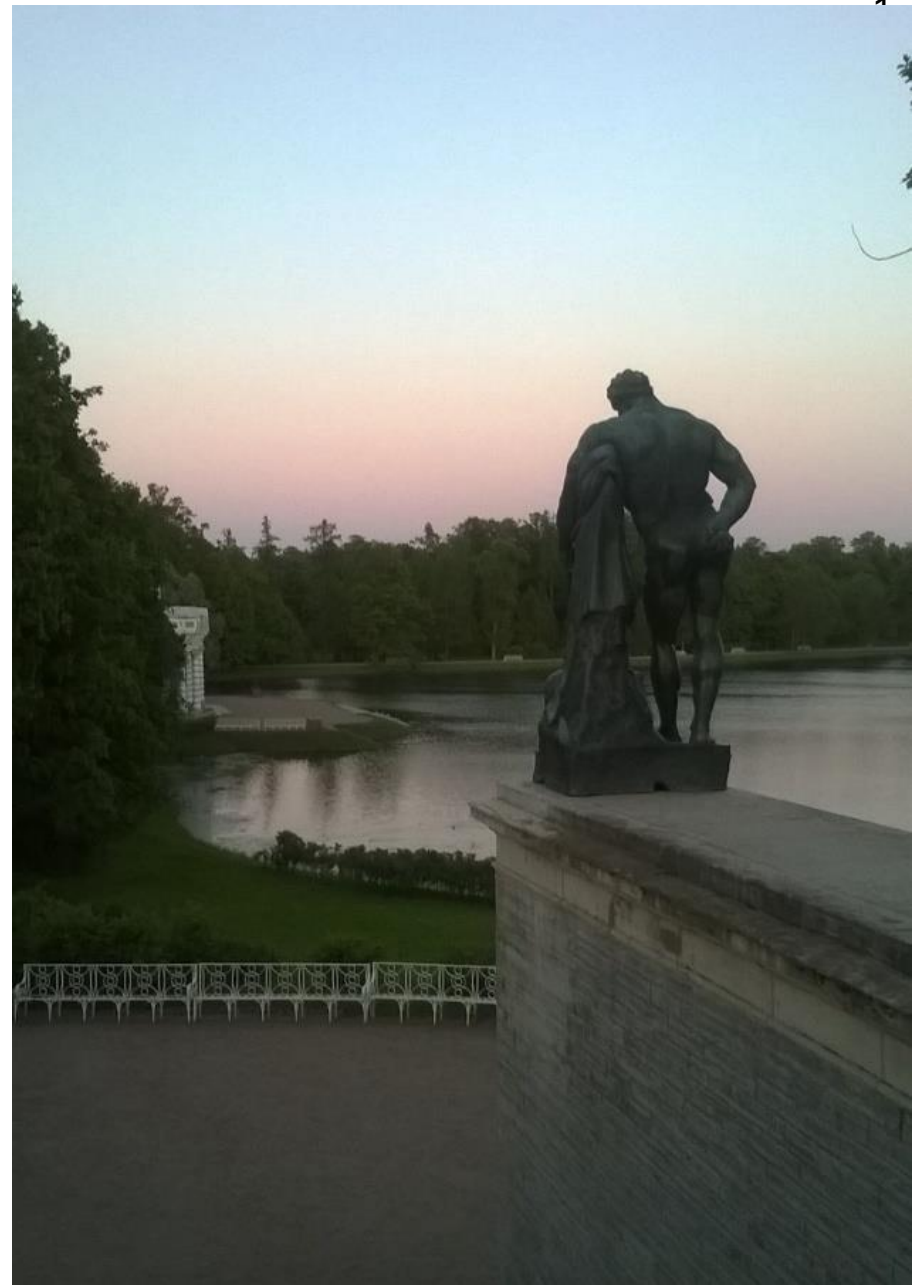


Key concepts in the field of higher education research –how helpful are they as intellectual devices?

Jussi Välimaa



Higher education: discipline or a field of research?

- Defined by the object of research (Higher Ed.)
- Multi-disciplinary (~50) & **multi-methodological** (qualitative, quantitative, historical, philosophical) research field
- Body of knowledge:** empirical, theoretical, practical
- Structured by the questions: What is higher education as a social phenomenon? How does it work? How it is related with society?

↔ Communication in the field

Types of higher education experts (Teichler, 2000)

Types	Theory, Methods	Basis of expertise, Field Knowledge	Application, Development
Discipline-based, occasional HE researcher	++	-	--
Discipline-based, con. HE researcher	++	+	-
Theme-based, academic HE researcher	+	+	-
Applied HE researcher (policy, institutional)	-	+	+
Consultant	-	+	++
Reflective practitioner	--	++	++

Foci of European higher education research

- Historically, the **main foci of European higher education research**:
 - a) Policy implementation studies (analyses of reforms; follow-ups; 'talking truth to power')
 - b) Social studies of higher education as a part of society (systems theory, field theory, governance theories; network theories...)
- => c) Analyses of the functioning of HE as a social entity** (system, organisation, culture)
(Välimaa 2008)



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What is a theory?



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On Theories

- Different perspectives to a **Theory**:
 - a) a **set of properly argued ideas** intended to explain facts or events (eg. evolution)
 - b) a **unified system of knowledge** (eg. molecular theory);
 - c) **Principles on which a subject study is based** (constructivist theory);
 - d) outcome of **theoretical reflections** (big bang)
- ↔ Common sense: it sounds fine in theory but does it work in practice?

Core theoretical perspective in the body of knowledge on HE: systems

- Higher education **as a system**: in the core because help to analyse different roles of actors & interplay across level of system
- Clark's triangle + Becher & Kogan's synoptic model + Glonacal + Fields of Social Action
- Policy implementation studies**: 1) focus attention to differences between levels of the system; 2) helps to bare in mind both the intended and unintended consequences of reforms



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Some theoretical perspectives utilised in HE studies

... but not approached here:

- Field / social space (Bourdieu)
- Knowledge Society (Stehr)
- Systems theories (Parsons, Luhmann)
- Academic capitalism, Triple helix, Mode 1 & 2 as "Zeitdiagnose" / middle range theories
- Neo-institutional theory, Path-dependency, Agency Theory applied in HE ⇔ combination of theories rather than a single theory

Higher education as a system?

- Basic conceptualisation in HE studies as a) social phenomenon & b) relationship with The Prince
- Structuring questions:
 - a) what are the **levels** of system?; b) what are **values and norms** (beliefs) of the system?; c) who are **the actors** & what are the **operations** in the system?

=> how to explain the interplay between all these dimensions?

Burton R. Clark (1983), The Higher Education System. Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective

- Increase of knowledge (teaching & research as technologies) & specialization **drive differentiation** => **what integrates HE systems?**
- **Levels: understructure** = 1) department (chair); 2) faculty (school); **middle structure** = 3) HEI (University, College); **superstructure** = 4) multicampus academic; 5) state, provincial ministry or bureau; 6) national government
- **Beliefs** (values and norms): cultures of discipline, profession, enterprise, system



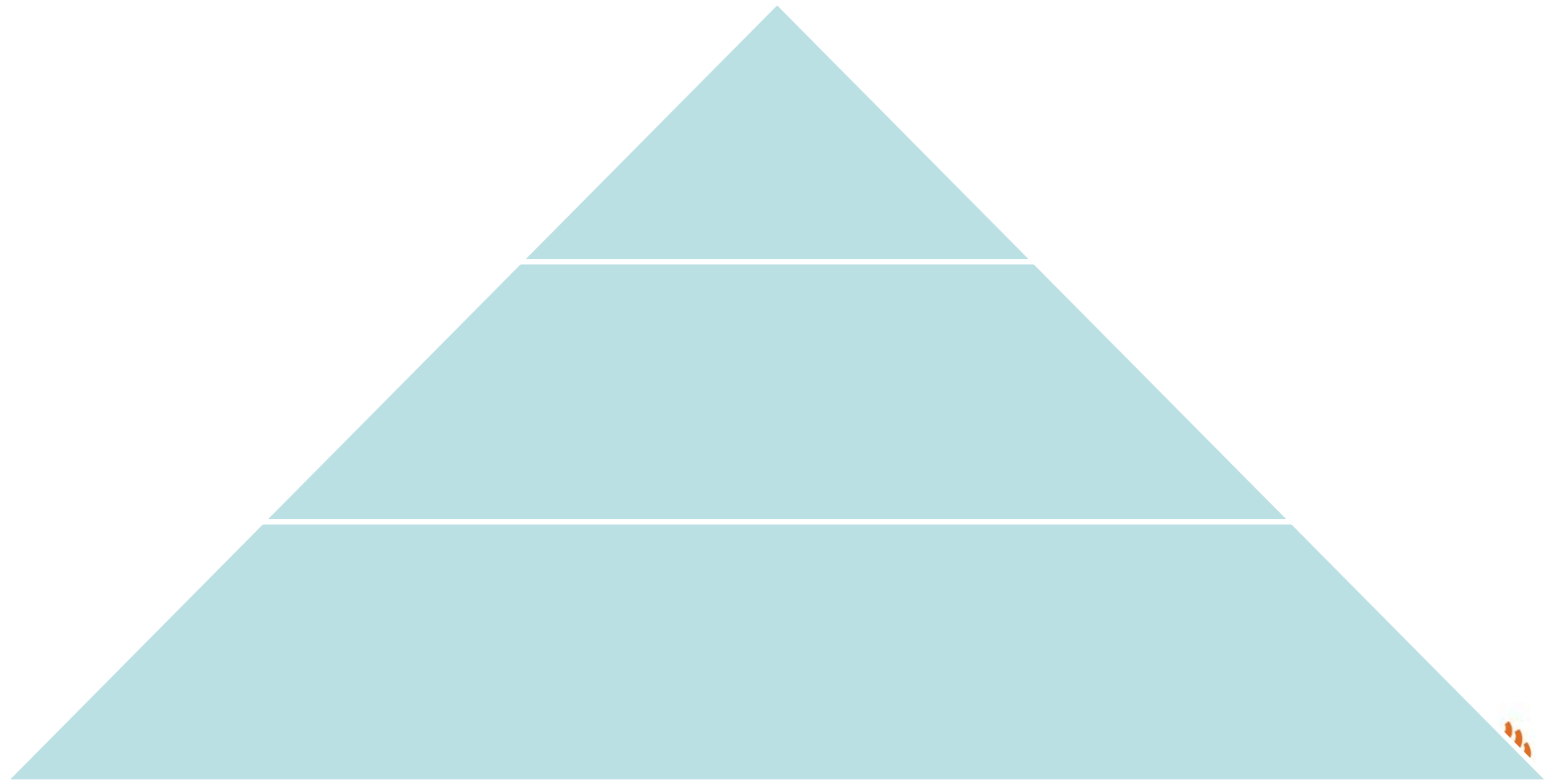
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Actors integrating systems of higher education; Clark's triangle

- A major contribution to our field
- **State:** bureaucracy & political (regulation) + *economic steering*
- **Markets / exchange relationship:** institutional (HEIs), consumer (students), labour (academics)
- **Academic oligarchy:** academic associations, professors, guilds, chairs + Charisma as the wild card (individuals)

Clark's Triangle: markets, state, academic oligarchy



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Why still alive?

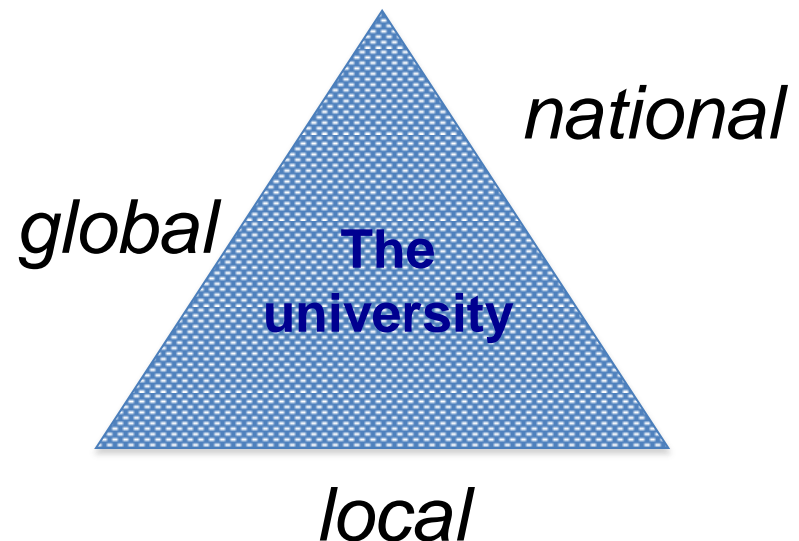
- Powerful heuristic device because it helps to illustrate:
 - 1) different perspectives to different purposes of higher education (research, teaching, service)
 - 2) interest groups (or stakeholders) of higher education (tax payers/state, students, academics, enterprises /markets, academics)
 - 3) forces of integration

Something missing: The Glonacal model

- Takes Clark's model as a starting point
- Adds new dimensions to it: local, national & global
- Emphasize the continuous interplay between different levels: global, national, local
- University's agency, capacity to act

Global, national and local agency: three dimensions of higher education

- Higher education is formed and regulated in regional/*national* (and also in Europe pan-national regional) systems
- *Local* individual and institutional agents and practices are salient
- *Global* agents, flows, systems and patterns, e.g. in research science, policy borrowing, are increasingly obvious
- University strategy institutionalises and synchronises all three dimensions



Clark's matrix

- Organising principles of HEIs:
- organisation
- discipline



Becher & Kogan (1992): Process and Structure in higher education

- **Levels:** individual, basic unit, institution, central authority (national level)
- **Modes** (operational & normative modes, internal & external): vary according to the level of the system
- **The Actors** in the system: individual academics; heads of depts. or schools / institutes; universities (HEIs), national ministers & ministry of education

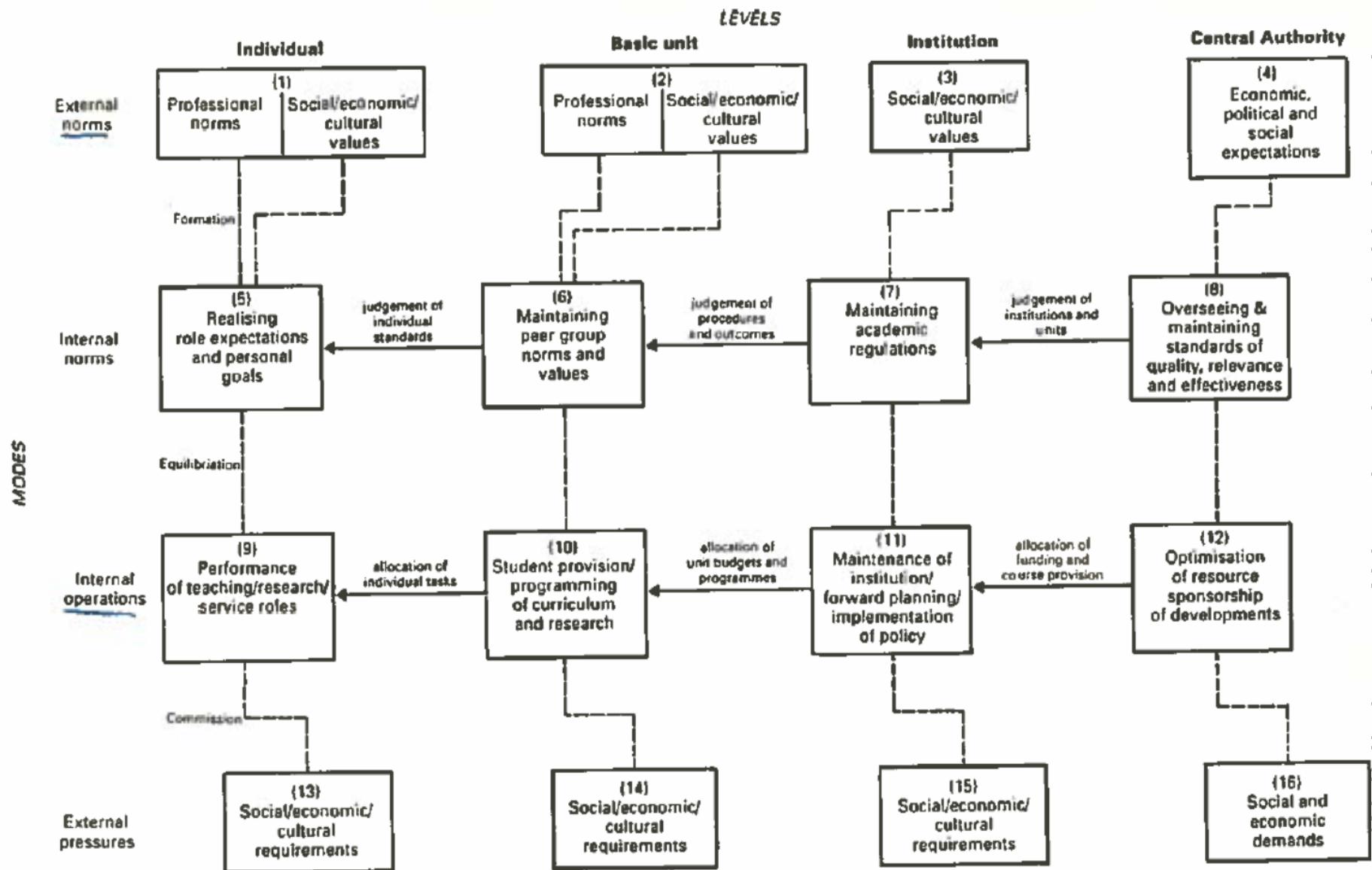


Figure 2.2 The synoptic model

Main concepts

- **Central level:** various authorities in charge of overall planning, resource allocation & monitoring standards
- **Institution:** as defined by law (instruments of governance) and by convention (through its various decision-making bodies)
- **Basic unit:** 1) academic responsibility for an identifiable course(s); 2) operating budget; 3) influence on recruitment of colleagues (often also students) – great variety between institutions
- **Individual:** teaching & research staff, administrators, ancillary workers & students



Policy implementation studies: The Implementation ladder

(by Trowler 2002 in Westerheijden 2015)

Central government makes formal HE policy and established funding regime

Vice chancellors and their top teams interpret and respond to policy in different ways

Heads of department balance competing pressures, employ, reject or ignore demands for compliance, employ, negotiate or construct the discursive repertoires in which policy is encoded

Academic staff in different departments and HEIs apply, ignore or adapt policy as they think appropriate, only some of which reaches them and which they receive and interpret in different —sometimes unpredictable—ways

Students respond in unpredicted ways, changing relationships and practices in teaching and learning situations. New situations often develop as unintended consequences of disturbance of the status quo.



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'Fields of Social Action'

(by Bleiklie et al. 2000)

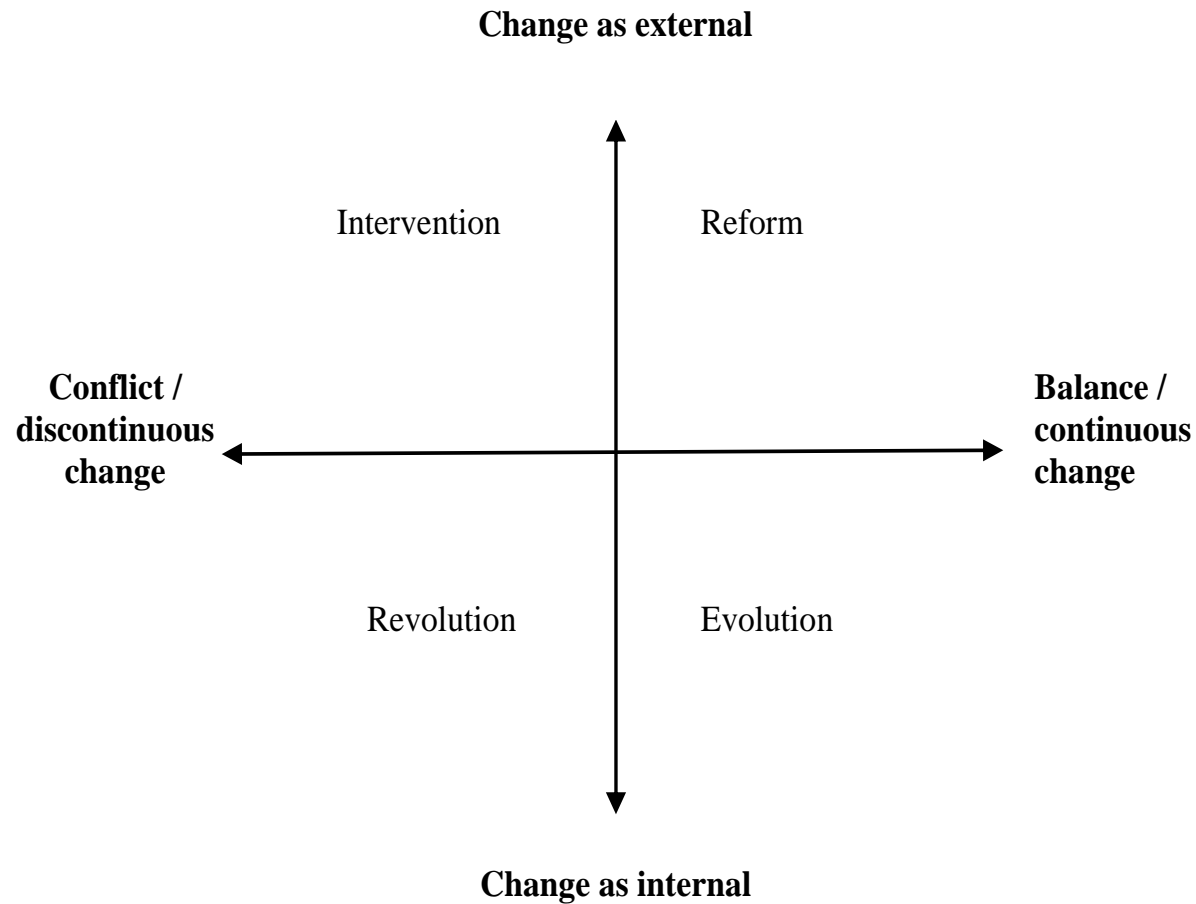
- "A field is an institutionalised area of activity in which actors struggle about something that is importance to them" (Kogan et al. 2000, 20)
- Builds on the body of knowledge on higher education systems, neo-institutionalism (Powell & DiMaggio) and sociological field theories (Bourdieu)
- Challenges top-down, or bottom-up (and hypothesis testing) of policy implementation theories

Contribution

- ❏ Systems of higher education do not follow either bottom-up or top-down (hierarchical) models of action but are based on continuous interaction between different levels of systems



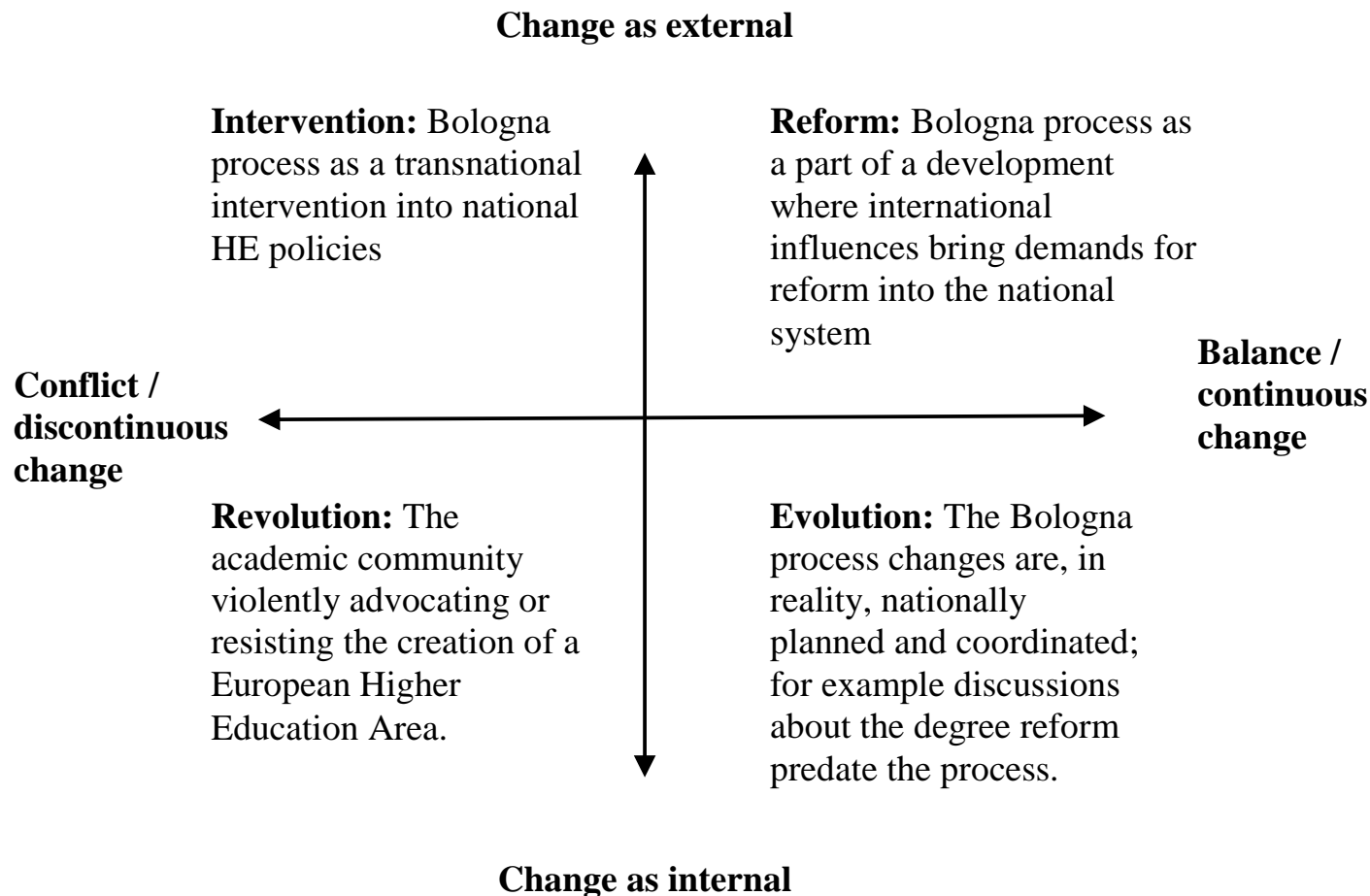
On Change



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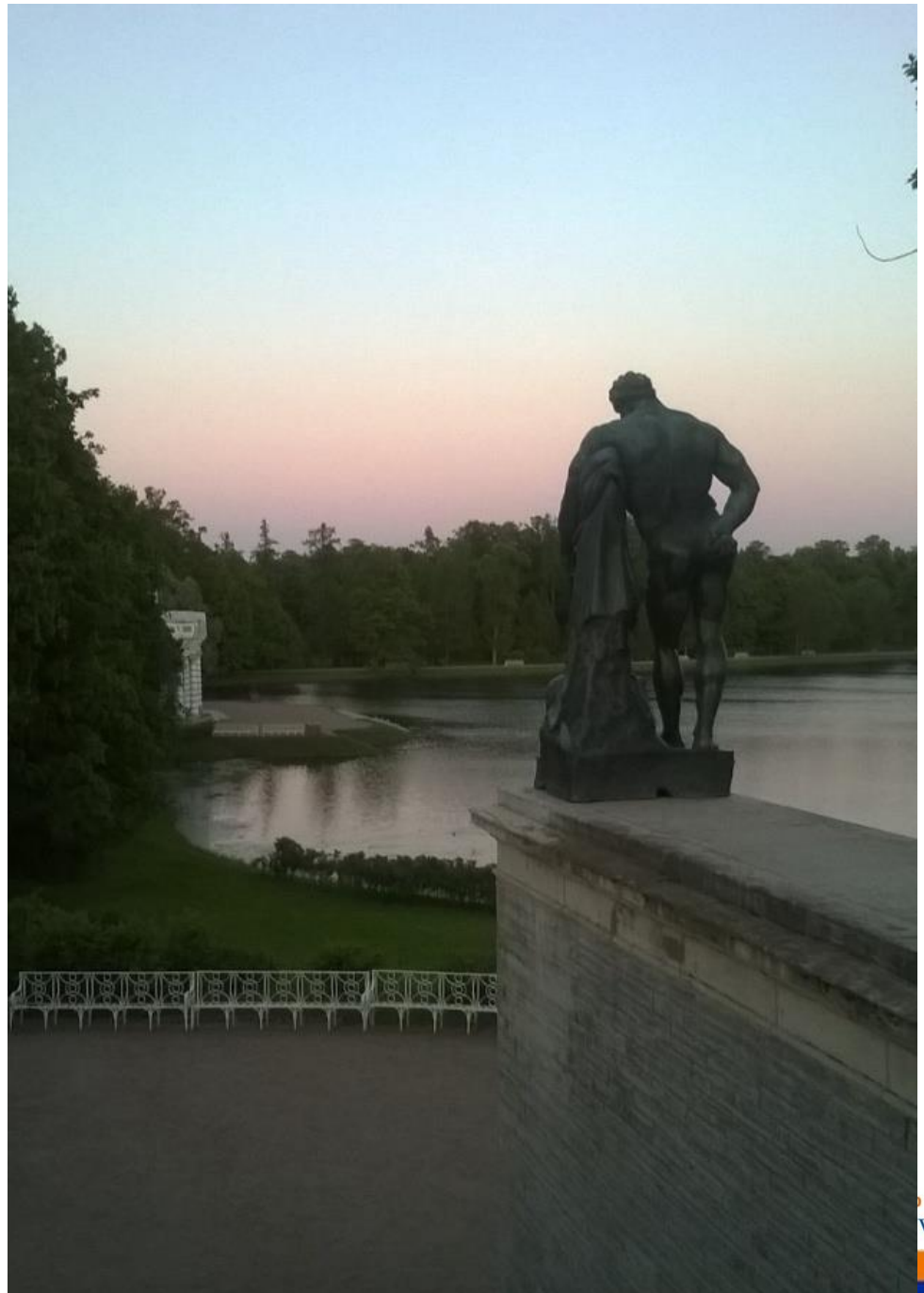
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The Bologna Process as an example



**Thanks for
your
attention!**

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Thanks for your time!



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