

Capacity building as an EU policy instrument: the case of the Tempus program

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ABSTRACT Within the European Union (EU) different policy instruments have been applied as means to realize political ambitions. In the higher education sector capacity building initiatives have been particularly popular, and this article studies one of the oldest and most dominant instruments used by the EU during the last two decades: the Tempus program, aimed at modernizing the higher education sector in Central and East-European countries. Based on data from over 50 universities in the Western Balkans, we discuss whether the many Tempus projects in this region have had an impact at the institutional level. Comparisons are drawn between institutions deeply involved in the Tempus program and institutions with few or no affiliations with Tempus, to provide results offering few indications that Tempus projects have had direct effects in terms of institutional renewal. The article ends by discussing possible explanations for the apparent absence of effects.

KEY WORDS capacity building; EU policy making; higher education management and governance;; policy instruments; Tempus programs; Western Balkans

INTRODUCTION

Within public administration and political science there is a renewed interest related to the design, functioning and effects of policy instruments, not least within an European Union (EU) context (Knill and Lehmkuhl 1999, 2002, Jordan *et al.* 2005, Hofmann 2008). From an EU perspective, many scholars have focused on the 'new governance' debate, where soft law and new policy instruments such as the Open Method of Coordination receive considerably attention (see, in particular, Borrás & Jacobsson 2004, Gornitzka 2005, Tholoniati 2010). The use of soft law instruments has been considered as a key measure in areas where the EU lacks formal competence (Kassim and Le Galés 2010). One such area is higher education and to some extent the same can be said of research, where formal power and political authority still mainly rests within the nation state (Neave and Maassen 2007).

However, while soft law instruments such as the Open Method of Coordination have received considerable attention, this does not mean that established types of instruments have disappeared from the scene. One such instrument is capacity building, which is often described in the literature as focused (economic) investment in a particular area, with the aim of enhancing skills, competence and knowledge in the receiving agency or organization (McDonnell and Elmore 1987: 141). In this article we study one EU capacity building instrument – the Tempus program – and consider whether skills, competence, and knowledge can be said to have been developed as a result of this program.

The Tempus program was initiated in 1990 as an aid program for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, helping them to restructure their universities during the political transition process and to prepare for EU accession (Wilson 1993, Kehm 1996, van der Sleen 2003). Today, Tempus is a major education cooperation program promoting higher education modernization and development in various regions outside the EU, and is an example of how EU instruments can reach beyond formal members of the union, especially to those countries that want closer links with the EU (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005). Tempus has turned out to be one of the most visible forms

of EU public diplomacy towards its near and immediate neighbors. It has become a key policy instrument in the EU education and training landscape during the past 20 years.

Tempus currently supports a wide range of activities, funding university cooperation projects in the Partner Countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Southern Mediterranean region. Since 1990, the EU has donated over 1.4 billion EUR to Tempus activities, funding more than 3800 cooperation projects. At present, 60 to 70 projects are selected annually, based on consortia of EU and Partner Country universities and using a total budget of approximately 60 Million EUR. The program promotes voluntary convergence with EU developments in the field of higher education deriving its aims from the Lisbon agenda and the Bologna process. This aim of convergence is also underlined, for example, by the website of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency where it is stated that “Tempus is the European Union’s program which supports the modernization of higher education in the EU’s surrounding area. Tempus promotes institutional cooperation that involves the European Union and Partner Countries and focuses on the reform and modernization of higher education systems in the Partner Countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region....priority themes under Tempus are defined around the main components of the EU’s higher education modernization agenda and are therefore structured in three building blocks: Curricular Reforms, Governance Reform, and Higher Education and Society”.

In this study, we assess this potential role of Tempus by analyzing how Tempus projects have influenced university governance and management practices in the Western Balkans. We focus particularly on analyzing whether the institutional capacity for strategic planning, performance management and benchmarking can be seen as strengthened by university involvement in Tempus projects. This article proceeds as follows. A brief overview of the Tempus program is presented in the next section. Section 3 presents the conceptual framework. Sections 4 and 5 give an overview of the study’s empirical design (methodology), data and the results. Section 6 presents the discussion. Finally the conclusion, section 7, discusses the broader implications of the findings.

THE TEMPUS PROGRAM - HISTORY, DEVELOPMENTS AND ORGANIZATION

From the inception of Tempus across the EU and Partner Countries, Tempus has contributed to promoting cooperation between higher education institutions by emphasizing capacity building activities (EACEA, 2012: 7). Four versions of the program have so far been implemented. Tempus I was formed as an ‘Assistance Program’ in the 1990s, not only for Central and Eastern European Countries, but also targeting a third group known as the ‘Western Countries’. During Tempus I the establishing Council ‘left the door open for participation of any of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, designated as eligible for economic aid... in any subsequent relevant legal act’ (McCabe *et al.* 2011: 10). Although ‘Yugoslavia joined in 1991’, a year later it ceased to exist as Yugoslavia. ‘Albanian followed suit in 1992’ (ibid). As Tempus I grew in importance and (global) recognition, it contributed to socio-economic reforms through cooperation in higher education. Typically, Tempus projects involved cooperation between two or several universities, where partnership learning and networking were seen as key activities. The EC Tempus Office was established in Brussels in 1990 to manage the first call for proposals for Tempus projects. Tempus II covered the next six years (1994-2000), and took place in the context of major transitions for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which were moving ‘to democracy and market economies and their preparations do accession to join the European Union’ (McCabe *et al.* 2011: 10). Characterized as a ‘Transition Program’, Tempus II was extended to certain countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. One innovation initiated by Tempus II required the national authorities of the Partner Countries to define priority areas for reform in their national higher education systems.

These priorities included 'reform of university management and financing' and also the need for national regulatory reforms (McCabe *et al.* 2011: 11). van der Sleen (2003: ii) reported that "Tempus II aims thus went beyond the mobility objective and bottom-up innovation of curriculum development and university management that characterized Tempus I". However, "for the successful applicants, Tempus funding has also meant manna from heaven... [thus] Tempus has especially been important for sensitizing policy makers and senior academics to the need for and direction of legislative and regulatory reforms" (van der Sleen 2003: viii).

Tempus III (2000 – 2006) was further developed into a 'Modernization Program' (McCabe *et al.* 2011: 16). During Tempus III, the concept of cooperation between different countries in the same region was also introduced. The program was also extended to cover North Africa and the Middle East 'with a view to contributing to promoting socio-economic development in this region' (EACEA, 2012: 7).

The most recent version, Tempus IV, is still ongoing (2007-2013). McCabe *et al.* (2011: 17) described Tempus IV as "a partner country supporting national reforms". Tempus IV places emphasis on regional and cross-national cooperation and reinforcing links between higher education and society. The networking dimension of the program has thus been strengthened. In this version of the program it was acknowledged that "impact could go no further, without national legislative reform and changes in national higher education systems as a whole" (McCabe *et al.* 2011: 17). However, the institutional capacity building heritage of Tempus is also continued in this version, and in essence the core activities of Tempus programs have remained quite stable over that past 23 years, although the means to achieve them has changed. The emphasis of Tempus has always been on higher education institutions rather than on individuals.

Numerous reports and ex-post evaluations are available on the Tempus website as well as several surveys concerning the impact of the Tempus programs on higher education development in the Tempus Partner Countries. More detailed information about the Tempus program can be found at <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/>.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, we outline some theoretical arguments and factors that may influence potential effects of the Tempus program, both by taking into consideration the assumptions behind capacity building as a policy instrument, and by considering key characteristics of the target of the instrument - universities and their capacity for organizational change.

Expected effects of capacity building as a policy instrument

Capacity building is an instrument that is not easy to define. Within the literature on policy instruments, various classifications and definitions of capacity building exist, and it is not easy to find agreement on clear demarcations between various instruments. Hence, capacity building may be said to have some characteristics that overlap with instruments such as information and learning tools, symbolic tools and even organizational tools (Salamon 2002, Hood and Margetts 2007). However, capacity building arguably has some specific key characteristics. Compared to the Open Method of Coordination capacity building is not as politicized (with high level political participation) and it contains very few direct peer pressure mechanisms (Borrás and Jacobsson 2004). Capacity building instruments also assume that those being targeted lack information, resources and skills, and that these features will – in an instrumental fashion – be corrected by the instrument (Schneider and Ingram 1990: 527). This does not imply that effects will appear immediately. Capacity building is generally considered to be an indirect policy tool, in the sense that building capacity in itself will not necessarily lead to direct effects such as new standards, rules and regulations. Capacity building is, in other words, an instrument intended for creating long-term effects (McDonnell and Elmore 1987:

143). However, the development of organizational capacity in the form of strategic planning, performance management and benchmarking systems are often seen by the EU as important ends in themselves (see also Heidbreder 2011: 723), and the existence of these activities in universities taking part in the Tempus program may be considered as a possible effect of the many projects initiated in the governance area. Of course, the absence of such activities within the universities involved in Tempus projects may also be a strong indication of a lack of effects of the Tempus program.

As illustrated in the previous section, Tempus has developed considerably over the years, and may be considered as a forerunner to the 'new governance' approach, with its emphasis on building networks both vertically and horizontally (Jordan *et al.* 2005), but also to facilitate direct learning from institutions within EU member countries. One could assume that certain governance tools will have a better fit with the Tempus approach than others. Not least, benchmarking can be seen as a governance tool that is particularly relevant when networking is top of the Tempus program agenda, and consequently it might be expected to be more widely implemented than other governance tools.

Due to the emphasis on building administrative capacity in universities in Central and Eastern European countries through interconnected institutions, the latest versions of the Tempus program also resemble what is currently labeled as the 'twinning' instrument, which also aims to build capacity at the central administrative level in the targeted countries (Tomolová and Tulmets 2007, see also Borrás and Jacobsson 2004: 189). These links to the national level may yield different expectations about the potential effects of the Tempus program, as an EU policy instrument. Since higher education is an area where the EU lacks formal competence (Neave and Maassen 2007), national legislation may in some countries be an important mediating variable influencing the effects of Tempus. Examples include countries where activities such as strategic planning are mandatory at the national level (Stensaker *et al.* 2007), or where national de-regulation has created a more market-based higher education sector, forcing universities to adopt managerial practices for coping with increased competition (Huisman 2009). In addition, one might also expect to find that in countries where formal membership of the EU is high on the political agenda, that national authorities perceive Tempus as a means for transformation triggering additional national support for participating institutions, although such national capacity should not be taken for granted (Sissenich 2007). Controlling for national variations in the Tempus program may yield some indications as to the relevance of these arguments.

Universities as change agents – between inertia and innovation

While policy instruments may create effects on their own (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007: 10), it is also important to consider the characteristics of those being targeted by the policy instrument, especially as networking activities and capacity building may activate an implementation process characterized by shared sovereignty between the program, the projects funded and the participating institutions (see, in particular, Hofmann 2008: 671).

The higher education sector in general, and universities in particular, are generally considered to make up an organizational field, or at least a set of institutions, where change is highly conditioned by factors such as history, national legislation, academic culture and organizational identity (Maassen and Olsen 2007). Universities are often seen as institutions which enjoy considerable autonomy with respect to their core functions (Clark 1983), although in recent decades they have been exposed to a number of reforms which aim to change the ways in which universities are governed and led. Studies have shown that many European universities have changed their governance and management structures (Amaral *et al.* 2003), although this does not necessarily imply changes in their core activities related to teaching and research (Musselin 2005, Huisman 2009, Stensaker *et al.* 2012). However, since universities are institutions that are highly dependent on external legitimacy, soft law

instruments such as capacity building may exert considerable influence on institutional behavior (Tholoniati 2010). On this basis one might expect Tempus projects to be difficult for universities to resist, especially when there is a great deal of pressure on universities to present themselves as more coherent and 'modern' organizational actors (Whitley 2008). Alternatively, universities may consider the potential 'risk' of adopting new (internally illegitimate) governance and management techniques as moderate all the time such activities can be shielded from core activities.

However, the capacity of the modern university to respond to change has remained an elusive enigma (Johnson *et al.* 2003). In the so-called Knowledge Society, universities are faced with an increasing number of societal expectations where adaptation may be difficult due to the complexity of the expectations or due to some of these expectations being contradictory or requiring conflicting organizational actions (Maassen and Stensaker 2011). Hence, for some universities participating in the Tempus program, strategic planning, performance management techniques or benchmarking activities may be seen as tools with little relevance to their core activities, or as tools which the institutions simply cannot adapt to, due to a lack of internal organizational capacity or cultural and structural characteristics. For example, several of the universities in the Western Balkan region have been quite de-centralized with extensive power and influence found at the faculty level (Vukasovic 2012); in such cases any efforts to develop the central administrative capacity of the university may be met with considerable resistance.

RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA AND METHODS

In general, capacity building can be considered as an instrument whose particular effects are difficult to detect, due to the fact that increased capacity may yield a range of actions, and also because its effects are generally long-term (Schneider and Ingram 1990: 517). Furthermore, as indicated in the description of the Tempus program, the partnership approach may result in quite fragmented and less consistent capacity building projects, making it difficult to trace effects across a set of organizations. Hence, capacity building is an instrument where identifying direct effects can be expected to pose a methodological challenge.

Due to this, the current study developed a 'quasi-experimental' approach, by comparing universities deeply involved and engaged in the Tempus program with universities with little of or no involvement in Tempus projects, and by including universities in different countries although within the same region – the Western Balkans – which in the current study includes the following countries: Serbia (SE), Croatia (CR), Montenegro (MO), Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Albania (AL), and Kosovo (KO). Based on the sample of institutions and the countries included, two general sets of assumptions, related to our theoretical discussion, can be tested in more detail:

- The basic assumption is that universities deeply involved and engaged in Tempus governance projects should have a higher level of governance capacity than universities not involved with the Tempus program (A1).
- An alternative assumption is that – due to the spread and acceptance of modern governance ideas in higher education – both universities with high and no involvement with Tempus have a high level of governance capacity (A2).
- A third assumption is that – due to cultural resistance and lack of organizational capacity – both universities with high or no involvement with Tempus have a low level of governance capacity (A3).
- Our final assumption is that there might be differences in the perceived validity of various governance instruments, and that governance activities related to benchmarking might be

more attractive than other instruments among those universities with a high involvement with the Tempus program (A4).

- Based on the belief that national legislation and regulation may impact on the governance capacity of universities, an assumption is that the effects of the Tempus program will vary between countries (B1).
- An alternative assumption is that EU funded projects may be seen as attractive and so override national legislation and regulations, leading to no national differences in the governance capacity of universities (B2).

Data collection methods

For the current study two sets of data was compiled. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected in a multiple mixed methods design. The first data set was derived from the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency's website, containing information on all Tempus projects in the period from 2000 - 2012 (<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/>). The second data set originated from a survey among 51 Western Balkan universities.

Tempus projects – identification and content analysis

Given the study's interest in institutional governance, Tempus projects related to this area were identified and selected for the study. Of particular interest were projects intended to strengthen institutional capacity for strategic planning, performance management, and benchmarking. Thematic analysis was used to identify key projects in this area (see, in particular, Boyatzis 1998: 5). Given the long history of Tempus, the selection of projects was concentrated on the last two versions of the Tempus program (Tempus III and IV) (hereafter also T₃ and T₄) covering the period from 2000 until 2012. The Western Balkan countries participated in total of 697 Tempus projects in this period (459 in Tempus III and 238 in Tempus IV). In the Tempus III and IV projects, several Western Balkan universities had a participating role as either coordinator or as a partner. For each project, the Tempus website provided the title of project, the year, the subject area, the objective, the duration, the amount (in Euros) of each grant, coordinators, and partners. The thematic analysis and consequently the selection of projects took into account the name of the project, the subject area, and most importantly, the objective of the project. From 697 projects, a total of 37 projects (17 T₃ projects and 20 T₄ projects) met our criteria and were chosen for further analysis. Across the 17 T₃ projects 142 participants were counted reflecting n=36 Western Balkan universities taking part; across 20 T₄ projects 102 participants were counted reflecting n=32 Western Balkan universities taking part. Across both Tempus programs (T₃ and T₄) there were a total of 244 projects, within which we counted n=41 Western Balkan universities taking part. For anonymity, we coded universities as A 1, A2 etc. Readers interested in details of the 37 selected T₃ and T₄ projects can contact the authors for specific information.

Survey

To test our assumptions about Tempus as a policy instrument a survey was undertaken among universities in the Western Balkan countries. A particular focus of the survey was to investigate and analyze institutional perceptions and concerns about organizational capacity building in the areas of strategic planning, performance management, and benchmarking. A questionnaire was derived from the U.S Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for Performance Excellence in Education (hereafter MB). This questionnaire has been used in various national settings (see, in particular, Papadimitriou 2011) and included questions about the universities' characteristics such as country, city, age, size, as well as various statements about strategic planning, performance management, and benchmarking activities in the targeted universities.

The survey was distributed online to universities. All public and private universities in the Western Balkans were selected. The population of the survey consisted of 112 universities listed at that time by the Ministry of Education and Quality Assurance Agencies in all seven Western Balkan counties and that were in actual operation. Dillman's (2000) four-phase administration process was followed to ensure a high response rate: phone calls and personal e-mails were used to provide reminders. Of the 112 universities sampled, 51 responded within a three-month period (November 2012- January 2013). The response rate for public universities was 62 percent. The response rate within private universities was 35 percent. Table 1 summarizes our sample.

Table 1 Respondents by country and ownership

Country	Public	MB Public	%	Private	MB Private	%
Albania	13	6	46,15	34	10	32,35
B&H	8	7	87,5	16	5	31,25
Croatia	7	5	71,42	0	0	
Kosovo	2	1	50	3	1	33,33
Montenegro	1	1	100	2	2	100
FYROM	5	2	40	8	3	37,5
Serbia	6	4	66,7	7	4	57,1
Total	42	27	64,28	70	25	35,71

Response bias

Response bias is the effect of non-responses on survey estimates (Fowler 1993). Bias means that if non-respondents had replied, their responses would have substantially changed the overall results of the survey. Creswell (2003) has suggested that an alternative check for response bias is to contact a few non-respondents by phone and determine if their answers differed substantially from those of respondents. This study included such a non-respondent check for response bias.

Data from content analysis revealed that 41 (mostly public) universities were involved in Tempus activities. Data from our survey illustrated that 29 of these 41 Tempus universities replied (a response rate 71 percent). Babbie (1990) has suggested that a 60 percent response is a good and a 70 percent rate very good.

The survey data were first analyzed with descriptive statistical methods, calculating frequencies and means. Based on this, for each Tempus project (T₃, T₄, and T₃+T₄,) we identified a group with no Tempus participation and then divided the participant universities into groups with high and low Tempus involvement (50% and 50%). Thus we organized the universities based on their Tempus involvement in order to provide nine sub groups which could be compared using variance analysis (ANOVA). Additionally, because the survey collected data about age, size, and nationality, we were able to compare these independent variables to the dependent variables reflecting capacity building (strategic planning, performance management, and benchmarking) through the use of oneway analysis of variance (ANOVA) as well. The post hoc procedures (Tukey HSD) was determined if any two groups in each ANOVA were significantly different at the .05 level.

RESULTS

To ascertain whether universities with high, low, and/or zero participation in Tempus projects had higher self-reported levels of implemented strategic planning, performance management and

benchmarking practices, an ANOVA was conducted. Figure 1 displays implementation scores i.e., whether organizational capacity in these areas can be found in surveyed universities.

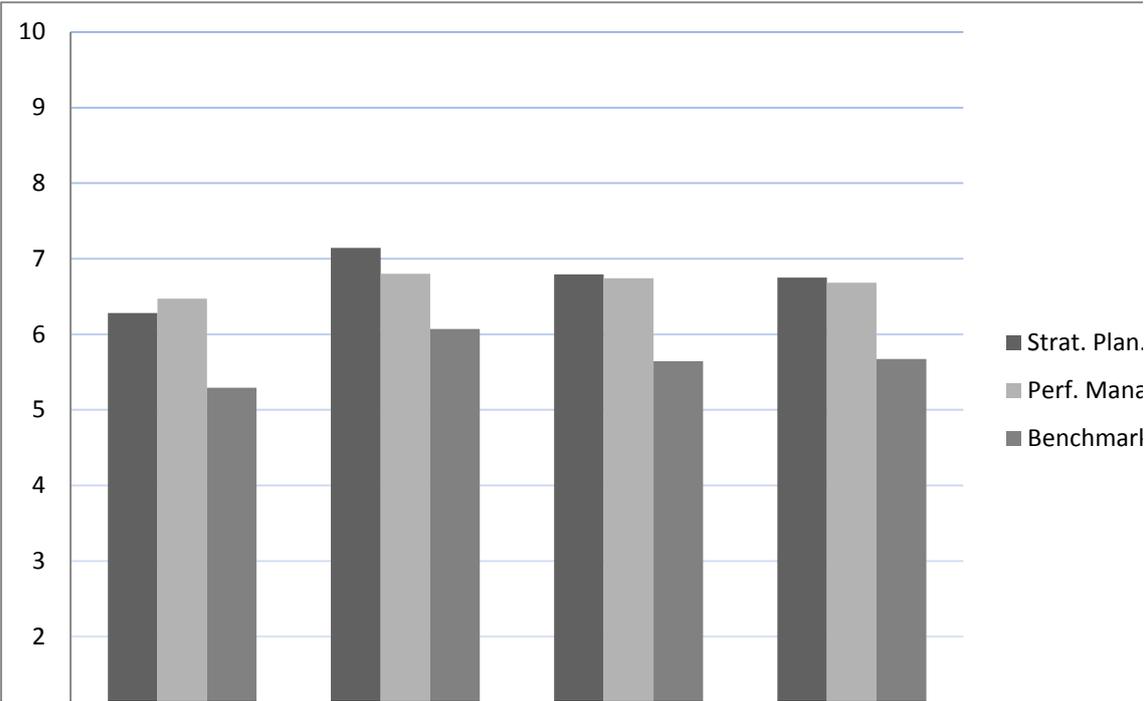


Figure 1 Distribution of institutional governance capacity within Tempus and non-Tempus groups (scale from 1 = no implementation to 10 = fully implemented)

The ANOVA analysis showed no significant differences between the mean of each test group. The assumption (A1) that universities with a high level of involvement in Tempus projects in the governance area should display higher organizational capacity in these areas, compared to universities with no or little involvement in Tempus projects, is not supported. As figure 1 indicates, universities report quite high and quite similar governance capacity in the various areas analyzed. The alternative assumption (A2) that the spread and acceptance of modern governance ideas in higher education means that most universities have developed their governance capacity accordingly is, however, supported by the data. Assumption A3 cannot be rejected based on these results, as the average organizational capacity among the universities is still far from the top end of the scale. However, as figure 2 shows, the universities perceive organizational governance capacity as very important, indicating that it is not cultural resistance that is limiting the level of implementation.

It is also interesting to note that the governance capacity seems greatest among universities with low involvement in Tempus projects, and that those universities with no involvement with Tempus actually have a higher level of capacity than those with high involvement.

Figure 1 also shows a difference between the universities in terms of the various governance instruments. In general, benchmarking activities are not implemented as much as strategic planning and performance management tools among the surveyed universities. Hence, our assumption (A4) that benchmarking activities would be especially emphasized is not supported.

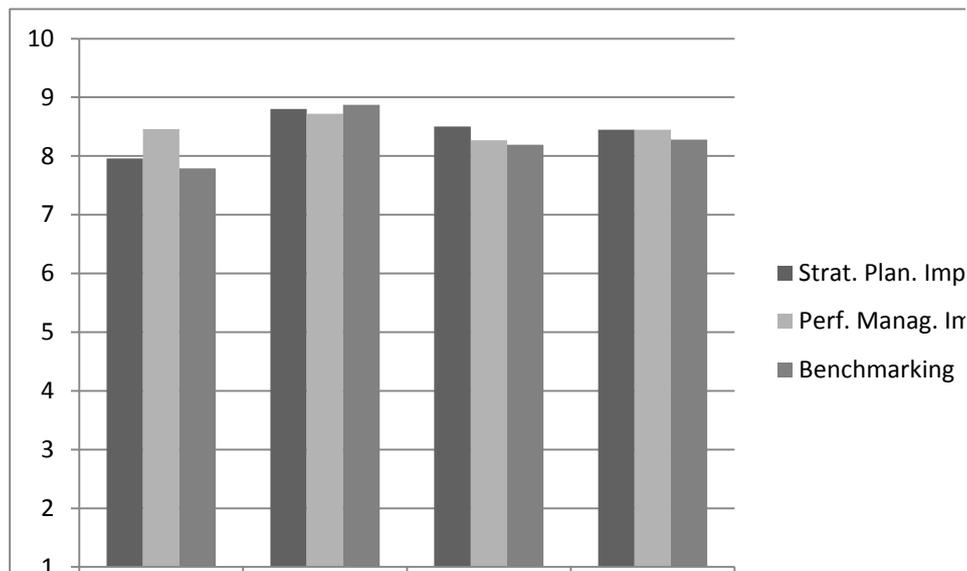


Figure 2 Distribution of beliefs concerning the importance of institutional governance capacity within Tempus and non-Tempus groups (scale from 1 = not important to 10 very important).

The survey data also enabled a series of additional analysis to be conducted to check the results further. Of particular interest was whether institutional governance capacity might have been affected by the age and size of the universities in the sample. In this analysis the ages of responding institutions were collapsed into 3 categories: universities which were established before 1989 were characterized as 'old', those established during the period 1990-2006 as 'new', and those established after 2007 as 'very new'. Each of the capacity building categories (importance and implementation) was compared to age using ANOVA and Tukey HSD post hoc procedures.

A significant difference was found between performance management implementation and age. The Tukey HSD procedure identified a significant difference between the mean scores of very new institutions (established since 2007), $F(6.542) = .003$. Specifically, very new universities had higher self-reported performance management implementation ($M=8.80$; $SD=.84$) than old universities ($M=6.61$; $SD=2.02$) and new universities ($M=6.03$; $SD=1.99$). In other words, old universities scored more highly than young universities, but not better than very new universities.

Another significant difference was also found between performance management importance (perceptions) and age. The Tukey HSD procedure identified a significant difference between the mean scores of very new institutions $F(3.223) = .049$. Specifically, very new universities had higher self-reported scores for the importance of performance management ($M=9.31$; $SD=.88$) than old universities ($M=8.62$; $SD=1.08$) and new universities ($M=8.03$; $SD=1.51$).

The number of students enrolled (undergraduate and graduate) was used to determine the size of each institution and divide them into categories (splitting the sample in three using the 33.33% rule). Small universities had below 1,925 students, medium sized between 1,926 and 3,333, and large universities over 13,334 students. The ANOVA for size was non-significant.

The study aimed to see if and how Tempus projects are affected by various national legislation and regulations. To assess differences in self-reported levels of capacity building (strategic planning, performance management, and benchmarking implementation) with overall Tempus (T_3+T_4) involvement based on national status, an ANOVA was conducted to test these assumptions. The overall ANOVA was non-significant. The averages for self-reported implementation practices on

strategic planning, performance management and benchmarking, by overall Tempus groups and country are shown in Figure 3.

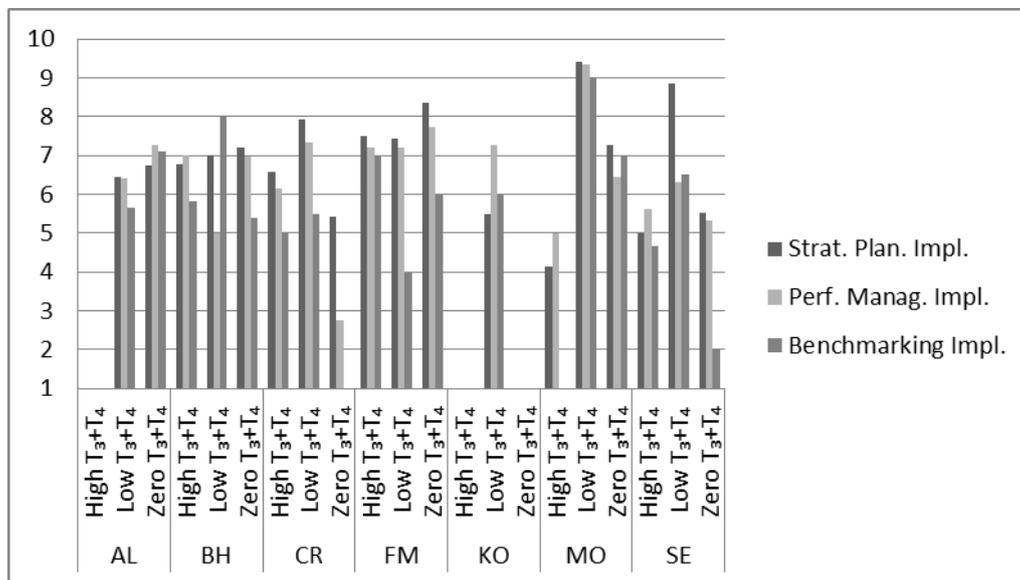


Figure 3 Influence of national regulations on institutional governance capacity (scale between 1 = no implementation and 10 = fully implemented)

As indicated in figure 3, there is no significant effect of national legislation and regulations on the effect of Tempus. Indeed, as figure 3 illustrates, there are sometimes greater differences among institutions within countries than between them. Based on this, our assumption that the national level might impact on Tempus implementation is not supported, while the alternative assumption concerning the potential impact of EU programs is strengthened.

DISCUSSION

The results from our study cannot be seen as providing any formal evaluation of the overall Tempus program, as the study has only focused on a specific area of Tempus projects and their effects in a specific region. However, the results are interesting in providing a ‘control group’ through the quasi-experimental design of the study, enabling a comparison between universities with varied degrees of involvement in the Tempus program. In general, the analysis is not encouraging with respect to the potential of capacity building as a policy instrument. While one might argue that the results are not surprising as capacity building is meant to lead to long-term effects, it should be underlined that the current analysis included Tempus projects back to 2000. This provides more than a decade since some of the earliest projects were initiated, and it is hard to see any particular effects even in this relatively long-term perspective. However, it should be underlined that our methodological approach has not made it possible to check whether there might be qualitative differences between universities with similar levels of governance capacity; it is possible that universities with high levels of involvement with Tempus have established more efficient governance systems, even if there are few differences in their formal capacity.

A more optimistic explanation of the results is that Tempus programs, and capacity building instruments in general, might have a ‘halo’ effect beyond the targeted institutions. The fact that non-Tempus universities seem to have developed the same governance capacity as those universities

with a high-Tempus involvement could be an indication that capacity building instruments can be interpreted as important symbolic instruments as well (Salomon 2002). Since Tempus is a well-known program in the Western Balkans (see McCabe *et al.* 2011), reform agendas supported by the program might be seen as highly legitimate, thereby creating pressure on all universities in the region to emulate the activities supported by the program.

The fact that those universities with a high involvement in Tempus do not seem to have developed a greater governance capacity than other universities, despite some of them having participated in more than ten Tempus projects in the governance area, also invites speculation as to their underlying motives for participation in these programs. If Tempus projects are perceived as ‘*mana from heaven*’ as stated by van der Sleen (2003: ii), the high involvement in the program could simply be interpreted as institutions exploiting an alternative funding mechanism. This interpretation suggests diminishing effects of capacity building as a policy instrument, and that participating in a high number of projects may not necessarily imply greater effects. Although differences found in the survey are not significant, those universities with a low involvement – and participation in only a small number of projects – have developed slightly higher governance capacity than all other universities (see figure 1).

It is quite surprising that the age and size of universities have little impact on the effects of the Tempus projects. In principle, one might expect that age and size could have various effects on governance capacity. For example, larger institutions might have a greater need for well-developed governance systems, although the traditions of Western Balkan universities tend to encourage decentralization of authority to the faculty level (see, particular, Vukasovic 2012) and this may explain the perceived lack of need for more centralized governance capacity. With respect to age, there are some significant differences between old and new universities, in that very recently established universities report a higher capacity for performance management than older universities. This may be explained by a greater need for control in these universities, which may be more financially vulnerable than older universities. However, the implication is nevertheless that differences in governance capacity are not related to Tempus program participation, but to institutional characteristics.

When looking at national differences, our analysis identified no significant impact on Tempus effects when controlling for national legislation and regulation. This finding may be interpreted as supportive of current efforts to broaden Tempus projects, where institutional capacity building is seen in as part of a need for national reform and renewal. Still, this broader project approach has been a key characteristic of Tempus IV since 2007, and so far there are few indications that this ‘*quasi twinning*’ is working. While the twinning instrument is currently seen as a policy innovation within the EU (see, Tomolová and Tulmets 2007), our findings suggest that the coupling of national reform and renewal to institutional capacity building is not very strong. Perhaps the explanation for these results is related to a poorly developed national capacity for reform and renewal (see also Sissenich 2007), or that the more instrumental weight is put on developing certain organizational practices, the more the cultural and symbolic dimensions related to organizational change tend to be overlooked (Schneider and Ingram 1990).

CONCLUSION

Neave and Maassen (2007: 135) have argued that the Bologna process has been “one of the most studied, if not the most studied undertaking in the field of European higher education reforms”. Less understood and studied are other European initiatives in the higher education sector. This study sheds some lights on the Tempus program and how this policy instrument has been received in a selected number of countries in the Western Balkans. In this way, the study contributes both to the

general debate about EU policy instruments and their effects, and to the increasing number of studies looking more closely at reform and change processes in higher education in Europe.

In terms of higher education the Tempus program is one of the oldest policy instruments in the EU tool box, and numerous evaluations have suggested that the program has contributed significantly to the development of universities and colleges in many countries (Kehm 1996, McCabe *et al.* 2011, Wilson 1993). While this might be true for the Tempus program as a whole, our study do show that capacity building may be an instrument with limits regarding its potential effectiveness and efficiency. With respect to effectiveness, the Tempus program has developed its profile substantially over the years and is now a much broader and less focused program than in the past. Indeed, the latest version of the Tempus program shares many characteristics with the Open Method of Coordination, in its emphasis on bridging common action and national autonomy, its non-sanction approach, and its focus on cooperative practices and networking (Borrás and Jacobsson 2004, Tholoniati 2010). There might be good arguments for this broadening, but one could also argue also it has made the program less focused. Can such a lack of focus provide explanation for the seemingly limited effects of the capacity building projects in the institutional governance area? Has a program that used to be a pure capacity building tool been turned into a more blurred policy instrument, where symbolic dimensions and resource driven needs have the upper hand? Compared to the Open Method of Coordination the problem faced with capacity building is that strong mutual commitment between the various actors involved is lacking, and that intergovernmental engagement is quite weak. These elements are generally considered to be important in making soft law instruments work well, and without them it may be that Tempus is an illustration of fragmented and diverse actions being taken by the EU to stimulate administrative reforms in the Central and Eastern Europe (Heidbreder 2011: 722).

However, as discussed earlier, symbolic dimensions should not be underestimated as potential drivers of change – especially in higher education. The fact that most universities in our study actually report a quite high level of governance capacity with respect to strategic planning, performance management and benchmarking, does suggest that soft instruments may have impact far beyond their target groups (see also Tholoniati 2010). As such, it would be interesting to study the driving forces behind the development of governance capacity in those universities not supported by the Tempus program.

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