The role of ideas and their change in the higher education policy-making processes from the Eighties to present-day. The cases of England and New Zealand in comparative perspective. Research Project.

During the last twenty-five years there has been a common trend within the higher education sector in all countries; this trend has sometimes produced profound changes and several proposals of reforms in the sector. This phenomenon was followed by an increased interest in the policy regarding this sector. The results of this new interest were different in each country. In some of them it led to processes of radical change; in others it produced only marginal changes. It is very interesting to study this phenomenon examining in particular the aspect related to the policies. In fact the higher education sector, the one I would like to consider, is a very interesting one for whom would like to study in depth the policy change. In this sense we have to keep in mind that the main elements of higher education are: knowledge, authority of the academics, fragmented structure of the organisation related to knowledge areas conceived as bricks. Clark (1983) explained that these characteristics of the sector help to understand the great adaptability of the institutions of higher education all their existence long. Under this point of view, that is the main one according to the literature on higher education, the changes in this sector can happen only if they conform to the values that are dominant, especially among the academics. According to this concept, the changes should reflect the main paradigm (dominant or hegemonic) in the policy sector. This means that they should be in line, or at least not opposite, to the institutionalised values and to the interests shared by the academics. This perspective reads the change as completely path-dependant. So, in this context, the policy legacy determines strictly the direction and the content of the change itself. Contrasting with this vision several
changes happened in countries like New Zealand, Australia, England, The Netherlands, that have taken completely different directions from the one of the dominant academic values in the policy sector and in the institutions. So, from the path-dependence perspective we would not be able to explain the different directions that the reforms within the higher education sector have taken in the Western countries from the early Eighties. In fact, comparing the shape and the content of the several policies adopted in this sector and in the different countries, the traditional perspective used to interpret this policy is not able to explain why a higher education system has changed more than others or which direction it has taken\(^1\). In this sense, the proposal of this paper, which constitutes the initial step of a more empirical-based research, is to start from the debate about the changeable nature of the higher education sector and to explore in particular the role that ideas have played in the higher education policy making from the Eighties till present-day in two countries which apparently seem to be very similar, United Kingdom and New Zealand. The focus will be particularly on the concept and the practice of change. This is because the twenty years that constitute the focus of this analysis have been a period of great and profound reforms in the higher education sector and of redefinition of values and objectives to be pursued. The two cases that will be analysed have been chosen because they represent an example from which other countries got inspired. Furthermore, another important goal of this research is to demonstrate that contexts that could seem to be very similar, as the ones of the United Kingdom and New Zealand, could reveal much more differences than initially believed, after a dense analysis of the policy processes.

This paper is divided into six parts: a theoretical framework; a general hypothesis and the description of the methodology chosen; the description of the two case-studies; the hypothesis derived from the case-studies analysis; a conclusion in which I will make clear the first impressions I have about the object of the research; an initial bibliography.

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The theoretical framework

Certainly the concept of knowledge is the basis of higher education.

Its disciplines, academic and professional, constitute the categories that shape the ways of teaching and researching, that institutions like universities, polytechnics and colleges are organised to offer. In the context of modern higher education, for sure, knowledge has to be interpreted in a way as wider as possible. It embraces not only the what, the content and methods of particular subjects, but also the why, the wide intellectual and cultural questions that they provoke, and the how, i.e. their practical application to the solution of personal, social and economic problems. So, in this sense, knowledge is not an exclusive property of a deeply intellectual civilization, and of those institutions strongly related to the preservation, transmission and development of a civilization. It is not something about ivory towers. It now permeates our mass society and our post-industrial culture. Knowledge is for sure a crucial resource in the development of political democracy, in the battle for social justice and for individual progress. So it is not something sacred and confined. From this acknowledgement comes that not only universities are institutions of higher education. We have to keep in mind that many students today do not come from, and are not intended to be part of a cohesive elite. Many new subjects that are now taught were introduced in order to supply and dilute the old academic and professional standards. But imagining that a consequence of this process could be a detachment from the knowledge itself could be an error. Despite the opening experimented in the last decades by the higher education sector, knowledge, even if in the restricted sense of sophisticated information and special capacities, remains at the very basis of it. The ones who try to substitute a rational, linear and simplistic logic of problem solving to the complexity of the objectives of higher education do not convince at all. Certainly it is important to reflect about the connection that exists between higher education as an intellectual system and as a political one, between its private and public life. In the past it has been difficult to define this connection, being at the same time intense and transversal. In a general sense, the private life of higher education has become public. The expansion of sciences, outputs of research and number of students would not have taken place without the scientific revolution that in the Fifties began to transform Biology and Biochemistry. But the nature of this bond could be more complex than it appears at first. The growth experimented by social services and biomedical industry in the post-war period, due without any doubt to the new scientific findings, stimulated also the diffusion of these subjects within the higher education during the Sixties and the Seventies. Therefore the way and the causal sequence of this complicated
interrelation between intellectual origins and political outcomes is
difficult to describe. So it is difficult to draw the link between the
changes experimented in the basis of the human and social sciences
(their private life) and their position and prominence in the higher
education sector (their public life). Certainly the relation between
change of ideas and political change seems to be very strong. Of
course, in terms of public policy, this relation has ever been difficult
to establish. The great growth of the social sciences in the universities
during the post-war period could be perhaps attributed to the rapid
growth of the welfare state, as much as to the intellectual vitality of
fundamental disciplines like Sociology and Psychology. A similar
process of development could be observed in relation to the studies
of organization and management. The political success of these
disciplines, in fact, has to be attributed only in little part to the
ingenious findings within the economical or organisational theories.
On the contrary, the decreasing consideration of the social sciences is
not the result of a lack of academic creativity. Thus, as we can see,
the bonds between the public and the private life of higher education
have become really difficult to describe.
One example of the rubbing between the political and the intellectual
spheres in this sense is the controversy provoked by the attempts to
use more indicators of performance in the planning of the system.
Teaching and research are at the heart of the enterprise culture, many
proposed indicators are related to subjects that once were considered
to be private business of experts of the sector. The practice of
measuring how the institutions administer their fluxes of money is
generally accepted as a legitimate exercise. Also the need to compare
the percentages of the components of the staff and the students is
generally considered to be a legitimate practice. But the attempts to
develop quantitative measures of the academic performances are
considered as an activity to be done between pairs more than to be
measured by managers. Despite this, the performance indicators have
become more and more important.
Of course these indicators create many doubts. In fact there is a
question that is generally formulated whenever the different measures
have to be combined to produce a general evaluation of the
performance of a person, a department, or an institution. Which
importance do we give to the different measures? They have to
depend on the definition that we give of the measures themselves
and on the idea we have of them, which often reflects the dominant
idea of the period we live in. This is a demonstration of the
importance and the power of ideas. Political Science and Sociology traditionally emphasised the role of the individual interest in the policy processes of the capitalistic societies; less emphasis has been put on how ideas could influence deeply those processes. Only in recent times this aspect has been studied in depth. From this point of view it seems good to me to make a review of the major theorization in this sense. Campbell (2002) makes a review of the major theories in this path. He starts taking into consideration two groups of theories: the first focuses on the so-called cognitive paradigms, that are visions of the world of the policy makers that define the range of choices that they consider in the moment that they have to formulate different kinds of policies.

The second group of theories takes into consideration the normative frameworks. Following this theory normative ideas are assumptions on values, identities, and other socially shared expectations. From this point of view, policy makers usually operate following a logic of moral or social pertinence. The normative beliefs could be so strong to overwhelm the individual interests of the policy makers. In fact they influence in depth the way in which they perceive their interests and which policies and institutions they prefer.

Other studies use the cognitive paradigms and the normative frameworks not to explain the differences between the policies but to show the similarities between them. They explain that there has been the affirmation of a western political culture that made the national political institutions and the policy-making apparatus homogeneous. This literature can be put within the thread of the so-called world culture. In this sense Røvik (1996) describes how these ideas move fast and far, and shortly are internationally perceived as the best approach possible.

Anyway, other authors underline how important local and national characteristics play a role against uniformity. For example, Halpin and Troya (1995) state that the different countries seem to do similar things, but, if they are examined more in depth, they are not as similar as they seem at a first moment.

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Some researches try to explain how policy makers draw some public policies to be acceptable to the majority of people. From this point of view the political elite strategically create some structures and use them to legitimate their choices in front of the public. This is the so-called frames literature. 

Another extremely important thread is the one of the programmatic ideas. Following this point of view, policy change derives from new programmatic ideas. Often they are the dependent variables for political sociologists and political scientists.

All these paradigms seem to suffer of the lack of one element: the lack of the explanation of the causal mechanisms which are fundamental for the influence of the ideas on the policy-making. Several studies tried to give an answer to this question. A way to do this is to show the process by which some actors bring some ideas in the policy arena and then use them effectively. These actors are often academics and other intellectuals. Their preparation and prestige are very important to make their voice heard over the one of everyone else. In the same way think tanks and research institutes can have a great influence. From this point of view we can talk of epistemic communities at the international level. They are responsible of generating new ideas and to diffuse them within the national policy-makers as within other people in the international community. 

Kekk and Sikkink (1998) argued that these network are effectively important because their members are often responsible of generating the most important ideas that constitute the world culture, to which sociologists attribute isomorphic effects at the national level6.

Another hypothesis that has been considered to explain the influence of ideas on the policy processes is the one that underlines the weight and importance of institutions. They can determine which ideas can be put in the process and then can be adopted and implemented as policies. From this point of view, the diffusion of ideas is a much more complex and mediate process than what is generally thought. 

Surel (2000) in particular underlined the value of two variables that seem not to be sufficiently considered by the literature on ideas: the interest of the actors and the role of the institutions. If, for instance, we consider that one nation is a subsystem, and that is subject to a similar norm than the others, it could be effectively possible to isolate discrepancy within the diffusion of some social paradigms. The particular and different reception of the same paradigm in each nation allows us to identify and compare the operazionalization

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dynamics of these norms, partly related to specific structures of interests and institutional configurations in each national context. Surel himself gives us an example on this talking about the difference of meaning ascribed to the neo-liberal ideology during the period of its diffusion in France, United States and Germany. Instead Geva-May (2002) talks about public policy and policy-making itself like profoundly influenced by ways of life and cultural biases of their cultural context. Consequently the cultural factors should be considered within the analysis of the public policies. From this point of view the author talks about culture as the neglected variable within the context of this analysis.

Swedlow (2002), developing the cultural approach of Douglas and Wildavsky, identifies a differentiation of policies, depending on the social contexts in which we operate. From this point of view he makes a distinction in: hierarchic contexts, to which we can associate the concepts of order and property; egalitarian ones, to which we can associate the concepts of equality and liberty; individualistic ones, to which we can associate autonomy and personal space; fatalistic ones, to which we can associate fortune and hope to survive. It is very interesting Hall’s (1993) point of view too, which underlines how changes in the policy paradigm are decisive in the adoption of one or another possible policy solution. He applies this concept to the shift from the adoption of the keynesian paradigm to the monetarist one in the economic policy of United Kingdom. The author interprets the policy paradigm as an intellectual construction, strongly related to a policy subsystem that contains a series of ideas shared by the same policy actors. The interrelationship between these ideas permits to establish which are the objectives of the different policies because it determines which definition of the problems will be adopted. Furthermore the paradigm warrants the resolution of the problems and the fulfilment of the objectives. In fact it constitutes a universe of meanings as well as a set of institutional practices.

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composed of ideas, the policy paradigm has a double connotation: on the one hand it establishes the goals of a policy and the conceptual map that will be used to give meaning to reality; becoming in this way a source of inspiration that is essential for the identity of the policy actors (in this sense it has an affective nature and is strictly related to the beliefs and the visions of the world of the policy actors; from this point of view we can say that the affective nature of the policy paradigm is its policy core); on the other hand the cognitive part represents its flexible part, which has the main function to protect the deep core. The affective nature of the deep core of the policy paradigm is the reason why it is so difficult to change it. At the same time, the cognitive connotation explains how it is possible to modify it in several directions.  

Those theories, that seem to recognise a strong role of the ideas in the policy-making processes, have been used in the higher education policy analysis by several authors, that underline their value. Particularly Clark (1983) examines the importance of ideas and values for the formulation of the higher education policies and their change. He believes that these policies could change depending on the values which one wants to be his guide: social justice, competence, liberty, loyalty, conflict. Van Vught (1989) underlines how two different perspectives of decision making have been confronting with each other in the context of adoption of different higher education policy solutions. The first perspective, very explored and prevalent in the western countries until the mid Eighties, is the rationalist one. It provides that some requirements have ever to be present: a general set of values expressed like objectives; the exam of all the possible options to obtain those objectives; the prediction of all the consequences that can follow the adoption of each alternative solution; the comparison between all the consequences related to an accepted set of objectives; the selection of the alternatives which correspond the more possible to the objectives. Several authors have argued that trying to arrive to a rational choice in this way is not realistic. This is more true in particular contexts, like universities, in which there aren’t well-defined roles and hierarchies and that seem often to look like organised anarchies.

The second perspective, which starts to emerge from the mid-Eighties, is the cybernetic one. It constitutes a serious critique to the rational theory and offers a series of alternative assumptions for the individual and collective decision-making process. The focal point of that theory is the reduction of variety maintaining a certain number of critic variables. This reduction of variety can realise especially paying attention to the concept of feedback. It constitutes a process of monitoring the performances of some principal variables. From this concept we can deduce a series of operations that an actor can do when he meets a precise set of conditions\textsuperscript{15}.

In the second half of the Eighties, in the majority of the western countries, the principal objective of the higher education policy has become creativity and excellence, both in the scientific production and in the formation of professionals able to support the innovations derived from this process. The strategy of increasing the autonomy of higher education institutions is completely coherent with this trend\textsuperscript{16}.

The strong emphasis on the growing attention that higher education policies seem to give to the concepts of efficiency and excellence is described also by Keith (1998), who talks about the concept of responsive university, like an institution focalised principally on its role towards its users and its society not only on itself. The more this aspect is underlined, the more the university will attract the resources needed to continue its activity. Making partnerships with the society or the government the new model of university will find its implementation in working for a more specialised society, in improving the quality of its research and in giving a concrete help to the development of enterprises\textsuperscript{17}.

Capano (1998) distinguishes three great macro-periods in the higher education policies of the western countries, related both to one predominant idea and to the application of particular policies. The first period is the one that goes from the end of the Second World War to the 1970; it is characterised essentially by an epochal passage from the elite-based structure of the university to its mass-based characterization. During this period the economic


\textsuperscript{15} Van Vught, F. (Ed.) (1989), op. cit., p. 29.
development led to the enlargement of the possibility of the people to have an education. This evolution brings to very important consequences from a practical point of view: the increased number of student brings unavoidably to an increased recruitment of teachers. Also the students themselves obtain new power. They obtain the right to have some representatives within the councils of the faculties.

The second period is the one of the Seventies, and is characterised by a general end of the illusion regarding the goal of widening the cultural base and of equality in the fruition of the university. These are the years of the start of the structural reforms of the university system itself. There is an attempt to rationalise the existing resources, especially to face up to the great increase of enrolled students who often did not have an adequate curriculum to enter in the working context. We have to add to this the explosion of the problem of public expenditure in several countries.

The third period is the Eighties and Nineties, which are characterised by an increasing trend towards competition, market and autonomy. Generally it has been thought that the state should only have the duty to define the macro-objectives that then could be developed and outlined at their best by each university institution. We have to add another important fact: in the different national contexts the development guidelines outlined before followed very different ways. Concerning this, talking about the reforms towards autonomy realised in different western countries, Bottani (2002) reminds that they have been adopted with great speed and determination in New Zealand; a strong idea of realism has guided their realisation in England and Sweden; a very strong idealistic vision has been the peculiarity of this process in Italy; the resistance to this process has been very strong in the United States; in the Swiss Cantone of Geneve there was only a little progress in the discourses about autonomy.

The theoretical references and the mentioned researches will be the path that I will walk as a starting point of my research.

2 Principal Hypothesis and Methodology

My principal research hypothesis can be put within this theoretical framework. It wants to demonstrate if and in which way the changes in the dominant ideas of the British and New Zealander contexts influenced policy making processes that brought as output the higher education reforms implemented from the Eighties to present-day. The countries chosen seem to me really interesting because they often generated reform processes then imitated by many other countries and because it is ever stimulating to confront analogies and differences within the anglosaxon world. To make the confrontation between these two countries more profitable, in the research I will analyse the singular cases before and then in comparative perspective. In this paper there will be only a presentation of each single case-study and, in the conclusion, an analysis of the first impressions that I had about the cases.

From a methodological point of view, the lens I will use to analyse the object of my study will be a constructivist one. That will happen because it seems to me the most suitable approach for studying ideas and their influence. I will do a dense analysis of the cases and then I will compare them. The independent variable will be constituted by the dominant ideas in the different periods considered; particularly in the period that goes until the Eighties and in the period from the Eighties until now. The dependent variable will be fundamentally two: the policy making processes from the Eighties to present-day within the British and New Zealander contexts; the different policy outputs, consequences of the processes themselves, in the same period. The intervening variables will be the individual interests that could have influenced the policy processes, and the institutions, with their structural and functional differentiation.

The peculiarity of the object of my analysis is also at the basis of the research methodology I want to use. In fact I find more appropriated to analyse the ideas and their changes with qualitative techniques, because using and searching for numeric indicators within this object of analysis would be extremely difficult and risky. So I will use different techniques, some of which related to the Content Analysis.

Both for the United Kingdom and New Zealand:

1. Dense analysis of the processes of reform in the two contexts taken into consideration;
2. In-depth interviews to personalities belonging to the political and cultural elites within the years taken into consideration;
3. Analysis of the dominant themes on the mass-media in the periods taken into consideration. In this perspective I will take into exam newspaper articles and indexes of the Times Higher Education Supplement for England, and of New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies for New Zealand.
from 1980 till present-day. The usage of this kind of techniques will make me draw some conclusions, the most exhaustive possible, regarding the initial hypothesis and it will help me to underline the analogies and differences that research finds in the different countries of the anglosaxon world taken into consideration. This will happen within a separated chapter dedicated to the comparison of the results.

3 The Case-studies

3.1 England

The English scholastic system, launched in 1944, has been for several years, until the first Eighties, a system characterized by a very decentralized model of management within which the schools - and so the teachers - had a wide autonomy and freedom to teach. The system has progressive showed its limits in several aspects and generated a lot of doubts about its real efficiency and effectiveness. This general trend within the school and particularly within the universities, characterised by an inclusive and egalitarian philosophy, ended with Margaret Thatcher, who found, in 1979, a scholastic system criticized from the most of the public opinion, characterized by a huge number of abandonments, by the dissatisfaction of the entrepreneurs for the preparation level of the young scholars, by the poor results in the international trials. So, starting from the Eighties, the trend taken by the higher education policies in the England (not only) has been directed to implement some extremely selective strategies, adopted mainly to satisfy the needs of the economic system. Another demand that became an absolute priority in this period has been the one of reduction of public expenditure, by then arrived to unsustainable levels after the Seventies. Concerning this, in the United Kingdom, the conservative government launched some radical changes in the higher education sector, first of all cutting many funding before given by the central state and then creating a structure that would be responsible for the planning and the guide of the polytechnic sector (non university). Then, the Thatcher’s reform of 1988 has been the most profound ever realised in Europe, especially for the strong attack against the progressive

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Talking about the higher education policy, this law, united with a similar of 1992, fulfilled the conservative principles, through a series of measures, like: the abolition of the principle for the university professors to be immovable; the introduction of a series of loans for the poorest students; the abolition of the distinction between universities and polytechnics.

The funds came from an organization which included no more university professors, but people from the world of enterprise and economy. Otherwise there were new criteria to give funds: the number of enrolled students and the scientific behaviour of the university institutions. The goal of the government has been turned to increase the number of students enrolled without weighing on the students' finances and to improve the quality of the research. It is important to remember that at the end of the Seventies the number of students enrolled to the English higher education was relatively smaller than the one of the other European countries. So, starting from this fact, the government thought that it could become a damage for the national economic development and it ascribed the causes especially to the excess of autonomy given to each university.

However, none of the changes made by the central state, had direct consequences on the curricula, but several changes in this sense have been introduced by the universities themselves, which stimulated a higher number of undergraduate courses, distant learning, and interdisciplinary curricula. On the other hand the changes in the modalities of teaching and of learning and in the content of the courses, have been modest, gradual and non-systematic. The incremental nature of the changes in the curricula has been largely due to the decentralization. As for the postgraduate courses, the PhD programmes has not changed in a remarkable way during the last years. Instead the Mphil courses showed a rapid growth in the paths of economy, history and physics. They have become more and more market-oriented. Apropos of curricula a very important and meaningful datum is the fact that among all the subjects, the ones that received more the recent changes were the humanistic more than the scientific ones. Exactly, following the research of Becher and Barnett (1999), there have been four major factors determining the curricular change in the United Kingdom:

1. The type of institution (polytechnics more open to change than the universities; new universities more than the old
ones).

2. Scientific or humanistic orientation (the humanistic more than the scientific one).

3. Purity of the subject (spurious more than pure subjects).

4. Market position (courses with less students more than the particularly popular ones)\textsuperscript{24}.

The labour majority of Blair did not come off from the policies implemented before. In the 2003 the Blair government risked to become a minority in parliament for an important bill. It provided for allowing the universities to raise the enrolment taxes for the students until 3,000 pound (before the maximum was 1,125 pound). Blair had to face the internal labour opposition towards a bill that was accused by 150 labour deputies, which signed an adverse motion, of not being put into the electoral programme and to have the capacity to create a discrimination between students based on money.

In point of fact the bill provided for the poorest students different ways to get loans at very low interests, to be given back once put in the working arena. A system borrowed by the Australian law. The Blair’s measure was justified by the necessity to modernize the British universities, conforming them to the transformation of the formative demands of the people. In fact, with the mass access to universities the relation between quantity and quality have entered a crisis. The English universities did not compete anymore with the American ones in the path of research. This was due to the lack of adequate funds.

So, the more profound changes in the trend of British higher education reform during the last twenty years were made to bring more and more higher education institution near to the world of work and to concentrate on the prudent and thrifty usage of public resources by them, with the goal to avoid the excess in public expenditure that had been at the basis of the crisis of the system before the Eighties\textsuperscript{25}. From this point of view different trends that underline the concept of quality have emerged in the new context. These are turned to assure that some academic standards could be maintained and could also be as comparable as possible; to assure the quality of teaching and learning; to respect academic autonomy,


diversity and liberty, while strengthening the mechanisms of control on the expenditure of each university institution; to avoid to put useless barriers between different institutions\textsuperscript{26}.

3.2 New Zealand

New Zealand has a population of three millions people and an half and the sector of tertiary education is composed by seven universities, twenty five polytechnics, four colleges of education, three wananga (Maori language institutions). We have to add to these structures some little private institutes. During the last two decades, particularly during the last ten years, both the labour and national party governments carried out policies of privatization and market-oriented competition for the assignation of the funds. The emphasis on the concept of quality in the higher education and in the academic production found confirmation in several legislative bills.

Contrarily to many other countries, New Zealand adopted a very wide definition of tertiary education. It includes all the levels of education traditionally defined post-secondary education within the international literature.

The main characteristic of the New Zealander tertiary education policy is its tendency to change\textsuperscript{27}. We can look at the story of the reforms relative to the tertiary education sector in New Zealand from the mid-Eighties to present-day, dividing this period of great reformism into four sub-periods:

1. Before the Eighties: an elite system characterized by low rates of participation.
2. From the mid-Eighties to the end of the Eighties: trend towards the enlargement of participation united with a major competition.
3. The Nineties: a further step towards a competitive market-oriented model.
4. From 2000 to present-day: continuing emphasis towards a competitive market-oriented model, while there is the emergence of a trend to a major central control to support


economy and social development of the nation. Before the Eighties the central state used to give funds to all the students; this happened particularly because of the low rate of enrolled students. The funding of universities happened in a very different way respect to the one of the polytechnics and of the colleges of education: in fact they received funds by the University Grant Committee which negotiated the amounting of funds themselves with the government. Instead the polytechnics and the colleges of education received funds directly from the Department of Education.

In the second period mentioned (mid-Eighties till the end of the Eighties), the labour government built a working group on the theme Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) with an advisory role to the government on the reform of tertiary education. It was chaired by Professor Gary Hawke of the Victoria University and the group included some representatives of govern agencies which treated the subject. Four months later this group elaborated a series of important purposes for the New Zealander tertiary education. The Hawke Report, that was the name of the document, proposed meaningful changes especially in the funding sector. Its principal goal was to increase the participation and to improve the teaching method in the context of the tertiary education. The purposed changes marked a shift of paradigm that is still at the basis of the approach towards the tertiary education. The Hawke Report recommended:

1. More emphasis on the private funds, even maintaining the government as the major financing body of the sector.
2. Increase of the taxes for the students and authorization for each institute to set the contribution level.
3. Funds to the institutes related to the number of full-time students.
4. Dealing with each tertiary education structure (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) in the same way.
5. Supporting a loaning programme for the students.
6. Helping the poorest students paying their taxes more than using the loans.

The labour government wanted also to apply a series of measures to increase the flow of students belonging to sub-represented ethnic groups. It wanted also to give a lot of subsidies to the poorest students. The most of these policies was never implemented; the subsidy for the poorest students was implemented but only for a

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short period of time, i.e. until 1991, when the National Party announced its cancellation.

From 1990 to 1999 the National Party government, elected in the October 1990, continued to follow the direction outlined in the Hawke Report, moving with greater decision and radicalism towards competition and market. There was an overemphasizing of the role of the private for the funding of the activities of tertiary education and of the idea of giving more autonomy to each structure. The policy decisions taken during this period seemed to be a real radical change of direction in respect to the classical welfare state.

The most important measures were:

1. The abolition of some university taxes decided by the labour government.
2. Policies to stimulate the tertiary education institutions to encourage the entry of people under twenty two years old.
3. Measures so that the twenty five years old students maintained by their family could give assistance to the neediest.
4. A new loaning system to be returned with the taxes.

The set-up decided in the context of these legislative bills concerning education at the beginning of the Nineties has been subject to a series of important revisions in the following years. The revision of the tertiary education started exactly after the general elections of 1996. The government drafted a Green Paper (September 1997), where the basic principles of the reform to be discussed by university authorities to give a feedback were enunciated. After this consultation on the Green Paper the government produced a White Paper (November 1998) with some ideas and policy solutions that soon would have become principal in the next years. In particular in the White Paper there is the confirmation of the idea that the tertiary education is ever more necessary in everyone's life to obtain the economic and social objectives and to improve the participation of the underrepresented groups. There is also a confirmation of the policies of closeness to the students' needs and of incentive to the differentiation of the programmatic offers. Those factors indicate that the purpose of the government is to fund all the students wherever they study, if the adopted programme respect the quality standards. Otherwise the White Paper indicates some areas where there was the need to make the system more efficient. The purposed measures comprehend: a higher and better information for the students, for the suppliers of services and for the government; a higher responsibility and governance for the institutions; the centrality of the concepts of quality and control and some changes in the way
of funding the area of research.
Professor Hawke indicated that the policies implemented during the Eighties and the Nineties overvalued the ability of the managers who worked in the sector of the tertiary education to think in terms of optimal balance or of economic interest and to put to use not only zero-sum game dynamics.

The period which goes from 2000 to present-day have as an important preamble the victory of the Labour Party in the elections of November 1999, which lead to a change in the attitude and in the policy of government towards tertiary education. These are some of the initiatives taken by the Labour government:

1. The Commission on Education and Science carried out an analysis on the student taxes, the loans and all the funding system of the tertiary education.

2. The government set up the TEAC (Tertiary Education Advisory Committee) on April 2001. It had the task to give advice to the government on the strategic directions in the sector of the tertiary education.

3. There was the introduction of a review of the adults’ and communitarian education.

The TEAC was a very ambitious institution and produced four reports in a year and a half. It did not spend much time on the definition of the problem and accepted the point of view that the system was too competitive and not in line with the social and economic needs of New Zealand.

Some very important recommendations made by TEAC were:

1. Create a document to outline the strategic directions for the tertiary education.

2. Developing a new method to give funds, maintaining the teaching and research activities separated.

3. Creating research centres of excellence and a fund related to performances.

Of fact TEAC was interested more in the structure and in the funding of the system than in the access and equity problems of the students.

From 2002 onwards this is the situation: the policies implemented by Labour government maintained many competitive aspects of the previous approach towards the tertiary education, but they are now put in a more centralized and regulated framework. The government put in practice several advice received by TEAC, even if not exactly in the way they were proposed; among these the elaboration of a strategy for the sector, an ad hoc commission for the tertiary education, some changes in the modalities of funding and the creation of a fund.
related to the performances, named Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF). Another important objective was quality, trying out the universities through some tests. All is supervised by an authority with the task to do so, the New Zealand Qualification Authority (NZQA). Any university institution, from this point of view, have to demonstrate to follow the rules about balance and to put through the programmes that it had as objectives. As for the university-like institutions, like polytechnics and similar, after a period of management separated from universities, now they are governed by the same authority. The same principle of quality guides the distribution of funds for the research. They, that initially were given on the basis of the number of students enrolled in an institute, now are related also to the qualitative standards of the researches themselves.

The actual action of the New Zealander government is turned to continue in this direction, particularly making the tertiary education contribute actively to the welfare of the country, pointing to the formation of professionalism needed by the economic system. Of course, there are some doubts and critiques towards the dominant trend in the reforms described. They especially emerged during the last years. In particular, Guy and Hellen Scott (2005) affirmed that the growing disengagement of the state and consequently of its funding from the sector of the tertiary education led to two negative consequences: a diffuse increase of the taxes for the students and the abandonment of the studies by many of them for the incapacity to subsist. Instead Dalziel (2005) accuses the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), because in his opinion it rewards the behaviour and the quality of performance only of each professor and not of the university institutions as a public service. This critique is amplified by David, Craig and Robertson, who underline that some kinds of research, particularly the ones related to the local communities, of certain public interest, will be destined to die with the actual system of incentives. For this reason they underline how the concept of public accountability have to be related more to the responsibility towards the citizens and their demands, not only to

academic world\textsuperscript{33}. Finally, Brian Opie underlines that, analysing the purposed strategies for the next five years the impression is that the sector of tertiary education in New Zealand is going in the wrong direction. This because it is too competitive and similar to the American system, when the country would need a softer approach that could look more to the diffusion of the benefits\textsuperscript{34}.

4
The hypothesis derived from the case-studies analysis

From a first analysis of the above-mentioned case-studies it is possible to generate a series of concrete hypothesis. In particular, for England:
1. It can be assumable that Margaret Thatcher performed the role of policy entrepreneur during the period of reforms taken into consideration;
2. It can be assumable that the conservative think tanks had a very important role in introducing ideas related to efficiency and excellence in the policy agenda;
3. It can be assumable that the trend of the process of reform of the British higher education has remained unchanged both with the conservative governments of Thatcher and Major and with the labour ones of Blair;
4. It can be assumable that humanitarian faculties received more than the scientific ones the innovations of the process of reform of the higher education system;

For New Zealand:
1. It can be assumable that the principal actors of the reform process from the Eighties until present day, particularly in the decade that goes from the end of the Eighties to the end of the Nineties, were the authorities in charge of testing the level of quality in the tertiary education system (NZQUA, AAA,CUAP), more than the central government;
2. It can be assumable that the idea of efficiency stood out setting aside the set up of politics. Labour and National parties carried out the same policies towards quality, even if under quite different perspectives; however the process

3. The affirmation of the idea of efficiency made it possible to give more funds to some faculties, particularly the technical ones. The period during which I want to test my hypothesis is especially the one that goes from 2000 to present day.

5 Conclusion: differences within a common trend

Actually the two situations taken into consideration are both passed through a very reformist phase starting from the Eighties; in both the contexts the weight of ideas that constituted the basis of policies until the Eighties and of the ones from that period on has been so prominent that in both cases the policies before the reform were inspired (mainly) to the egalitarianism and the expansion of the student population, while the following ones followed criteria more related to the ideas of efficiency, quality and competitiveness. Surely we have to add to this basic tendency, that would seem to be coherent with the general hypothesis here proposed, some differences between the two higher education systems, where the New Zealander one proceeded with decision towards an ever higher managerial inspiration, particularly from 1996 to present day, consistently with the reforms within the entire public sector. In the United Kingdom there was a confrontation with a tradition of progressive education and with the idea of the expansion of the education itself, that until the Eighties were prominent ideas, like in the majority of other European countries. From this point of view the action of the Thatcher’s government created the conditions for a radical change that revolutionized the objectives and values of the entire education and especially of the higher education sector. The ideas of efficiency, excellence and control over performances became decisive. The labour governments of Blair continued on the way traced by the conservative reforms. This seems to be an important point and we can find it also in New Zealand, where the same trend in the reform processes was followed both by progressive and conservative governments.

So the impression is that ideas marked deeply the two reform processes, but this impression has to be verified through the research itself. Anyway, there are several factors that have to be valued; in which way the different political elites perceived, appropriated and put into the policies to be implemented these ideas; how the different socioeconomic contexts influenced the process; what was the weight
of the different institutional set ups; if the individual interests played a role and, if it is the case, of which relevance. These are the questions to which I will try to answer with my research.

6

Initial bibliography

The texts will be cited in the following order: monographs; articles published on reviews; collective volumes; term papers; articles published only on Internet.


Capano G. (1999), *Replacing the Policy Paradigm: Higher Educational Reform in*
Research Paper


