



**Albania's Journey into the Bologna Process:
Europeanizing Higher Education Policies
and the role of Epistemic Communities**

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This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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List of Acronyms

ACF	Advocacy Coalition Framework
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CRAU	Conference of Rectors of Albanian Universities
EC	Epistemic Community
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ERT	European Roundtable of Industrialists
EU	European Union
HDPC	Human Development Promotion Center
HE	Higher Education
HEFR	Higher Education Financial Reform
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HER	Higher Education Reform
IPE	International Political Economy
LHE	Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Albania passed in 2007
MES	Minister of Education and Science
MOES	Ministry of Education and Science
NES	National Education Strategy 2004 – 2015
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSDI	National Strategy for Development and Integration 2007-2013
NPEDS	National Pre-university Education Development Strategy 2004 – 2013
NSSD	National Strategy for Socio-economic Development
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SKALA	Strategjia Kombëtare për Arsimin e Lartë 2008-2013 (National Strategy for Higher Education 2008-2013)
SSTI	National Strategy of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009-2015
UNICE	Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe
WB	World Bank

Abstract

This research explores the role of Albanian epistemic communities in the country's development policy framing by investigating who had a say in the dialogues for the higher education reform. This comprehensive reform integrated Albanian universities in the European Higher Education Area and adopted the Bologna Process as a guideline for a new system of higher education. Interviews collected with Albanian academics, civil servants, politicians and civil society members are used to explore the nature, influence and political engagement of these communities as well as the consequences of their exclusion. The theoretical and political context in which higher education reforms took place is also investigated, highlighting the way in which Europeanization discourses shaped higher education policies in Albania while heavily influencing political deliberation.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research questions the validity of claims that integration of a developing country into structures of developed, democratic countries encourages more deliberation and increases opportunities for national ECs to participate in policymaking. Recognizing the unique perspective local knowledge can provide to development strategies, this research explores which particular communities make use of this alleged policy space and in what ways.

The case study points to complicated integration regulations and a general sense of disempowerment fostered both internally by the government and externally by powerful actors, which contributes to further devaluing national experts. An emphasized preference for foreign consultants, as well as unequal opportunities within the country for different epistemic communities, point to the challenges facing national experts in developing countries around the world. In exposing the dis-empowerment of Albanian epistemic communities, especially of those not aligned with the dominant Europeanization discourse, this research critically highlights the international hierarchy of power in relation to knowledge, expertise and capabilities that faces all developing countries.

If indeed disempowerment of national experts takes place as integration progresses, there is a strong need to explore why this is happening and which specific communities are suffering more from it. Thus, results on Albania's EU integration bear relevance to any developing country joining 'more developed' structures. Findings also illustrate how integration affects the policy space for national epistemic communities and changes knowledge - power dynamics within a developing country between governments and non-state actors.

Keywords: Albania, epistemic communities; national experts; policy space; higher education reform; European integration; Europeanization; political participation; deliberation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction:

Albania, the Bologna Declaration and national epistemic communities

This research explores the role of Albanian epistemic communities in the country's development policy framing by investigating who had a say in the dialogues for the higher education reform (HER) in Albania. The reform aimed to include Albanian universities in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and adopted the Bologna Process as a guideline for the new system. This system was officially adopted in 2003 when Albania signed the Bologna Declaration and was consolidated in 2007 with a new Law on Higher Education (LHE)¹. In this paper I lay down the theoretical and political context in which this reform took place in Albania, as in most of Europe, and I highlight the discourses that shaped the strategies and policies behind the HER. Based on interviews, collected with Albanian academics, civil servants, politicians and civil society members, I analyse the role and potential engagement of national epistemic communities (ECs) during the adoption of the Bologna system in Albania, trying to derive also implications for their future engagement in policy framing. The overall aim is to explore the roles communities of local experts have, or could potentially have, in the framing of development policies as well as the consequences of their exclusion.

1.1 Albania and the EU Integration imperative

1.1.1 *The transition resolve*

The Republic of Albania is situated in South East Europe, at the western part of the Balkan Peninsula, with a coastline on the Adriatic sea and Ionian sea, a total area of 28 748 km² and a population of about 3.1 million inhabitants (INSTAT 2001). But what is Albania beyond these general essentials?

Albania, known to its nationals as Shqipëri, is certainly not the typical case that comes to mind when thinking of developing countries. The country has a peculiar history of 40 years of near total isolation from the international political arena and global markets during what was one of the most repressive communist dictatorships in Europe; its history as detached from the European Union (EU) as it was from the developing world. When the economic and political system collapsed in 1990, the state vowed allegiance to democratic values and market economy. What followed in the next years was less a democratiza-

¹ The draft Law On Higher Education in the Republic of Albania was passed by the Council of Ministers on Albania's Teacher's Day, 7 March 2007 (Agenda Institute 2007).

tion process and more a period of social, economic and political transition. Needless to say it has been difficult. A failed pyramid scheme in 1997 caused numerous Albanian families to lose their savings plunging the country into an economic, social and political crisis (Jarvis 2000) and in 1999, during the Kosovo War, a still fragile country sheltered almost half a million Kosovar Albanians as displaced refugees (Kondaj 2002). The political arena has suffered continuously from clashes among different political parties over election results and corruption charges.

Despite these setbacks, governments have one after another taken decisive steps to reform the country's economic, legal and political system. In the last decade, the country has managed to stabilise and has established its path to development by committing to European Integration. Albania started negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2003 after being officially recognized as a "potential candidate country". The SAA was agreed and signed on 12 June 2006, representing a successful completion of the first major step towards full membership in the EU (SAA between Albania and the EU 2006). The country applied for EU membership on 28 April 2009 and has recently seen the application of a visa free regime with the Schengen Area after a long and frustrating period of restrictions placed on the movement of its citizens (Council of the European Union 2010).

Despite ongoing disputes between political forces and a rather unpredictable political scene, the Albanian state has repeatedly expressed its commitment to pursuing development efforts in line with EU aspirations. Continuous reforms are underway aiming to develop the Albanian legal, economic and political systems in accordance with EU's institutions, values and what are basically pre-requisites to accession. The country has in this way taken a difficult path of stabilization efforts in line with pre-accession requirements. Also, part of these reforms is the comprehensive restructuring of the HE sector.

1.1.2 Development or Integration: who gets to 'help'

It is no surprise that conceptualizations of 'development' and 'integration' are intrinsically connected in Albania's case. The country has a ministry dedicated to integration matters, and the national strategy for development in Albania is named National Strategy of Development and Integration (NSDI 2008). Thus the way development is perceived and pursued in the country goes hand in hand with EU integration efforts. Any dynamics within the development sector are, by default, immersed in the dominant discourse of development as EU Integration. This says a lot about the policies aimed at development in the country which are without doubt aligned to development ambitions but also and most importantly to the goal of Albania joining the EU and adapting its economic, political and legal systems to such transition. Such developments have emphasized what was an already strong need for expertise in both strategizing on development and various reforms to be implemented in accordance with integration processes. The state has recognized the need for both foreign aid and different national experts' participation in these areas, but what their role and share of responsibility really is remains unclear. This is where my research interest is based.

What serves as a case study to this paper is the reform of the Albanian HE sector. The main long-term priority of the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) in the sector of HE is the adoption and full implementation of the Bologna Declaration. It was signed by the MOES in 2003 and forms now the basis of the National Strategy for Higher Education (SKALA 2008). The aim, as stated in the NSDI as well as SKALA, is to meet the requirements of the Bologna Declaration (NSDI 2008: 74-76, SKALA 2008: 3) and its implementation has led to continuous reforms in the country's public HE system. The results of such a process, started in quite a rush, have not been uncontested and difficulties with regard to implementation are numerous.

I explore in this research the negotiation processes that led to the shaping and adoption of Albania's HE policy with a special focus on non-state actors, specifically national academic and civil society ECs.

1.1.3 Epistemic Communities (ECs): beyond shared perceptions

Many authors dealing with the subject of ECs in a European context agree on a shared conceptualization, if not definition, of what constitutes ECs, how they behave and what their potential roles and contributions mean to policy framing, policy advice, and problem solving. This agreement falls along the lines of the writings of Peter Haas (1992) who defines ECs as networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area. The definition resembles Fleck's *thought collective*, a 'sociological group with a common style of thinking' (Harwood 1986). As Haas (1992) emphasizes (and the results from fieldwork confirm) shared values and beliefs are another important component of these communities. Ideas also play an important role in gluing these communities together thus challenging neo-classical models' view individuals as mere utility maximizers². This definition enables me to target ECs in Albania as I explore research questions regarding the nature, influence and political role of these communities.

Beyond shared perspectives on HE issues or certain values, I explore whether these groups of experts also share common interests. (In fact it makes sense to ask: are interests even a factor in framing group conscience or political influence?). I also investigate the degree to which these communities, or particular members within them, are involved in politics or adopt specific political ideologies. An interesting line of publications studying ECs in Europe points out to a process of politicization that certain ECs are going through, reflecting power shifts within the EU itself (Radaelli 1999). They are perceived to be displaying better-coordinated common interests and a stronger will to pursue these interests by means of organized action. Terms such as 'advocacy coalitions' (Sabatier 1998), 'political epistemic communities' (Marier 2008) and 'collective entrepreneurship' (Zito 2001) have emerged as various authors try to define new roles and potential capabilities of ECs in public policy. It is interesting to see whether this translates to more policy space for all communities, even in candidate countries, claiming a contribution in the production of knowledge.

² Refer to Appendix B for an analysis of this challenge to neo-classical models

While the crucial role of foreign expertise is visible in many areas of Albanian public policy and development sector, the role of national ECs is yet to be explored. These networks have surely flourished with the country's democratization efforts into a multitude of institutes, NGOs and political debate arenas. The media's role in promoting specific groups as well as individuals has been especially important. Albanian governments have also acknowledged the importance and need for participation of national ECs and civil society in policy framing. Yet, beyond offering food for thought to the wide public, the concrete role these communities play in the country's development policy framing, specifically in the policies concerning HE, remains unclear.

Given the case study, I have focused on academic bodies and individual experts in HE that were available for active participation in education policy framing. Their roles are explored in terms of their relation with the government, their standpoint and the part played in framing the policy that led Albania into the Bologna Process.

1.2 Research Question, Sub-Questions and Hypothesis

As Europeanization of policymaking processes in aspiring countries like Albania opens up more political space for deliberation, which communities are able to take advantage of this space with regard to policy advice and which aren't? Specifically, given the case study and the dominant Europeanization discourse on public policies, **what were the roles Albanian ECs played in the framing of higher education reforms and the adoption of the Bologna system?**

To explore these roles there is a need to evaluate 1) whether the government indeed encourages participation of national non-state actors in policy framing 2) whether any political space is created by integration for involvement of non-governmental actors, especially ECs; and 3) whether certain tendencies and characteristics of specific ECs vest these with a higher probability to fill out this political space.

Important sub-questions relate to Albania prioritizing EU integration as well as to the engagement of many European states and organizations that have offered to guide such a process. These have without doubt affected the way national expertise engages with both national and international actors to participate in policy-making. The main focus will be on how EU integration has changed the way these networks engage with political parties. Specifically, I ask *how do EU integration imperatives affect the advice provided by national ECs in specific public policies?*

A commitment to European values means, among other things, a commitment to a long tradition of experts engaging in the policymaking process. Ever since this first milestone of European integration, the creators of the ECSC reserved a special position for non-state stakeholders by attaching to its policymaking institutions the Consultative Committee where producers, workers and consumers could have a say in the policymaking process (Rittberger and Glockner 2010). Today the European Economic and Social Committee is the legacy of that tradition reinforcing the consultancy status of networks of experts, non-state stakeholders and civil society (Irrera 2010: 190-192). In fact, this particular distribution of powers across different levels and actors that

characterizes European multi-level governance and drives European deliberative democracy also provides a strong basis of legitimacy for EU integration (Tanasescu 2009: 27-28). By implication, such tradition has significant connotations for any country committing itself to adhering to the EU as an important role has to be reserved for expertise in its policy making. Whether this expertise is foreign or local, national or ‘European’, we do not know. In addition, as clearly not all groups of experts have equal access to policy advising functions, it is necessary to also differentiate between them. *While integration pushes for more deliberation and a bigger role for non-state expertise, what are the tendencies and characteristics that make some ECs a suitable choice to be consulted by the government for policy advice?* It is also essential to ask: *Why some of these groups fail to make use of the political space created and most importantly, how their exclusion affects the framing.*

I lay down my hypothesis relating the above sub-questions at the start of this study. European integration efforts in Albania, and the way they shape reforms aimed at ‘developing’ or ‘modernizing’ different sectors, make up the general context in which the actors interact. It is in this context that ECs are constantly competing for the use of policy space. It is very probable that there are certain characteristics that define who will be more successful in this competition. *My hypothesis is that influence will depend on:*

- *Political, ideological and strategic alignment of the EC with the party in power as well as alignment of the community’s approach to the issue with the dominant European discourse on similar issues in the EU*
- *Ability of the community not only to pose and offer relevant expertise on the subject but also to frame shared group interests on that issue and advocate for them (in other words the degree of resemblance to an interest group or an advocacy coalition).*

These factors largely determine the interaction between ECs, international experts and the government.

Given the heated debates revolving around the proliferation of private HEIs in Albania, I also explore *any correlation between this phenomenon and the Albanian HER* embarking the country into the Bologna process.

1.3 Significance of the study

While maintaining the momentum of the Bologna Process is proving difficult in many European countries, the biggest challenge for Albania, who has already adapted its legal and administrative HE systems, remains one of legitimacy and potential implementation alternatives. Nevertheless, a decade after the HER, many Albanian communities of academics and students do not subscribe to the highly promoted benefits of the Bologna Process (neither do they display an accurate understanding of the process). This points to a problematic start. It is essential to trace the root causes of what seems to be a crisis of identity of the new HE system more than mere legitimacy glitches in the face of difficulties.

There are reasons to believe these causes lie in the way HE policy in Albania was framed and adopted. Adopting the Bologna Process was no small decision. The HE system faced a wide-range restructuring, which came at no small cost. Many generations of students had to start and complete their studies in the face of general uncertainty and overall confusion. Thus, the decision to re-

structure the Albanian HE system, the groups that supported it, and the strategies and ideologies underlying it, are the object of this research.

It is essential to also see how the agenda of prioritizing EU integration through highly Europeanized policies and ideologies, changes the way aspiring countries understand and pursue development, and how a powerful integration discourse affects the choice of expertise in public policies.

1.4 Fieldwork and data collection

Existing texts as well as semi-structured interviews serve as basic tools of this research. The literature regarding European ECs, EU regulations and Albanian legislation is ample and mostly available online. It sheds light on pre-accession requirements, general EU legislation dictating countries' engagement frameworks and the degree of involvement of EU experts in designing and implementing development policies in Albania. Through this literature I have explored the policy space available for national ECs. Secondary data review provides also the theoretical backbone to the study.

Semi-structured interviews were used as primary data to capture the policy environment in Albania. Various EC representatives such as public officials, political analysts and academics that either took active part in negotiations for the HER or were left out of these negotiations describe the current engagement of these communities with the government and one another.

Political alignment plays an important role in political participation in Albania and experts interviewed do recognize the role past experiences and political alignment plays in shaping their outlook on HE policies. But it only partly describes the reality of local expertise requested by the government. Beyond (or maybe parallel with) political alignment, there are other characteristics that make some communities 'suitable' policy advisors in the eyes of the government. I explored these factors through interviews with HE experts from universities, NGOs and the public administration. The aim was not only to describe how integration has affected the policy framing process and local consultancy choices but also to probe into the very anatomy of these ECs, into their ideologies and their reactions to dominant European paradigms of what comprises a 'modernized and developed' HE.

1.5 Structure of the paper

Following this introductory chapter, my research is structured in three main chapters. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical backbone to the study and lays down the ontology, epistemology and methodology that guided the research process. Chapter 3 elaborates on the HE policy context and problem analysis. I place the study of the Albanian HER and Albanian ECs into the wider European integration context. I also explore how a powerful Europeanization discourse shapes national policies of aspiring countries like Albania and affects the roles different ECs play in public policy framing. Chapter 4 uses interviews by Albanian HE experts to answer the research question and sub questions. Lastly there is a concluding section that synthesizes research results and points to areas that need further research.

Chapter 2

Theory and Methodology: Outlining the Albanian political ‘reality’

2.1 Ontological Standpoint

Norman Blaikie offers useful guidance into exploring the notion of ontology via comprehensive and transparent terminology. Ontology, he suggests, concerns answers to questions like: “What is the nature of the social [or, by extension, political] reality... what it looks like, what units make it up, and how these units interact with each other” (Blaikie 2007: 3). Below I lay down my understanding of the policy environment investigated, i.e. the public policymaking arena in the Albanian HE sector

2.1.1 Constructing the political ‘reality’

In the attempt to describe something that is, I start with describing what it is not. Firstly, mine is not a state-centric ontology. Nor do I employ a hierarchical or bureaucratic portrayal of the relationships that frame my notion of ‘reality’. Whether we adopt a national, regional or global perspective, a multitude of actors other than states and governments, make up the political system. These actors are tied together and to policymaking processes by intricate relationship webs.

Secondly, I do not claim to have offered any universal portrayal of the political ‘reality’ as I acknowledge that components of any political system and the rules and institutions within it are historically and culturally dependent. Behind the drives of each of these components to act, interact, take stance, or influence change in any way, rests their own subjective interpretation of such a system and its institutions. The actors’ environment, values and frames of thinking heavily influence the way they perceive institutions.

Thirdly, this is not yet another study of public policy that treats policymaking processes as alienated from the economic developments both within the country and in the international arena. Rather I acknowledge that the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’, locally as well as regionally, are closely intertwined. This is also reflected in the interviews collected for this paper, which point to the importance of both economic drives and economic outcomes regarding the proposal or adoption of new policies in HE. The analytical framework adopted in this thesis takes careful account of the above premises.

Following groundbreaking contributions by literature on systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) and subsequently on social network theory, social capital, ECs, civic community studies and issue networks, **I adopt a portrayal of the political reality as made up of systems of interrelated ECs and other**

networks³. This ‘networks and communities perspective’ is important because it acknowledges the production of behavior that one would not necessarily expect from the individual parts. Through it, we move away from notions of hierarchy or even bureaucracy as founding analytical frameworks of a political ‘reality’. At the same time, this perspective is an acknowledgment (as well as a direct consequence) of the information age that has captured the developing world just as strongly, if not more, than the developed one. Ultimately, “things are as they are related. The world is interconnected and interdependent” (Stamps and Lipnack 2004: 36).

A relational nature of the political reality paints a clearer picture of interactions within Albania and helps to situate it regionally in the myriad of relationships that comprise the EU and countries aspiring to EU membership. These relations are channeled by multiple agreements, regulations, norms and legislations guiding the accession process. Important frameworks for interactions are for example the SAAs signed between the EU and aspiring candidates as well as multiple agreements in specific sectors, such as the case of the Bologna Declaration, signed by Albania in 2003.

2.1.2 Knowledge and Power: shaping perceptions and relationships

Knowledge significantly shapes the perceptions of different political actors while power characterizes to a great extent any relation between them. In this light the two concepts are most crucial to my ontology. They allow us to better understand the dynamics underlying links and relationships between different actors. For example, power becomes especially visible in the role EU accession processes play in policy choices of countries aspiring to join the EU. I explore this in more detail in Chapter 3.

Moving away from notions of power as merely dominance or control, the artificial separation between knowledge and power makes way for the mutually constitutive relationship between the two. Knowledge and expertise become tinted with power as knowledge pools within the society inform policies. HERs in Albania get informed by local communities of knowledge but also shaped by power hierarchies between a developing country and a developed Union – hierarchies that are themselves sensitive to other communities, powerful enough to make their knowledge the dominant ideology. Thus power and knowledge become interrelated, integrated. But they become also mutually constitutive.

While the literature on networks, policy communities, ECs, politics of expertise, role of intellectuals and deliberative practices sees knowledge as merely being applied to policy processes, other lines of research based on the work of, for example, Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault depict an expertise that is just as much shaped and constituted by power and politics. Of crucial importance to this paper is Habermas’ (1987) call for a ‘repolitization of the public sphere’ through argumentative and communicative practices making expertise the terrain of politics and vice-versa. Just as instructive to this research are

³ see Hofkirchner and Schafranek, 2011, for a comprehensive description of ontological and epistemological implications of the general systems theory

Foucault's critiques of the way in which traditional notions of power as state-centered exercise of the will of dominant elites' have blinded us from the discursive nature of power itself as well as its subjects. In a short review of their work, Fischer (2003: 39-40) concludes "the 'political' can no longer be understood adequately in terms of dominant elites and centres of power... political power no longer belongs to the state alone: it is everywhere". I attempt to scratch the surface of such a relationship in my research by depicting power as both constituted by and constitutive of the knowledge spectrum of social relations, institutional dynamics and discursive practices.

2.2 Epistemology and Epistemic Communities

Following the nature of the reality explored, how does one approach this reality in trying to answer the research question? The epistemological choice is crucial in identifying ECs and the contestation of ideas between those who get to influence policymaking and those who don't. To understand why some ideas backed by the dominant power structure prevail, while others do not – even if (or perhaps because) they provide a different ontological understanding of reality, I first lay down the epistemological grounding to this research.

2.2.1 *Postempiricism: a critical pursuit of knowledge*

While meticulous attention has been devoted to the careful representation of the narratives of experts consulted during my fieldwork, as well as to the analyzing and synthesizing of common viewpoints into broader shared perspectives, I hardly employ a positivist/empiricist approach. In fact, I make use of the postempiricist alternative of argumentation and discursive policy analysis as described by Fischer (2003). Taking impetus from renewed critiques to empiricist policy inquiry by the development of critical postempiricist and postmodern theories in the humanities and social sciences, he proposes a careful understanding and interpretation of social meanings and discourses which than underlie a 'value-critical' approach to political inquiry. This discursive epistemological and methodological approach delineates relationships between ideas, power and interests and sees the social political reality as not only reflected through, but also constituted by interpretations and discourse. (Fischer 2003: viii-xi).

This type of inquiry goes back to highly influential work on the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckman 1966) whose theory of 'social construction of reality' incited ample debate on the applicability and limitations of positivist approaches to political inquiry and the social study of science in general. Taking from that influential past and building on valuable contributions from the fields of critical theory, post-structuralism, social constructionism, postmodernism and discourse analysis, the epistemological approach labeled as 'post-positivism' or 'postempiricism' is now widely used among scholars.

This is the approach I adopt in my thesis to inquire on the role of prevailing Europeanization discourses in the dynamics and power relations between the public sector and networks of expertise within the Albanian HE sector. This approach also allows me to demonstrate how different groups perceive, interpret and evaluate such discourses and policy choices in diverse ways.

2.2.2 *Tracing shared perspectives*

As the paper deals with the role of local experts in policy framing, it seeks to present a wider range of interests, stakeholders and therefore participants (actual or potential) within the policymaking process. **The aim is to trace relevant shared perspectives or trends in the way experts perceive the nature, degree and necessity of participation as well as how these perspectives could potentially reshape the public discourse on HE just as much as the ideologies of political parties can.** This can only be achieved by rejecting any notion of a neutral, unified epistemology.

This approach to research provides part of the structure that informs the analysis of my data. Interviews are treated as shared experiences and aggregate perceptions of different members of ECs while their ideas relate to the dominant Europeanization perspective adopted by the Albanian government. In adopting a constructivist ontology and postempiricist epistemology, I acknowledge the opportunities for these different perspectives to develop and eventually gain importance. Therein lies the main motivation behind my research. By embedding the policymaking process in local knowledge and developing new critical outlooks on prevailing discourses, I aim to see how these opportunities are used and by whom.

2.3 Methodological framing: guiding principles and techniques

“Getting started, that’s the first concern of the policy analyst” (Yanow 2002: 26). Beyond methods and techniques of research, methodology refers to the choice of analytical strategy employed in substantive research (Hay 2002: 63). It establishes the principles upon which rest our choice of methods, sources, data and analytical frameworks. Thus I elaborate below on the analytical principles that guided my choice of research methods.

2.3.1 *Guiding principles: an alternative to the ‘textbook approach’*

Throughout the 70s and 80s, the most widely used framework for understanding the policy process was what Nakamura (1987) dubbed as ‘the textbooks approach’ or as Sabatier (1993) referred to it: the ‘stages heuristic’. Developed by Jones (1970), Lasswell (1971), Anderson (1975) and Brewer and De Leon (1983) this approach depicts a policy process divided in stages, starting with agenda setting and continuing with implementation and evaluation. It has been heavily criticized as embodying a legalistic, top-down perspective that fails to portray the more complex realities of the policy processes and the ‘multiple, interacting cycles’ that characterize it (Sabatier 2005: 18). This critique is crucial to my disregard of such an approach.

Eventually, as Burch and Denmark (1997: 208) emphasize: “a “constitutive epistemology” enables – indeed, requires – *knowledge of a form of reality not accessible via a positivist methodology and empiricist epistemology*”. This assertion is based on a range of critiques of traditional rational-choice IPE publications adopting strongly empiricist techniques and resulting in an IPE arena “deeply

embedded in the standard epistemological methodology of the social sciences which, stripped to its bare bones, simply means stating a proposition and testing it against external evidence” (Krasner 1996: 108-109). Yanow (2000) sheds light on not only epistemological but also methodological limitations of positivist modes of inquiry. She indicates how often it is in the field that the researcher will encounter the limitations of models and methodologies that seem to make perfect sense in theory. The differences encountered more often than not prove to be a matter of interpretation rather than “fact” (Yanow 2000: 92-93). It is for this reason that a largely interpretive approach is more appropriate for my inquiry into the multiple ‘realities’ constructed by actors, the meanings assigned to such constructions and their effects on dominant political discourses in HE.

In fact, the interviews collected paint a different picture of the debates, ideas and interests that underlie the process of HER in Albania - a process far more complex than the deliberation on LHE which, in itself, has received ample attention by media and public opinion. The LHE initiated the consolidation of Albania’s HE strategy and it aimed primarily to regulate what had already been decided and adopted in most universities. In this sense, debates around it revolved less on strategy and more on paving the legal ground for the new system. It is the discussions around HERs, which started almost a decade before LHE and which are at the center of this research, that truly reveal the different perceptions of HE experts on a new system that would restructure Albanian HE. These debates and the processes that the reform underwent (and in a way still undergoes today) dealt with a wide range of issues from the applicability of the Bologna system to its compatibility with HEIs in Albania and the possible consequences of its adoption. It is in the light of such diversity that the concept of ‘policy cycle’, which makes sense in theory, loses its charm in practice as one experiences through field work complex, multi-level interactions, which take place in expertise areas and hierarchy levels that often intersect.

Defining actors alone proves a seemingly impossible challenge even in the case of Albania, a country of less than 3 million, still new in experiencing the ways of democracy. Between academics multi-tasking as policy advisors, teachers and opinion shapers; bureaucrats forced into advancing party programs and a civil society that is still in its embryonic stages, one can not adopt such clear cut definitions of the game and its players. Instead, I shall adopt a much more dynamic understanding of the policymaking process - one where the role of ECs can not be conceived within just the stage of policy framing without also looking at subsequent implementation or evaluation. And one where relationships are still in the making, structures and institutions still in nascent stages, solutions often rushed in the overwhelming challenges posed by transition and lack of experience. It is for this reason however, that researching this chaotic environment is imperative (though less productive in terms of decisive conclusions). For it is out of these dynamics and the learning process they nurture that more stable, institutionalized communities and relationships will eventually be born.

2.3.2 *Guiding techniques*

With regard to data collection techniques, ample reading on the subject as well as a clear research question are a good start but, as fieldwork showed, methodological guiding principles relate less to the case study and more to what aspect of that case study a researcher plans to examine. In this regard, an advice by Prof. Yanow (2011) proved most helpful: One must not decide on methods and interpretive frameworks before going into the field⁴. It is only once well-acquainted with the field that a researcher can reflect on the best methodology to address her question.

Initial talks with scholars, students and persons employed in the public sector, as well as a review of the press covering the HER showed the lack of reliable publications on the interactions between the Albanian Government and local experts on any given policy deliberation, even on highly debated ones like the HER. The most appropriate way to trace this interaction lies in the experiences and interpretations of the persons who took active part in the policy-framing process in the roles of bureaucrats, academics or civil society representatives. I have therefore used an approach of qualitative, semi-structured interviewing looking for policy storylines and narratives. A storyline, Hajer (1995: 56) notes “is a generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific or social phenomena” (for example, ‘we need to move forward’ or ‘we need to integrate’). Simply put, a narrative is our way to condense all the facts surrounding a certain issue into our own subjective interpretation of ‘reality’.

Given the nature of my study, structured interviews would have proven restrictive and likely not as effective. Instead the contributors to this research offered their story, their perspective, their criticisms and opinions together with underlying ideas and beliefs. Some even ventured warm advice in the direction of this researcher. No tape recorders were used and each of the experts consulted guided the pace of the conversation. They shared their sense of pride in their profession, their experience, achievements as well as the general disillusionment with the ever-present perception that ‘Albania has failed to develop’. In this way, they shared their storylines (Appendix A).

2.4 **Concluding remarks**

Perhaps, after this experience, I can also offer an additional insight to Prof. Yanov’s advice. By keeping an open mind towards ontological and epistemological approaches as well as methods and techniques until one has been in the field, not only does one avoid pre-selecting frameworks that may prove unproductive or restrictive. This also creates an opportunity to develop one’s own approach by merging different theories, methods and techniques and to adapt this approach to different sources and contexts. In this regard, my challenge as a researcher was not only to be able to identify the sources, but also, given their diversity, to identify the best way to approach each of them.

⁴ in a lecture given at the ISS in May 2011

Having established the theoretical groundings of this study, I move on to detail the wider contextual background within which Albanian HER was developed and a detailed problem analysis that motivates my research question.

Chapter 3

Policy context and problem analysis: Situating local communities in Integration and Development discourses

3.1 Restructuring Albanian HE: the policy

In Albania, the efforts to reform HE were in line with the overall public sector restructuring that aimed to establish a market-based economy and a democratic system of governance. HE was promoted as a national priority (NSSD 2001: 9) and given special importance amidst such transformative efforts.

The 1999 LHE established the legal framework for the regulation of the public education sector in Albania⁵. It defined HE in the Republic of Albania as “both public and non public” (Law no. 8461 Article 1) and higher public civil schools as “autonomous institutions”(Law no. 8461 Article 7). In this way, we see from 1999 the development of an affinity of Albanian legislation (and terminology) with European platforms. This legislation marked the start of a period of several normative acts, decisions, directives and decrees issued by the government, which tried to qualitatively influence the advancing of European standards in the sector. The Director of HE in the MOES at the time, Edmond Hajdëri (2011) recalls the important role that European assistance in the form of programs like PHARE or SEE-ERA.NET⁶ played in coordinating national efforts in this regard:

“Even before signing the Bologna Declaration, we had completed important steps like the establishment of HE accreditation institutions in 1999, the introduction and application of the ECTS system in 2000 and the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2002”.

(Hajdëri 2011)

In September 2003, in a meeting in Berlin of all European Ministers of Education, Albanian Minister of Education and Science (MES) Luan Memushi signed the Bologna Declaration, officially pledging the country to comprehensive structural reforms in HE that would adapt the sector to European values and aspirations embodied in the Bologna Process (Berlin Communiqué 2003). Thus Albania officially adopted the Bologna principles as guidelines to the policies that would subsequently re-structure its HE, a strategy later consolidated with the new LHE adopted in 2007.

⁵ The HE sector was previously regulated by a legislation prepared and adopted in 1994 with European assistance

⁶ PHARE is a pre-accession instrument financed by the EU to assist the applicant countries of CEE in making adjustments, especially promoting convergence and cohesion (European Commission 2010) while the SEE-ERA.NET project aimed at integrating and strengthening the European Research Area in South East Europe.

To Albania at the time, the Bologna Declaration and the policy of reforms devised around it, were a ready-made framework in reforming a system that was largely perceived to be in need of restructuring. This framework set out the following objectives, six main action plans in a way, around which revolved all other policies and which Albania is still determined to achieve today:

- Developing easily readable and comparable degrees
- Adopting a system essentially based on academic cycles
- Adopting a system of credits such as the ECTS
- Promoting mobility for students, teachers and researchers
- Promoting European co-operation in quality assurance
- Promoting a European dimension in HE

Whether this framework addressed the real causes of the needs for reform is something I explore in my interviews. A detailed account of the ideologies and strategic vision that underlaid this policy as well as the powerful discourse it nourished is laid out in this chapter.

3.2 The Europe of Knowledge: setting the agenda in the quest for competitiveness

3.2.1 From shared values to the ‘competitiveness’ discourse

The process that entailed massive re-structuration of European HE systems dates back to the Magna Charta Universitatum, a declaration signed in Bologna, Italy 1988, from the rectors of European universities to “all states and to the conscience of all nations”. It defined a university as “the trustee of the European humanist tradition” and pointed to the need for increased mobility of students and researchers as well as more cooperation between European universities in the pursuit and advancement of “universal knowledge” (Magna Charta Universitatum, 1988).

A decade later, the Sorbonne Joint Declaration embodied the terminology and imperatives that had become by that time well known: the “Europe of Knowledge” and the need for an EHEA. The document also called for all member states to acknowledge the “consolidation of Europe’s standing” as a clear objective of European universities (Sorbonne Joint Declaration, 1998). I argue that these declarations, though regrettably Euro-centric, managed to maintain the discourse on HERs centred around shared values, increasing the attractiveness of European HE and the ‘common European good’. This was soon bound to change.

Due to major advances in economic and monetary integration, the process that followed with the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999 was less aligned with this ‘shared values’ perspective. In fact, it was more in line with the new strategy coined at Lisbon that aimed to make Europe “*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world*” (Lisbon Declaration, 24 March 2000) by deregulating labour markets and removing barriers to the liberalization of trade and education. Thus followed the ‘Lisbonization’ of European HE (Capano and Piattoni 2009). As the Lisbon agenda was revised and further redefined in the coming years so was the role of European Universities reinvented. Amidst intensified calls for coordination between education and

employment needs they became, or rather had to become, the advancers of European interests, the guardians and promoters of progress.

As expected, this had major implications, for any country adopting the Bologna system outside the EU. Albanian national strategies in HE (SKALA 2008) and research, technology and innovation (SSTI 2009) display a clear orientation towards harmonizing the production of knowledge with the Lisbon imperatives.

3.2.2 Actors and strategy behind the reforms

Who were the drivers of these reforms? New non-state actors and policy-making processes emerge as one probes into the historical background of the reforms as well as into recent critiques of the Lisbon agenda – these same actors pushing heavily for structural reforms in HE, in line with and in function of the Lisbon strategy.

In particular, the largest European corporates and industry leading firms stand out as highly influential. I refer here to the strong lobbying of communities such as the European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT) and the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (once known as UNICE⁷) that largely drove the struggle for a new strategy like the Lisbon Declaration and reforms throughout the EU. Critical journalists (see Rutherford 2001; Brunkhorst 2006) as well as neo-Gramscian literature in the past decade (see Holman and van der Pijl 2003; Bradanini 2009) have devoted particular attention to their ideology and their overwhelming power in setting the European agenda. While exploring the dominance of the 'competitiveness' discourse in the establishment of a transnational, neo-liberal strategy of European Integration, this literature explored this corporate class devoting particular attention to its agenda setting role.

In fact, during a meeting with students in September 2011, I managed to get an opinion on the matter by Mr. Hans van Baalen, Dutch politician of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and Member of the European Parliament for the Netherlands since 2009. Asked on the role communities such as the ERT played in the new European education strategies, the marketization of education and their emphasis on enhancing European competitiveness, he describes their influence as enormous.

“International companies want people to be more internationally oriented, with greater mobility, and therefore education has a crucial role to play in that. The programs and reports they prepare for politicians, as well as their strong lobbying are immensely important”

(Van Baalen 2011)

⁷As of January 2007, the UNICE has changed its name to BUSINESSEUROPE, The Confederation of European Business which is reflected also in their new website: www.businessseurope.eu

He illustrates how in education, just as in the case of the Single Currency, these communities were among the most powerful defining actors of new integration strategies (Van Baalen 2011).

These particular ECs display strong corporatist orientations towards European integration and reforms. Their business-oriented outlook points to the wider ideological framework of the Lisbon strategy, which underlaid HERs in Europe. This outlook exercises its influence through strong lobbying and illustrates the extent to which transnational corporations shape EU policy (Balanyá 2000; Van Apeldoorn 2002). Calls by these powerful groups for enhanced mobility and flexibility of workforce, deregulation of labour laws and a more entrepreneurship-oriented HE system determined the overall imperative of increasing European competitiveness in the international markets. This was reflected in their publications (ERT 1994, 1998, 2001 and UNICE 2000, 2002) as well as in a work program published by the European Commission on the future objectives of education and training systems in the EU (European Commission 2002) emphasizing the central role those systems would play in achieving Europe's competitiveness goals. In fact, the European Commission became much more prominent in HE policymaking after the year 2000 under this new agenda (Van der Wende 2009).

These powerful circles as well as EU executive powers shared similar approaches to HER and were the main actors pushing for the Bologna system throughout Europe and in aspiring countries. In a critical piece published in *Die Tageszeitung*, Brunkhorst (2006) questions the legitimacy of Bologna reforms throughout Europe precisely because of the actors that promoted it and its implementation that demonstrated how "legal decisions can be made upon recommendations of such informal circles". "Thus, constraint is built" he entitles his piece highlighting the lack of democratic legitimacy, in a process, largely accomplished through the "bonapartization of executive powers" that had similar approaches to HER (Brunkhorst 2006). In this way, the competitiveness imperative shaped European HE strategies in the new millennium and set the foundations for the creation of the EHEA

3.2.3 One Size Fits All: Drawing analogies with the Single Market

As these same corporate ambitions drove economic integration and the single European currency process, I shortly elaborate here on the analogy between repeated calls for harmonization of European monetary policies and the debates on building a common EHEA.

The European Monetary Union was established as a European response to the instability of liberalized international financial markets. What was largely seen as an experiment soon became a precondition for the Single Market project (Bieling and Schulten 2003). The EHEA - in many ways an extension of the same ideology - could do nothing but complement this restructuring. Since 1998 in the highly influential report *Job Creation and Competitiveness through Innovation*, the ERT openly stated:

"The time has come to extend the Single Market concept into the world of academia and, above all, into publicly funded R&D... Universities no longer have the monopoly on disseminating knowledge. We cannot leave all

action in the hands of the public sector. The provision of education is a market opportunity and should be treated as such.”

Thus the door was opened for the marketization of one of the last remaining public goods: HE. This is not to say that European Universities became victims of the flourishing corporatist drives within the EU. But rather, that the understanding of European HERs would be incomplete without taking these developments into consideration. An investigation into multiple reports published by both ERT and UNICE prior and during the reforms (see ERT 1994, 1998, 2001 and UNICE 2000, 2002) offers ample evidence of the ideology and terminology that these communities vested into the HERs and the Bologna Process. In these reports a recurrent invoking of “Europe of Knowledge” stands in line with repeated calls for urgent deregulation and the need for strong entrepreneurship orientation of education and research. This particular ideology, legitimized by employment creation pledges, saw industrial development and global economic competitiveness as the road to progress.

The analogy of structural HERs with the Single Currency process does more than emphasize the overall trend towards neo-liberal integration. In fact, it sheds new light on the relations between the European market and European policies on education. The changing work patterns in Europe demanded highly mobile, risk-taking individuals with an industry-friendly education that could cope with a largely de-regulated labour market – individuals that could be the new *pan-European critical mass* for global competitiveness (ERT 1998). It is within this framework of producing employees compatible with the new nature of European demand for labour, that shared interests and strategies that drove the Bologna process can be better understood. This evidence leaves little room for debate on the orientation of the Bologna Process towards serving the needs of a competitive Europe within a framework of enhanced, neo-liberal market imperatives.

3.3 Blurring the boundaries of Development and Integration

3.3.1 From Europe to Albania: defining Europeanization

Zooming in to my study of the Albanian HER, this section outlines the national context in which the Bologna was adopted. The severe ending of the Albanian communist experience gave way to an exhausting transition as the country struggles even today, two decades later, to consolidate its economic, political and legal systems. Yet Albania is a small country of big aspirations. It wants to develop. And Integrate. And Europeanize. HERs in Albania were developed and implemented in the context of such Europeanization.

There is something to be said on a general protectionist stance Europe adopted towards Albania in the first decade transition. International economic support was abundant, as was development assistance. Attitudes to immigration by neighbouring Italy and Greece were initially rather tolerant. All in all, unlike in some other Balkan countries, “there was little sense that Europe had forgotten it or tried to push it to the margins” (Muço and Sjöberg 2005: 150). It is no surprise that that Albania was highly receptive of Europeanization and the reforms it required.

My use of the term ‘Europeanization’ takes from Featherstone’s (2003: 3) definition of “a process of structural change, variously affecting actors and institutions, ideas and interests”. This process refers to the historical phenomenon of the proliferation of European norms and practices but also to cultural diffusion, institutional adjustment and most importantly policy and policy process adaptations (Featherstone 2003: 5-12).

I take into careful consideration here the peculiarity of the Europeanization process in countries like Albania who aspire to join the EU. The relationship between them and the EU is asymmetrical as they are outside the Union and therefore less likely to both question and affect European policies. The EU can thus influence their policies by promoting development along the path of Europeanization. Grabbe (2003: 312-317) lists various mechanisms of Europeanization. More specifically: provision of models, aid and technical assistance, benchmarking and monitoring, advice and twinning as well as, ultimately, EU’s most powerful political tool – gate-keeping – exercised by granting or denying access to negotiations and further stages of the accession process. Through these mechanisms and a managerialist approach that establishes objectives “which are not necessarily held for the project or policy by other stakeholder groups” (Rem and Gasper 2008) the Union has shaped the institutional and political reforms of aspiring countries to a large extent. Decisions to adopt the Bologna system in both European and aspiring countries are no exception. In exploring the ‘metamorphosis’ of European HE, Lock and Lorenzo (2007) highlight links between HERs and general developments in political life as “ideological fashions in public policy—call it “commercialization”, “privatization”, “marketization”, “liberalization” or whatever you like—has also swept across the higher education and research sectors, with far-reaching consequences”.

In Albania, the need to integrate becomes synonymous with development thus turning HERs into mere adoptions of ‘European’ model. To illustrate this, it suffices to mention that the national strategy for development in Albania is named National Strategy of Development and Integration. However, overemphasizing the power of discourse alone may lead to a rather limiting analysis. Grabbe (1999) offered a detailed account of the conditional nature of the Accession process and its effects on CEE countries. More often than not, such conditionality manifests itself through countless written accession laws and regulations. In this way, the EU has come to play a hegemonic role in aspiring countries exercised through the dynamics of Europeanization processes.

3.3.2 From Albania to Europe: Europeanization from within

On the other hand, there are particular perceptions of enhanced civil liberties, increased political inclusion and a wider political space for deliberation that accompany Europeanization in Albania, often imbuing the term with democratic ambitions. This section sheds light on the accommodative attitude of students in general and the weak response of several ECs towards such all-encompassing reform. I argue the striking lack of criticism at the time of the HER relates less to the nature of political deliberation in the EU and more to Albania’s historical past.

The strive to Europeanize at all costs does more than point out to the powerful influence the European integration discourse has on Albanian development policies and reforms. It is also testimony of the needs of a people long isolated to be an integral part of the region. In this way, ‘integration’ means to Albania much more than joining a political and economic union. It becomes one with development, a path to both growth and democracy that takes impetus and legitimacy from the country’s history of isolation and poverty. I quote here a well-respected Albanian academic and supporter of the Bologna process: “This country will develop only when it integrates. We have been extremely poor. And isolation has made a harsh people out of us. Integration is the only way” (Puka 2011). His words enunciate the outlook of many, who look to Europe, more than anything else, as a framework for change and self-improvement.

In this regard, I cannot stress enough the significance of severe limitations placed on the free movement of Albanian citizens in EU territory in shaping the way Albanian governments and citizens perceived Europeanization. During the past two decades, through a coercive and often frustrating visa system, Albanians were presented with a notion of Europe that resembled a fortress to which they were not welcome rather than a community to join. This played a key role in legitimizing the adoption of anything European, including here the Bologna system, which specifically emphasized mobility. One may even suppose that university students, who were particularly sensitive to the mobility issue, may have been more critical of the HER, given different circumstances. At a time when one had to stand in line for hours and go through intricate bureaucracies just to apply for a student visa, a new system that promised easier access to European schools was hard to contest. Within the country and in the eyes of a population eager to explore the region after almost half a century of isolation, Europe became the “forbidden fruit” and Europeanization was seen as simply the gateway to freedom of mobility.

It is only now, having finally been ‘granted’ the right to travel freely, that critical voices can and have started to question European models and their effect on Albania’s development⁸. I hope this research can be one of those voices.

3.4 Problem analysis: political space and the role of ECs

Europeanization currents, both from the EU to Albania and from Albania towards the EU, have indeed clouded the boundaries between development and integration strategies. But did they actually drive the country towards more deliberative approaches to policy making? Did Europeanization contribute to opening up new political spaces for actors other than political parties to participate in policy-making processes? Political developments in Albania suggest it did, but in very different degrees depending on the sector and community.

⁸From November 2010 Albanian citizens can travel to Schengen countries without a visa (Council of the European Union 2010)

3.4.1 Outlining political space

As stated in the beginning of this study, before we can examine the roles of local ECs and characteristics that would make of them successful actors in policy framing, the issue of political space needs to be explored. Albania's case offers rather interesting insights in this regard.

In line with integration efforts, both Albanian legislation and political leaders have acknowledged the need for participation of local experts in particular and civil society in general in policy framing and implementation. However, their actual role as described in development strategy documents is far from clear. The fundamental role of deliberation and technical expertise within the EU, as well as the need for all aspiring countries to slowly adopt the *acquis communautaire*, could by extension very well empower ECs in countries aspiring to one day become part of the Union. Whether this empowerment stops at rebuilding group consciousness in the light of experiences of European communities or extends to active political participation is another matter.

A predominant perspective shared by many interviewees is that of the variation of the degree of political space as one takes a look at different sectors. It seems that while more deliberation has taken place in business or law related sectors, the HE sector still lags behind in this direction. "Business or law related communities have had a much higher chance to determine policies, especially since Albania had to adapt its legislation to strict European norms in taxation, customs and other standards" (Lamani 2011).

Nevertheless, taking note of increasing efforts by Albanian governments to organize more working groups (Puka 2011, Gjonaj 2011, Memushi 2011), the emphasis placed on participatory processes by the government (NSSD 2001: 9-10) and general efforts towards decentralization by the MOES (NES 2005: 7-8) it would seem, even in the sector of HE, democratic efforts under Europeanization processes have contributed to opening some political space for non-state actors to participate in policy-making processes.

3.4.2 Exploring the current state of Albanian ECs

The challenge facing ECs in Albania is not only one of participation but also of self-determination. The communist experience left Albanian ECs heavily challenged in terms of political participation. Today, established think tanks and institutionalized communities of experts are still in their embryonic stages. Civil society seems to have developed faster (HDPC 2007) with institutes and NGOs focusing on deliberative and participatory democracy challenges⁹ while other ECs, and academics in particular, lag behind in terms of organization or even acknowledgement of shared perspectives and goals. And yet, as the interviews showed, they are present: clusters of experts with similar approaches to knowledge, policymaking and problem solving.

⁹ See for example the HDPC, an NGO promoting the active participation of Albanian society in the process of political, economic and social reform or the EUNACAL institute focusing on EU public policy and political deliberation in Albania

In trying to answer questions on their roles, experts interviewed were also forced to reflect and acknowledge the existence of these very communities. I have identified four large ECs that were influential (in very different degrees) in the HE policy framing. The below typology is a result of those interviews:

Typology of Albanian ECs in Higher Education

	Members
Communities of Politicians	Usually made up of Members of Parliament and party members
Communities of Bureaucrats	State officials employed at a time or another in the public administration, specifically in the MOES
Communities of Academics	University professors, members of academic councils and academic advisory bodies
Civil Society Communities	NGO officials, opinion makers, writers and journalists that have tackled HE issues in their debates and publications

Source: Own elaboration

Of course, given especially the circumstances of a small country like Albania, chances that these communities overlap are high. As the interviews show, experts that have once worked in the public sector may have shifted to the NGO sector, university professors may be involved with political parties, state officials may have moved to open private universities and previous university founders may have become civil society opinion makers. This is the fluid and dynamic nature of relationships and links, still in the making, that determine the interactions of these communities.

Additionally, there is a general political alignment of Albanian bureaucrats with the ruling party. Public officials in Albania can rarely afford to adopt political or ideological outlooks that clash with those of the politicians in power. As corruption and nepotism continue to challenge Albania's public administration, political inclination often comes down to losing or keeping one's job. However, there are clear differences in the way these two ECs approach HE issues with bureaucrats in the MOES typically showing a more practical approach to reforms, as strategies are left to political communities.

In conclusion, different ECs are not hard to identify if one takes account of the approaches they adopt towards certain issues, rather than the experience of their members. In Chapter 4, analyses of interviews display these particular common stances to education-related issues and specific positions with regard to the Bologna process. These common perspectives bind community members together, regardless of the lack of institutionalization, and even regardless of the lack sometimes of a common conscience on the very existence of the community.

3.4.3 What seems to be the problem?

While there is ample literature exploring the role of ECs in well-established democracies, few authors have investigated ECs in Albania, perhaps because simply identifying them proves extremely challenging. Hopefully this research will help to raise awareness on the existence of these communities, regardless

of their institutionalization, and on the potential they have for shaping development policies.

ECs in a country like Albania find themselves heavily challenged by wider regional developments as they struggle to redefine their role and social function. Partly due to the dichotomous nature of Europeanization described above the role of local expertise becomes ambiguous, hard to define. On the one hand, one cannot deny the political space democratization and Europeanization efforts feed. It is there, embedded in new legislation and political speeches promising local ECs their due role in policy framing. Repeated calls for public deliberation from the part of the EU, have also placed constraints on the way Albanian political parties frame and implement policies as consecutive governments pride themselves on including more local knowledge and expertise into the policymaking process.

Yet, the experience of the Albanian HER advises caution in taking their involvement for granted. In young democracies where economic and political systems are still in the making, the opportunities for social mobility are at their highest. But so are competition and incentives for manipulation. Who takes advantage of these opportunities is of crucial importance and not knowing which actors indeed make use of political space, is also part of the problem.

Chapter 4

I have a (European) dream!

Analysis and findings

In this chapter I address the research question and sub-questions laid out at the forefront of this study through the findings and analysis of nine interviews conducted with Albanian HE personalities (Appendix A). Their narratives are as diverse as their experience and background, though similar outlooks on certain issues stand out as well as a rather critical take on the HE reforms. Regardless of limitations in terms of time and resources, the fieldwork experience proved extremely rewarding and the people interviewed quite exceptional. Embedded in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the previous chapters, their opinions outline not only a critical review of what the Bologna Declaration meant to Albania and these communities, but also provide interesting insights on the very anatomy of ECs in Albania and shared perspectives that characterize them. I lay down below my analysis of their contributions, without which this research would not have been possible. The research questions in the introductory chapter serve as main sub-themes according to which I organize the material collected from the field and comprise the analytical pillars around which I structure my analysis and findings.

4.1 Inclusion or merely a post-decision debate?

This first section explores the main research question posed at the start of this study: *what were the roles Albanian ECs played in the framing of HE reforms and the adoption of the Bologna system?*

Throughout the narratives a general sense of disempowerment shows the limited role played by most local experts in the framing of HE reforms. “Usually, communities of academics are not consulted in the first steps of the process, when political decisions are in the making, but rather in later phases when implementation problems arise” (Lamani 2011). As their role became more prominent during implementation, universities seem to have been more privileged than civil society. They were officially responsible for determining certain elements of the reform but these contributions never made a strategic impact as ‘macro’ decisions were always left up to politicians. For example “universities were consulted on diploma converting or the organization of study programs but never on the actual decision to be involved in the Bologna process, which was a purely political decision” (Lamani 2011).

At the time, opinions of various ECs were considered initially unimportant also due to a governance philosophy of ‘implement first, solve problems later’. Such ruling strategy ignored the few spontaneous voices from experts warning on the preliminary measures that had to be taken and conditions that had to be fulfilled prior to embarking the country into the Bologna process. Thus a carefully planned reform ‘on paper’ which could have evaluated risks and opportunities, planned for the needed materials, funding and human resources, was brushed aside through strong political will for a ‘learn as we go’ strategy. This

meant that solutions had to be often improvised and questions like how to link the old system with the new one were left unanswered. This also explains a growing demand by the government for participation of communities of experts after the decision was taken. “The role of local experts became somewhat more consistent later in the process, during implementation, to address and help solve the problems that ‘came up’ along the way” (Lamani 2011). However, many experts are of the opinion that so much could and should have been addressed before the actual decision to adopt the reform. Instead, after few debates and an ultimately superficial expert participation, a government decree declared the country’s decision to embark in the Bologna Process. As Prof. Lamani recalls: “The political decision had been made a long time ago, and to that decision, we had been mere spectators”.

Prof. Luan Memushi (2011), MES during 2001 – 2005, admits that experts were consulted during implementation rather than framing as “nowadays there are already framed programs” upon which to base reforms. This seems to be a widespread opinion among Albanian communities of politicians who attribute a great degree of prestige to western models and the foreign expertise supporting those models. In this line, another factor, which also indirectly undermined many local knowledge initiatives, was the overwhelming presence of foreign expertise. A typical and rather pervasive preference of the government for foreign consultants over national experts further devalued already weak national communities of experts highlighting the international hierarchy of power in relation to knowledge, expertise and capabilities.

The role of the World Bank (WB), for example, is acknowledged by most experts as heavily influential in financing and actively participating in the shaping of national strategies (Gjonaj 2011, Memushi 2011). Prof. Memushi highlights for example the role played by the WB to illustrate the importance placed on foreign expertise in providing the necessary experience into drafting overall political and financial strategies. Foreign expertise was also used to ‘certify’ the entire process, imbue it with credibility. For example, he recalls: “I would have not been able to get the draft ‘NPEDS 2004 – 2013’¹⁰ approved had it not carried WB’s approval and support” (Memushi 2011).

The role of the foreign expertise is widely acknowledged in almost all education policy initiatives in Albania (Memushi 2011, Çabiri 2011, Gjonaj 2011, Lamani 2011). HE Strategy, LHE and the HE Financial reform (HEFR) discussed later on in this chapter, are some of the areas where WB-paid expertise and the European Council were most influential (Gjonaj 2011). As to HE reforms, Dr. Çabiri illustrates: “Numerous foreign experts took part in the debate. The consequence of this together with the importance placed on Albania’s EU future, gave the debate the nuances of a ‘Yes Man’ discourse” (Çabiri 2011). This resembles similar debates in Macedonia, Bosnia or Kosovo around HE issues.

In conclusion, the roles played by local experts and ECs of academics and civil society in both the decision to embark the country into the Bologna pro-

¹⁰ The NPEDS 2004 2013 is no longer available online but it is cited in the text of the new NES 2004 – 2015 as one of its building blocks

cess and the framing of the reforms restructuring Albanian HE were very limited. The coming section shows how specific communities with particular shared interests were more active than others and played a bigger role, but there is a general consensus among experts on the politics of integration behind the reform, which left little room for alternative solutions.

In all fairness, the reaction to such exclusion by most experts seems to have been weak and often directed at marginal issues. Prof. Puka (2011) recalls many voices being raised against the process, but few actually offering substantive criticism. It seems contradictions failed to relate to the issues at hand: the new framework of engagement with the EHEA, the HER that was taking shape or the lack of a clear strategic vision. In most cases, strong criticisms to the HER, were related to personal financial interests (professors having to offer in three years what they previously taught in four), lack of information or merely frustration at being left out of the process (Puka 2011) rather than constructive criticism with regard to the shift in HE strategy.

Such failure to mobilize and offer a substantive critique to the reform underway points to deeply rooted patterns of behavior, problematized also by interviewees. These relate to political culture but also to a communist legacy, which lingers within fragile academic and civil society communities resulting in conformist attitudes. Prof. Kule (2011) warns against governments exploiting such political culture by demanding conformism in exchange for inclusion in policy making. This was a theme of self-criticism in most interviews, where each community looks back to its own role and evaluates the room for intervention that could have been used had they been less reluctant to engage critically with the process. A great degree of self-reflection also seems to revolve around interest framing. Many experts raise the question: have we moved beyond strictly individual self-interests and has an acknowledgement of shared interests led to several different kinds of ECs? This is further explored in the following section.

In conclusion, Albanian academic and civil society ECs did not play a role in the decision to adopt the Bologna process or in the shaping of the subsequent HER. Most interviewees agree that deliberation on the HER, to the extent that it took place, was merely a post-decision debate.

4.2 Defining stakeholders: ECs or Interest Groups?

The issue of active engagement with political communities is particularly sensitive among academics and was explored in my interview with the Rector of the University of Tirana and Head of the CRAU, Prof. Dhori Kule. He is a strong believer in the political role academic communities can and should play in public policy and often advises colleagues to “become part of the game where the game is played” (Kule 2011) thus encouraging them to even become members of political parties. An active participant in the reform working groups, Prof. Kule sees the need for government initiatives to awaken the local ECs to their social responsibility.

“Unfortunately, communities of academics in Albania still seem to bear the weight of decades of communism and often display a reluctance to engage in public policy to their free initiative. It is why in transition countries, more than anywhere else, participation in public policy consulting or decision-

making is not offered at the experts' free initiative. In Albania, where a democratic system is yet to be consolidated, interest groups are rather weak and civil society not yet developed, the lack of an open call for participation by the government to these communities is very unfortunate"

(Kule 2011)

So far, this is not the case in most of Albanian communities of academics or civil society, which due to a great degree of disillusionment with the current state of affairs and an obnoxious, rather aggressive political debate, refuse to 'become part of the game'. However, some have embraced this perspective and their experience and successful political engagement is worth noting. This distinctive experience relates to certain members of academic and civil society communities with strong neo-liberal convictions, supporters of liberalization, marketization and privatization initiatives. These experts got involved in the process as shapers rather than spectators of the restructuring that was underway. For example, Mr. Henri Çili, an Albanian opinion former, was at the forefront of Albanian experts pushing for liberalization of HE through proactive engagement with media and government initiatives. He then went on to become one of the founders of the private European University of Tirana.

It is obvious why the government chose to engage with and reward this particular type of expertise as well as particular members of local communities. These communities closely resembled interest groups, empowered to make use of the political space available through a clear set of objectives and a particular neo-liberal standpoint on the marketization of education while at the same time embracing and supporting the restructuring of the sector in line with the integration agenda.

An interesting line of publications by European academics in the last two decades explores the politicization that some knowledge networks and institutionalized forms of ECs went through, reflecting power shifts within the EU itself (Radaelli 1999). These groups are perceived to be displaying better-coordinated common interests and generally a stronger will to pursue their interests by means of organized action. Terms such as 'advocacy coalitions' (Sabatier 1998), 'political ECs' (Marier 2008) and 'collective entrepreneurship' (Zito 2001) have emerged in the literature to define the new roles and potential capabilities of certain non-state actors. This new terminology points to an essential change in the relationship between groups representing knowledge and expertise and those representing interests. It seems to imply that if communities and networks want to make use of the political space within the European political and decision-making system, they need to cooperate and jointly advocate for what they stand for. Roberts (1992: 59-64) emphasizes this collective entrepreneurship as the only way to break into the highly bureaucratic European institutional framework.

The roles of ERT and UNICE explored in the previous chapter, are a most appropriate illustration of such groups. Their achievements stand to show the important role some networks of expertise have been playing in shaping reforms in Europe. And while this means more policy space is indeed available outside traditional bureaucracies, this space seems to be available mostly to those who advocate for it. This perceived preference for better political organization extends to aspiring countries like Albania where ECs with

clearly framed interests (in this case driven by the business imperatives of developing the HE private sector) have made better use of the political space available.

Indeed, as Prof. Lamani puts it, “our experience has shown that whenever experts are independent of interests, they are less likely to follow through with such initiatives” (Lamani 2011). To illustrate he points to the visible contrast between the role of ECs in HERs vs. other areas such as agriculture or business taxation where interest groups and politicized ECs were much more powerful. To note these differences one need only take a look at issues like land ownership or urbanization. In more than one occasion in these areas, the debates at the ‘bottom’ have been able to shape politics at the ‘top’. These debates owe their success to interest groups rather than communities of experts in general.

In any case, one must be cautious not to overestimate a power that ‘politicized’ communities were, largely granted by the government due to their support of the prevailing political agenda and integration discourse. This sheds light on the *characteristics that a community in Albania ‘needs’ to have in order to be eligible for a leading, rather than purely spectator role, in policy framing.*

As the hypothesis at the start of this study suggested, political/ideological alignment of ECs (with the party in power) as well as accommodation by the community of the government’s perspective on the matter (rather than challenging it) is crucial to its successful participation in policymaking. Prof. Lamani illustrates this with the subjectivity that often underlies the selection of specific individuals from academic communities called to contribute in the policy framing process. “These were almost always individuals with a high probability of detailing and developing those particular ideas and alternatives already predetermined by political communities” (Lamani 2011). Beyond that, an alignment of the community’s approach to the issue at hand with the dominant European discourse on similar issues in the EU is also imperative. Lastly, the ability of the community to not only pose and offer relevant expertise on the subject but to also frame interests of a specific group of the society on that issue and advocate for them (in other words the degree of resemblance to an advocacy coalition type of network) also greatly increased their chances to become part of policymaking (an analysis of theoretical implications to these findings may be found in Appendix C).

Given these characteristics, the Albanian experience points to higher chances of participation in policymaking for interest groups than for those ECs that refrain from acknowledging, framing and advocating for shared interests.

4.3 Problem-framing: Reform for what?

But *how did the choice of expertise and exclusion of certain groups affect the actual framing of the policy on Albanian HE reforms?* Prof. Aleksandër Xhuvani directed for many years the work of the Albanian BFUG and participated in numerous meetings with public officials, national and international experts on HERs. Drawing also from a 30 years long experience in HE, he believes the sector was in dire need of restructuring. Adopting a crucial insider’s perspective and having dedicated years to the implementation of the reform, his angle on the process is rather

optimistic. The Bologna process was, to him, a reform that beyond the ‘European’ political agenda answered to a great extent the needs of a system in stagnation. He recalls the time of adoption, when the decision was made:

“We were facing facts: a reform was needed, charts were showing a decline in student performance and there was no alternative reform available”

(Xhuvani 2011)

To a certain extent other experts share this perspective though they do not necessarily agree on Bologna being the only solution arguing that perhaps proper deliberation and a higher involvement of local experts might have helped to highlight the problems the sector was facing before a reform was devised. For example, Prof. Puka (2011) thinks the need for a reform originated mostly due to massification of HE and therefore problems arising from such massification (mostly related to employment and HE costs) were left unaddressed. He illustrates how “the political communities that crafted the reform failed to address these problems also failing to accompany a policy of massification with a much needed policy of selection” (Puka 2011) thus leaving Albania with entire generations of university graduates but failing to provide the tools to determine the best and brightest among them.

One would like to think local experts with decades of experience in HE, many of them educated in western universities, would have been able to devise solutions to these problems, which were of a far more complex nature than study cycles in need of restructuring. Prof. Lamani, a fellow engineer and colleague, adds to these doubts.

“Indeed the problems were many but they were not only related to student performance - this was more likely a consequence. They were related to the need for better infrastructure, staff qualification, increased funding and the development of a new student-teacher relationship”

(Lamani 2011)

In fact this is a feature of almost all my interviews. Most HE experts, looking back now to the comprehensive reform that the sector underwent, wonder if any of the root causes for concern and public discontent were indeed addressed or even brought to light. Dr. Ylli Çabiri takes from a wide experience in national studies on economic and social development, to lay down his doubts on what the HER aimed to address in Albania: “It is not clear whether the adoption of the Bologna Declaration has merely postponed the debate on the needs of HE or it has served to cover up more deeply-rooted problems”(Çabiri 2011).

It suffices to have an overall re-evaluation today a decade later, to understand these concerns. Mr. Adri Nurellari highlights the failure of the reform to address the real issues at hand. He recognizes the HER was not well thought through as the years following its adoption showed. In fact, implementation problems escalated, general public information on what the reform meant to Albania is still lacking and overall public discontent with the sector and the changes it underwent persists. Problems afflicting the Albanian HE, raised by many interviewees, regard the lack of academic integrity, the need for better qualification of human resources, and the need for better developed programs

and curricula. Similar issues were also raised in a highly influential report by the European Investment Bank in preparation of an Albanian Master Plan in HE (Hatakenaka and Thomson 2006)

It is hard to say today that the HER relieved any of these symptoms. Doubts persist among academics, students and civil society in general as to whether the real challenges were tackled (or were instead covered up) by the reform. The less ambitious goals that the Bologna process pursued were also apparently not achieved:

“Mobility, be it within the country from one faculty to another or internationally, is still afar. The promised higher compatibility with the labour market was a failure [one only needs to look at how the market reacted towards students holding a 3 year instead of a 4 year bachelor degree, treating them as insufficiently qualified]. And with regard to scientific and academic research, our publications remain of a very low quality.”

(Nurellari 2011)

Prof. Xhuvani highlights the need for public income generation as a point in favour of HERs in Europe and Albania but the proliferation of private institutions that followed hardly fulfilled such aspirations. Prof. Kule (2011) explains: “no new capital is being generated”. In fact, private universities in Albania are not the result of heavy private investment, donations by philanthropic organizations or foreign donors as is often the case in many developing countries. They simply generate income through the high fees paid by students. Whereas a public university might cost each student €200 per year, a private institution could cost up to €5000 per year. It is the same finances of Albanian students and families that go to the private sector instead of the state, facilitating diploma awards at the expense of education quality, which is “at best dubious in most of these institutions” (Kule 2011).

Thus, in most experts’ opinion the real issues to be tackled (mainly quality improvement, labour market enhancement and income generation) were brushed aside, in favour of a reform that proved to be a facade, and therefore unnecessary for the time and challenges facing the Albanian HE. This demands the question: Was this avoidable?

Critical public policy literature has repeatedly acknowledged the role of deliberative practices in reconciling political vision with pragmatism, in consensus building and creation of public value (Forester 1999). The role of local knowledge is crucial not only to re-framing challenges and devising applicable solutions but also, as the following section demonstrates, to legitimize public policies, especially when these entail deep structural reforms. It may be in fact that particular perspectives and decades of experience of national ECs of academics and civil society could have prevented such disillusionment by better framing the problems and challenges facing HE in Albania as well as suggesting locally devised solutions to them. With proper deliberation, the Bologna process as well could have formed part of these solutions.

4.4 The Integration imperative: agenda, continuity and vision

As explored in the previous chapter, under the umbrella of Europeanization, development and integration are often conceptualized and presented as one in Albanian public policies. A Ministry of Integration as well as Directorates of Integration in other Ministries have been established and carry out the harmonization of Albanian policies with European pre-accession requirements. In trying to explore *how integration imperatives affect national ECs in terms of offering advice to specific policies*, Dr. Çabiri draws attention to the important role these imperatives played in isolating ECs that adopted a critical perspective to the reform:

“The debates, to the extent that they were developed, revolved more around the perspective of EU Integration, than the development of the HE sector. It was very clear that the decision was part of a political agenda”

(Çabiri 2011)

Prof. Dr. Lamani (2011) supports this view recalling that any deliberation or active participation by Albanian ECs of academics or individual experts in the first phases of the process was modest, and merely a formality, as this participation had already been “preceded by a political decision” to adopt the Bologna process.

A rather interesting insight is that of Ms. Gjonaj (2011), a member of parliament for the Democratic party of Albania and former Deputy MES: “Yes it was a political decision – she says – but in a way it was an inevitable one”. She points out to the Europeanization discourse as something that surely affected the decision, but also helped to legitimize it and assured the continuity of the policy in a country of an extremely tense and competitive political arena where continuity is by all means a luxury. To illustrate: from 1991 to 2005, Albania has had eleven governments, five general elections, two referenda on the constitution and several reorganizations of ministries, all characterized by an overall lack of orderly transition (Muço and Sjöberg 2005: 161-162). Coupled with tense, distrustful and confrontational relations between parties, this nourished an unproductive political culture and severely undermined continuity of any policy. But the HER stood out as incredibly persistent. The ‘Bologna’ brand gave the reform strong Integration nuances and legitimized it through the dominant Europeanization discourse, thus securing its continuity. Ms. Gjonaj recalls the start of the reform by the Socialists and its continuation by the Democrats as a unique case of consensus among different political ECs, regardless of their ideologies. This process, started by the left and continued by the right, was able to bypass the harsh reality of Albanian political culture and make use of the continuity secured by its European nature as power shifted between political parties.

Understandably, other ECs feel differently on the ‘consensual’ nature of the reform, as consensus among political communities has to be differentiated from national consensus. Prof. Lamani recalls the years 2000-2003 when in most European countries, interest groups and academic communities were intensively discussing the ‘pluses’ and ‘minuses’ of the Bologna process. Albania experienced no such stage. At most, some informative conferences were orga-

nized on the Bologna declaration and “the process that had started elsewhere” (Lamani 2011).

“Within Albanian academics and ECs, there was a somewhat passive expectancy where optimism and skepticism were equally present. Optimism – not based on a constructive knowledge of the process (in fact this knowledge was lacking), but in an inertia of accepting everything that would bring us closer to Europe and Integration, the ‘magic’ word. Skepticism – not due to the possible negative effects of the reform, but to our inability to seriously engage in this process.”

(Lamani 2011)

He recalls at the time critical voices in Europe calling for a cautious stance to the Bologna process, but the arguments of European sceptics did not find much ground in Albanian ECs. In any case, it is possible to conclude that while academic ECs repeatedly called for reforms, the push for the Bologna process did not come from them. As to the political communities, they seem to have been puzzled as well, but on rather different concerns.

“On the one side, presenting our inclusion in the Bologna process as an ‘integration’ element and a ‘major reform’, political communities were expecting a positive political impact both nationally and internationally. This was at the core of their efforts to take the step and sign the Declaration (the terms in quotation marks remain very fashionable today as well, and that is how the facade become more important than the content). On the other, the transparency and standards for comparison that the Bologna demanded, were a serious cause for concern, as they would have exposed the gravity of Albanian HE, when the people in power could in fact not afford to take any real, serious steps in improving the situation. In fact, in the years 2000 – 2004, the percentage of GDP devoted to education fell under 3%.”

(Lamani 2011)

Thus Albania reached a historical minimum of education financing, just as the reform was underway, while the EU was encouraging governments to support HERs with an increase in spending. Whether it was the lack of opportunity or a general lack of will by the political communities to engage seriously and critically in the reform that was being prepared is up to discussion. The way restructuring was framed, presented and implemented reflects, more than anything else, a lack of vision and clear strategy in HE. Nevertheless, the restructuring went on because of what the HER symbolized, both to the ruling elites in Albania and those in EU. According to numerous academics and students, the Bologna process remains today a political reform that largely mirrors the political aspirations of its time: to become like Europe, regardless of our vision (or lack of), even if this comes at the cost of adopting a system we have yet to understand, even if we cannot afford it financially, even if we start by the facade.

4.5 Privatization and the political economy of HE

One of the most heated debates on HER in Albania revolves around privatization. In the last decade, private institutions offering bachelor and masters degrees have proliferated¹¹ giving way to mixed feelings and a great degree of scepticism among HE expert *But can we trace any correlation between this phenomenon and the Bologna process?*

Privatization was hardly advertised as a policy objective at the time the reform was being framed. Today as well HE privatization and the HER are seen as two different things by experts - the former an expected consequence of neo-liberal restructuring within the country and the later a conscious political decision towards EU integration. Yet correlations hardly go unnoticed. Since early on, academics and various interest groups reserved an important role for the Bologna Declaration in the marketization of HE, some with heavy criticism and others with a hint of enthusiasm.

“Even though it did not directly concern privatization, the Bologna process facilitated the opening of private HEIs. The process lowered the cost of education for a bachelor by shortening the time needed from four to three years. It increased mobility and placed a higher prestige on master degrees thus devaluing the diplomas by public universities. In this way, it helped privatization initiatives”

(Nurellari 2011)

Another interesting perspective is that of Prof. Puka who sees privatization as a response to the pressures the Bologna Process was placing on the government. “The massification of HE was a heavy load on the budget of the Albanian governments who have tried to unload some it on the private sector” (Puka 2011). Ms. Gjonaj as well admits that HER and the Bologna process affected indirectly, but considerably, the privatization that followed, mainly by shortening the Bachelor cycle and generally massivizing HE. “We were at an average of 10 students per 1000 citizens while the European standard was 40/1000. Regardless of the degree of funding to the public sector, privatization was necessary if we ever wished to satisfy these expectations” (Gjonaj 2011). According to her, privatization served the interests of government policies, private investors and potential students.

Prof. Kule is less utilitarian in his perspective on HE privatization. Also a member of the Board of Directors of the Balkan Universities Network, he draws parallels with other neighbouring transition countries that have given way to privatization hoping the market will help to address some of the problems afflicting HE sectors in the region. He shared with me his concerns on such initiatives:

“ The commercialization challenge that HE in the region is facing comes from the idea that the market will be the best solution to HE problems. Education is thus being treated as all other industries. Unfortunately, this is the No.1 mistake as education is not a regulatory function of the state. Rather, it

¹¹ Currently there are 37 licensed private HEIs in Albania (MOES 2011)

is a very basic function. Through heavy commercialization we deform this function and turn the state into a regulator rather than provider. A particular logic whereby universities act as units regulated by the market thus predominates. Often the terminology and very structure of the Bologna process has come to hide defects born out of this marketization. Thus HER often became the facade hiding marketization deformations”

(Kule 2011)

Chapter 3 sheds some light on how the overall competitiveness discourse that shaped the Lisbon agenda, also pushed for marketization of HE. This opened up space for the development of a private HE sector. To countries like Albania, that aspired to join, “the need to create a private sector in education was openly stated as a guideline of Integration. Such drives were also strongly supported by local business communities and interest groups” (Çabiri 2011). Prof. Xhuvani recalls particularly the Democrats, coming to power in 2005 with an entirely European Integration oriented agenda. This government openly pushed for the liberalization of HE. In May 2007, the new LHE, which was entirely oriented towards the Bologna process, reflected this (Xhuvani 2011). Thus, there is a strong ideological correlation between European Integration imperatives, the liberalization fostered by the Bologna Process and the fast development of a private sector in Albanian HE.

During his years as MES Prof. Memushi, now running one of many Albanian private HEIs, licensed the first private university in the country, the Luarasi University. To him, HE privatization was key in providing competition to the public sector (Memushi 2011).

“Surely in Albania the public university reserves a prestigious position, but this does not explain why, for example in various rankings by foreigners, Albanian private universities do better than public ones. It is true that ranking does not make up for accreditation and that eventually every institution should only give accredited diplomas. But we must also ask the question: isn't the public university doing the same? Are they not also giving out diplomas that rarely are recognized as fully valid abroad?”

(Memushi 2011)

In this way Prof. Memushi illustrates his support for a private HE sector. However, the emphasis often placed on ranking rather than accreditation by certain communities points to the very low standards of education provided in most of private HEIs. This concern is shared by various experts interviewed (Çabiri 2011, Kule 2001, Lamani 2011, Nurellari 2011), In fact, Prof. Kule (2011) calls it “one of the many sophisms in function of politics” and points to an interesting impetus for the emphasis on ranking (rather than accreditation): the new up and coming HEFR.

The issue of privatization is the ‘hot topic’, around which the harshest debates on the reform revolve, precisely because it represents, more than anything else, the political economy of HE in Albania. What seems to have been a matter of providing more or less competition to the public sector, reflects now much higher stakes as it gives way to a whole new debate, currently under way in Albania, on the issue of public financing. According to various media and experts, repeated talks have taken place and a comprehensive HEFR could be

under way sooner than expected, that will, under the pressure of private institutions, completely transform the way Albanian HE is financed (Lamani 2011). What is being requested by the state from private universities is that instead of highly financing public education, students be given financial ‘vouchers’ by the state to spend wherever they choose to. Prof. Kule shares his concerns on the issue: “All this relates to the HEFR we will soon have to face that demands for state budget money to go to those same institutions, without proper accreditation, that today express their strongest interest in the ranking system” (Kule 2011).

The debates around such HEFR and the way it could be framed should provide interesting insights into the dynamics between the Albanian government, ECs of academics, civil society and interest groups; as well as on the very future of Albanian HE. Now that the stakes are higher, it should be interesting to follow whether local ECs will show more resilience and claim their due role in public policy.

Chapter 5

Synthesis and conclusions

Through this research I aimed to explore the roles of Albanian ECs in the country's development policy framing by investigating who had a say in the dialogues for the HER in Albania, which adopted the Bologna Process. ECs were conceptualized along the lines of Haas' (1992) definition: networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area, which also share values and beliefs. I researched the nature, influence and political roles of these communities as well as the consequences of their exclusion. From the interviews conducted, I have identified four main ECs in the HE sector made up respectively of politicians, bureaucrats, academics and civil society representatives. Each of them displayed different approaches to policymaking, HER and the general development/integration choices in Albania.

The main research question posed at the start of this study was: What were the roles Albanian ECs played in the framing of HERs and the adoption of the Bologna system? In addressing this question, I also explored how EU integration imperatives and the Europeanization discourse affect the advice provided by national ECs in specific public policies. As integration pushes for more deliberation and a bigger role for non-state expertise, I tried to identify what are the characteristics that make certain ECs a more suitable choice to be consulted by the government for policy advice. Additionally, given the intensity of debates on HER and privatization in Albania, I asked whether we could trace any correlation between the two.

It became clear from interviews that deliberation on the HER, to the extent that it took place, developed after the decision had been made and focused on implementation rather than strategic issues. Albanian academic and civil society ECs did not play a role in the decision to adopt the Bologna process or in the shaping of the subsequent HER. Communities of politicians had already pre-determined a political agenda whereby the Bologna Process would be adopted in light of prioritizing Albania's EU integration. This exclusion heavily impacted the framing of HER, which was promoted as drawing Albania one step closer to Europe but failed to address some of the biggest challenges facing Albanian HE at the time. Only specific ECs with strong neo-liberal convictions, supporters of liberalization, marketization and privatization initiatives, as well as supporters of the overall Albanian Integration imperative, got involved in the process as shapers rather than spectators of the restructuring that was underway. Their experience points to the characteristics a local EC needs to exhibit to be regarded as a suitable consultant by the government. As the hypothesis at the start of this study suggested and fieldwork findings confirmed: political, ideological and strategic alignment of the EC with the party in power as well as alignment of the community's approach to the issue with the dominant European discourse on similar issues in the EU is crucial. Additionally the ability of the community to frame shared group interests on the issue and ad-

vocate for them greatly increases their chances of successful political participation.

As to privatization of HE in Albania, while it may not directly relate to the HER, interviews uncovered indirect links between the Bologna Process and the subsequent proliferation of private HEIs. The HER indirectly promoted privatization by shortening the time needed to complete a Bachelor, massivizing the service at a time when the public sector could not afford the load and generally promoting reorganisation of the HE sector in line with European neo-liberal restructuring under the Lisbon agenda.

The role of Integration also was devoted particular attention. In Albania, where the boundaries between development and integration are heavily blurred, the two are interchangeably used in policymaking and implementations to both frame and legitimate specific political agendas. Under the heavy influence of Europeanization dynamics, the imperative to integrate at all costs imbues all European models with legitimacy. This was also the case of the HER. Given research findings, I was able to trace parallels between 'one size fits all' approaches in Albanian HE and the wider reforms restructuring HE throughout Europe. Highly managerialist approaches dominate both these reforms as evaluation, assessment and accreditation schemes develop into 'the latest avatars of the managerialist ideology' (Lock and Lorenz 2007). In a wider context, the actors and competitiveness imperatives that drove the wider Lisbon agenda, also shaped the way HE restructuring would proceed throughout Europe and in countries aspiring to integrate.

Interesting insights were drawn by interviews on three additional issues: the conceptualization of political space, the consequences of local knowledge exclusion on policy framing and potential opportunities for alternative ways of participation.

Firstly, the way political space was theorized by experts leads to interesting deductions. It seems political space is conceptualized in a two-dimensional manner differentiating between:

- political space created by EU requirements of the sector (less rigid requirements on aspiring governments mean more political space for both local state and non-state actors to determine their strategies) and
- political space created by the government for deliberation with non-state actors.

One might think that the tighter EU legislation on a sector is, the less political space is created and therefore the less deliberation will actually take place. Surprisingly, this is not always the case. In Albania, political space provided by EU regulations seemed to be inversely related with space created by the government for deliberation with local ECs. Political culture has a central role to play in this ambiguity. In fact, the tighter EU requirements get, the better-defined policy goals are, the less room for different alternatives there is, and therefore the more outside contributions are welcome by the government to help in implementation of already predefined frameworks. As big decisions are made elsewhere, fewer struggles take place between state and non-state actors. This was evident in the case of legal reforms for example. In contrast, in the case of HE, EU requirements rarely went beyond a strategic compliance. This

created ample room for shaping a locally based HE policy and more opportunities opened up for different groups in the country to pursue their interests. As the stakes were high, so was the room for opportunism and all ECs not having clearly framed interests, thus not advocating for any particular ideology, were left at the margins. Given the circumstances, the government and few communities with clearly framed interests predominated. These findings suggest an interesting hypothesis with regard to integration and policy space worth exploring in future research. A more complex conceptualization of policy space, as made up of at least two different dimensions, also demands future attention in studies on the subject.

Secondly, the exclusion of most local experts heavily affected the framing of the reform. As Haas (1992) underlines, the importance of ECs lies in articulating cause-and-effects of relationships of complex problems, in providing information but also in helping states better frame issues for public debate. This advantage is lost if a government leaves ECs out of policymaking. As the case of Albania showed, the exclusion of most HE experts heavily impacted the HER framing resulting in a reform that failed to highlight, let alone address, the real challenges facing HE at the time. These findings make a case for highly deliberative approaches as the appropriate frameworks for understanding the complex dynamics behind public policy problems. The Albanian HER experience calls for further research into various development policies in the country to try and identify a possible pattern of exclusion. A variation of the degrees of deliberation in different sectors may also point to interesting results on the characteristics of specific sectors that hinder or foster deliberation.

Thirdly, interviews highlighted the potential opportunities for alternative means of participation. While better interest framing may lead to higher chances of successful political engagement, this does not preclude the possibility for other means of engagement. In fact, a community may not have to engage in politics directly or resemble in any way interest groups to be part of public policy framing. By reaching and influencing the public and especially students, these ECs could have joined other stakeholders and raised their voice to the government. Multiple academics, regardless of their political engagement, had the potential to shape public debates on the HER but failed to do so. In this way they also failed to affirm their role as stakeholders in the process. Neo-liberal academic and civil society communities were more successful in recognizing their status, actively engaging with stakeholders and ultimately shaping the policies that facilitated the liberalization of HE. The Albanian experience also points to legitimate doubts surrounding the accountability and, in fact quality, of a politicized expertise. These findings open up further research questions on the dynamics within and between ECs and interest groups as well as on possible outcomes from the apparent politicization of numerous ECs.

If this study has opened up enough questions to encourage further research into Albania's development policies, especially in key sectors like higher education, it will have fulfilled its purpose. This was a study of different epistemic communities and their struggles to shape Albania's path, groups of people with different approaches and ideologies; groups of people with different values and beliefs; they shared hopes of Albania's development.

Appendix A

Interviewees' profiles

Personal interviews conducted in Tirana, Albania, July-August 2011

Prof. Dr. Luan Memushi, former Minister of Education and Science (2001 – 2005), former Member of Parliament, current Rector of the private university “Universiteti Planetar i Tiranës”.

Prof. Dr. Dhori Kule, economist, current Rector of the University of Tirana and Head of the Conference of Rectors of Albanian Universities (CRAU), over 30 years of teaching experience, former Dean of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Tirana, member of the Council of Higher Education and Science, led numerous meetings with public, national as well as international experts on the HER, participated in working groups and advisory committees on the HER.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emil Lamani, currently Professor in the Polytechnic University of Tirana, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, over 35 years of teaching experience, former Rector of the Polytechnic University of Tirana, member of the Accreditation Council (collegial body recommending, based on external quality evaluation, the accreditation of curricula and institutions of public and private higher education), director of various national development projects, active participant in working groups and advisory committees during the HER.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Edmond Hajdëri, biologist, former Director of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES), currently General Secretary of Albanian private university “Zoja e Këshillit të Mirë”.

Prof. Dr. Llukan Puka, mathematician, Professor in the University of Tirana, Faculty of Natural Sciences, over 35 years of teaching experience, former Dean of the Faculty of natural Sciences, member of the Council of Higher Education and Science, active participant in working groups and advisory committees during the HE reforms.

Dr. Adriana Gjonaj-Kumbaro, Member of Parliament for the Democratic Party, former Deputy Minister of Education (2005-2009), over 30 years of experience in universities, lecturer in the Automation Dept. and Computer Science Department at the Polytechnic University of Tirana, leader and participant in many working groups on the HER.

Dr. Ylli Çabiri, Chief of Cabinet for the Prime Minister in the years 2001-2002, Executive Director of the non-governmental organization “Human Development Promotion Center”.

Prof. Dr. Aleksandër Xhuvani, Professor in the Polytechnic University of Tirana, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, over 30 years of teaching experience, former Director of the International Relations office of the Polytechnic University of Tirana, member of the Council of Higher Education and Science (an advisory council for the Minister of Education that is in charge of ensuring educational policies of higher education, development and promotion of quality in higher education), former head of the BFUG (Bologna follow-up group), participant in most of the meetings with public, national as well as international experts on the HER.

Mr. Adri Nurellari, founder and Director of the Albanian Liberal Institute, political science researcher, public speaker and opinion former, former lecturer at University of Tirana (2004 – 2010), former Political Advisor at Office of the Prime Minister of Albania (2005 – 2006), former Technical Advisor at Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo (2007 – 2008).

Answering questions in a meeting with students at the ISS Opening MA Programme event, 16 Nov 2011

Johannes Cornelis "Hans" van Baalen, Dutch politician, member of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Member of the European Parliament for the Netherlands, twice Member of the House of Representatives in the Netherlands, President of the Liberal International (a political international federation for liberal parties) since 2009.

Appendix B

The role of ideas and the challenge to neoclassical models

This section elaborates on the role ideas have in shaping Albanian expertise in HE and the challenge these ideas pose to neoclassical notions of individuals as utility maximizers.

The role of ideas in public affairs has been widely researched producing remarkable results, which confirm that people act in accordance with their personal or group interest as well as their ideas, values and principles. The impacts of such findings go beyond behavioral studies and have striking implications for both political and economic studies. They challenge the foundations of once undisputed models based on assumptions that the individual is merely a utility maximizer. For instance, it is through an emphasis on the role of ideas that Orren (1988) offers his critique of neoclassical economics, by deeming its models not only unable to encompass the complex reality of social affairs but also, within the safety of the economic sphere, utterly silent in explaining how the nature and extent of public intervention in the economy is largely determined by values and ideology (Orren 1988: 15). His criticism of the models used is followed by a ‘new’ vision emphasizing the role of shared ideas in both economic and political behavior.

As various attempts to explain patterns of conduct through economics of self-interest fail, concepts such as solidarity, purpose, commitments and ideas have gained due importance in political inquiry. One may argue that this is particularly true of certain communities in sectors considered as serving the wide public such as HE. In fact, the interviews conducted consistently show that among academics ideas, purpose and a general sense of devotion to what they perceive as an ‘honorable task’ often prevail over individual or group interests related to posts, scientific grades or titles.

Moreover, while developing his theory on communicative action, Habermas (1984) observed that actors in society more often than not aim for a shared understanding and try to coordinate their actions by rational, consensual cooperation rather than simply aiming to maximize their own self-centered goals. And as the line of research building on Hecló’s (1978) work on issue networks has also noted, their material self-interest is often subordinate to intellectual convictions or value-related commitments. I have found these disclosures confirmed during my fieldwork in interviews conducted with academics, bureaucrats and members of parliament.

Appendix C

Theoretical implications: Making knowledge the terrain of politics

In this Appendix, I place the findings by Chapter 4, section 4.2, and their implications with regard to theoretical debates on knowledge and power dynamics in the context of politicization of Epistemic Communities (ECs) in the EU. I shortly address here the connotations that my findings, confirming a stronger role for ‘politicized’ ECs compared to other academic or civil society ECs, bear¹².

Policymaking and networks of expertise are fundamentally related to one another, especially within the intricate bureaucracy and the elaborate system of legislation, rules and regulations that comprises political processes within the EU. This relationship has been far from static though and evolved parallel to power shifts within the EU. The changing dynamics of power and policy processes within the EU pave the way for new conceptualizations of epistemic communities and new ways of defining successful participation in EU policymaking. The findings in the case of Albanian HE policy bear resemblance to these re-conceptualizations and to the line of literature exploring them.

As European integration progressed arguably towards more accountable and democratic approaches, so too emerged a new political space for participation of non-state actors into EU policy making, with a special focus on the so called epistemic or knowledge communities. An interesting line of publications explored this political space. By tracing parallels with power shifts within the EU, this literature explores how politicians rose to replace the technocrats that dominated policymaking at the start of the ECSC (see for example Radaelli 1999, Alter and Steinberg 2007) and how these shifts affected notions of political participation. General disillusionment with the perceived failure of the highly technocratic ECSC to enforce, or even gain general support for, its own rules and regulations (Alter and Steinberg 2007) led to the demise of technocratic approaches to EU policymaking. Bureaucrats, with a very rational, almost purist, approach to knowledge and policy were pushed aside by politicians, who reserved a much more instrumental approach to knowledge. This can be illustrated with the gradual strengthening of the European Parliament. As politicians also tend to see different ECs and experts as tools to advocate for a certain perspective and interest, the preference within the EU to leave politics to politicians (instead of technocrats) (Radaelli 1999) can be interpreted also as a recognition of the constant struggle for power between different groups in the society. Such a shift in the ideologies underlying European integration theories has placed epistemic communities and networks of expertise in the context of these new (or newly risen to public attention) trends of politicization in the decision making processes.

¹² The analysis takes from a paper written by myself in June 2011 while at the Erasmus International Institute of Social Studies

Highly critical of technocratic approaches to policymaking, Radaelli (1999: 22) places the whole issue of technocracy versus politicization within the EU into a higher accountability perspective by stating: “The main challenge is neither to preserve an unattainable de-politicized EU nor to assume that politicization will tame technocracy, but to make expertise more accountable in an increasingly politicized environment”. There is something to be said about the neglect that often characterizes highly technical approaches to policy making when impacts on specific groups of the society are in question. These approaches usually aim for a best possible solution displaying thus a highly utilitarian view of policies and their consequences. But whether higher politicization makes for a more democratic and more accountable EU is debatable. This resembles debates in the Albanian HER sector on the need to include academics in politics.

The literature exploring similar debates within the EU, while trying to define the new role and potential capabilities of epistemic communities within the politicization process, often refers to them as ‘advocacy coalitions’ (Sabatier 1998), ‘political epistemic communities’ (Marier 2008) or ‘collective entrepreneurship’ (Zito 2001). This new terminology points to an essential change in the relationship between groups representing knowledge and expertise and those representing interests. It seems to imply that if these communities and networks want to make use of the political space within the European political and decision-making system, they need to cooperate and jointly advocate for what they stand for. Roberts (1992: 59-64) emphasizes this collective entrepreneurship as the only way to break into the highly bureaucratic European institutional framework.

The Albanian HER experience, and the success of pro-privatization communities in influencing government policy, certainly seems to support this hypothesis. Similar European experiences are also not lacking. Examples of such successful cooperation start with the creation of the European Monetary Union (Radelli 1999) that comprised a counterbalancing of the power of technocracy, bureaucracy and epistemic communities by a higher participation of strongly politicized interest groups. Zito (2001) explored another case of how one epistemic community, by showing strong entrepreneurship and taking the role of an advocacy coalition, influenced the EU acid rain policy. This literature recognizes the immense constraints than any community advocating for significant change within the European system faces and it calls for coalitions to overcome these constraints. Marier (2008) making a case for the possibility of alternative ideologies far from the existing status quo, cites also the example of the Swedish parliamentarians, assisted by experts within the civil service generating one of the most widely cited and discussed pension reform. “Those outside the community, including unions, find it very hard to alter the views and policies of the close-knit pension group which formed the epistemic community” (Marier 2008: 514). This new form of ‘political’ epistemic community proved stronger than the overall status quo ideology and succeeded in implementing a reform that highly challenged that status quo. In this way the new political and interest – related features within the anatomy of epistemic communities may result in their empowerment if these communities show enough

political entrepreneurship and make good use of the opportunities for coalitions with both politicians and interest groups. This seems to also be the case of Albanian ECs with a strong orientation towards privatization of higher education.

The change in the nature of power dynamics within the EU, and, as findings show, in countries like Albania, is analogous with not only these new perceptions of ECs and new notions of politically relevant expertise, but also with new conceptualizations of the nature and role of knowledge in politics. Fischer as cited by Radaelli (1999:4) puts it very bluntly in the words “Knowledge has become the terrain of politics”. Radaelli (1994) then elaborates on the crucial importance of recognizing that the main idea is not the change in the types of actors (experts versus elected politicians) but the change in the nature of power. ECs, according to this literature, have power only when they are organically inserted into the policy process. One may observe thus, quite interestingly, how the political role of expertise comes to re-define the way knowledge and knowledge communities and networks are conceptualized.

There seems to be an implicit general agreement in the European literature as well that this process is useful and inevitable thus confronting knowledge and expertise with the prerogative ‘politicize or perish’. As fieldwork showed, Albanian academic and civil society ECs know this challenge all too well.

In the search for a more democratic and a more accountable European Union, or perhaps while trying to legitimize what now seems a matter of fact, various authors focus on how ECs can make better use of these new shifts: either by changing their organic parts and employing more political elements or by collaborating with interest groups in advocacy coalitions. This means that there is no need for experts themselves to become politicians or vice versa, but in a deeper sense it implies that knowledge, if it is to be of any use, should not only provide advice but it should, quite interestingly, incorporate (and even possibly shape) various interests that underlie policy framing and its impacts on different groups within European societies.

Such analysis opens up various questions that need further research. For example, would this policy space be available equally to all communities claiming a contribution in the production of knowledge as long as they can cooperate with different interest groups or incorporate political elements? It would seem from the above mentioned experiences of European ECs shaping EU policy, that successful entrepreneurs to public policy participation share many similar characteristics such as inclusion of parliamentarians, a strong determination to lobbying and, most importantly, determination to initiate and push for their inclusion. Thus that the more an EC resembles an advocacy group, the higher the opportunities are for its inclusion into the policy process. As the case of Albanian HER shows, this has serious implications for the many remaining communities of experts that are not willing to engage politically, lack the resources to mobilize public and political support or that find it hard to get their issues on the political agendas of potential supporters.

By making political participation a US system lookalike, where a race to the top grants the most ambitious and resourceful communities the chance to

participate, is the public really getting the best available consultants to their lawmakers? The confusion and general discontent on the Albanian HER a decade later seems to suggest it is not. The Albanian experience points to legitimate doubts surrounding the accountability and, in fact quality, of a politicized expertise. By making knowledge and expertise the terrain of politics, it remains to be seen whether we can ever be sure that it will not be subject to the usual settlements, bargains and compromises that underlie all political processes.

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