchies of higher education; 3) Both countries have experienced further concentration of resources in fewer cities and universities, despite efforts to reduce disparities and increase access to higher education; 4) Concerns about a research university model and innovative contributions from academic science grew faster in Russia than in Ukraine, given a stronger influence of knowledge economy in the former; 5) The quality of governmental steering has worsened in the Ukrainian higher education as political elites saw universities as major challengers of their legitimacy as well as a periphery to the old industry; at the same time, the Russian higher education reforms have benefited from the active linkage between the reformist wing of the post-Soviet government and several academic think-tanks acting as high-status coordinators of economic and educational reforms. **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:** This study contributes to the reconceptualization of the center-periphery model in international higher education by shedding more light on university and government responses to status anxiety generated at local,

national and international levels of the emerging hierarchies of knowledge. It also examines how the anxiety is managed by academics, administrators and policy-makers in the sampled countries. This will be helpful for policy reformers as well as new generations of scholars in the post-Soviet countries (primarily 15 former Soviet Union republics, now independent states) but also for those in the former Soviet-ally countries (e.g. People's Republic of China (PRC), Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, North Korea in Asia, as well as Poland, Moldova, and the Baltic Republics in Europe) that have already departed from the Soviet model to various degrees, and some (e.g. PRC) that have been making significant progress in positioning themselves in the global higher education space.