

Is a Global Organizational Field of Higher Education Emerging? Management Education as an Early Example

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Introduction

Are universities becoming increasingly similar around the world? Recent developments in higher education lead us to believe that this is indeed the case. These developments include the expansion of higher education in many regions and the deregulation of national educational systems resulting in the appearance of new transnational regulations. Political efforts are now underway in Europe to create a uniform internal market for higher education. These efforts were formalized in 1999 when 29 European ministers of education signed the Bologna Declaration and committed themselves to reforming their higher education systems in similar ways. We have also witnessed the growing availability of global comparative ratings and international information regarding “best practices.” Recently, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University world ranking of 500 universities, first published in 2003, attracted significant attention within universities and among university administrators. While not the first ranking of universities, the publication of this encompassing and global ranking caused quite a “stir” in the field. Suddenly universities all over the world were interested in rankings – how they are structured, what they do – and in how to make their universities rise in them. While an increase in the ranking and assessment of universities is only one recent development concerning higher education, such mechanisms are important in creating the appearance of a “global” and unified educational market. With this development, universities appear to have become active organizational reformers: they are developing new and ad-

vanced governance forms, performance measurements, and marketing techniques and activities. Are all these developments causing universities to become more alike, or are they making them more diverse in terms of structure and content?

A particular and early example of the above developments is found in higher management education. In this chapter, we review and analyze the recent emergence of the organizational and regulatory field of management education. We ask whether these developments have led to homogenization, and then discuss to what extent we can expect higher education around the world to follow the same general path.

Efforts to create a coherent global field of management education and of business schools have been underway for quite some time, and these efforts are linked to the rapid expansion of management education programs and schools around the world. In particular, master of business administration (MBA) programs have flourished around the globe and become an institutionalized and integrated part of higher education systems in many countries. The expanding field of management education encompasses a diverse mix of schools and programs, such as full-time, part-time, and distance-learning MBA programs and executive management training programs. Despite this diversity, all programs have increasingly come to be regarded as comparable and belonging to the same category.

Global ideas as to what management education is and should be have evolved concurrently with this expansion, largely because of the related expansion and increase in monitoring and assessment activities and the increasing dissemination of information about programs and schools. Particularly salient was the development of international accreditation procedures and international rankings in the late 1990s. In 1997, the European accreditation program EQUIS was launched in an attempt to strengthen and standardize European management education. Nineteen European business schools volunteered to undergo the accreditation process as pioneers. Today, the system has expanded and includes 92 schools from 28 countries around the world. Furthermore, in 1998, the *Financial Times* launched a European ranking of MBA programs; this was made international in scope in 1999, becoming the first widely recognized international ranking of business schools and programs in various parts of the world. Rankings, accreditations, and other forms of comparisons are based on assumptions of uniformity and comparability across nations and educational systems, assumptions that create the perception of a global management education field.

With the expansion of both schools and programs, and of systems to compare and assess them, the ideals and practices of management edu-

cation have come to be widely discussed – though not always applied – in similar ways around the globe. Even though attempts to start programs and schools may resemble each other, and this may initially suggest homogenization, closer examination reveals differences between both the attempts and their results. Indeed, as is true of globalization processes more generally, the flow of ideas around the world may just as easily lead to increased variation and difference as to greater uniformity (Christensen/Læg Reid 2001; Sahlin-Andersson/Engwall 2002). In fact, in-depth studies of the development of management education in Europe show that this proliferation has been followed by clear differentiation, with a central elite – a group of programs attracting increasing attention and prestige – and a group of followers that appear to be more peripheral and less influential (Hedmo 2004, Wedlin 2006). The answer to the question of whether there is increasing homogeneity or diversity is thus not so simple. The dissemination of ideas and practices, the development of global models and standards, and the expansion of the transnational regulation of practices can lead to both variety and homogeneity.

The dynamics of current higher education development can also be regarded as contributing to the generation of a global university organizational field, a development that can entail both homogenization and differentiation. To discuss the current dynamics in play, we will investigate the field of management education as a particular and early example of such a development, and even for some, an exemplar to follow. We will especially focus on the proliferation of management education in Europe and the development of accreditation and ranking systems in this context. Together and intertwined, these developments have led to the formation and dissemination of global models of management education, and thus to the formation of an organizational field of management education.

This chapter is based on four empirical studies. The first traces the development of management education in Europe and elsewhere, building on secondary sources such as guidebooks and directories of business schools and MBA programs. This material was compared with and complemented by the findings of previous studies (Locke 1989, Engwall 1992, Daniel 1998, Engwall/Zamagni 1998, Moon 2002). The second study analyzes the development of media coverage of management education, with a special focus on the development of European media rankings. The third study tracks the emergence of a European system of management education accreditation, while the fourth presents the results of a survey of business school deans, asking for their reactions to the emergent accreditation and ranking systems. A combined analysis of these four studies reveals the interplay between processes of imitation

and re-regulation, which together generate both a global model and an organizational field. Before analyzing the dynamics of these intertwined developments and their consequences, we will briefly elaborate on the conceptual framework used to analyze the two processes of imitation and re-regulation and their impact on management education development.

Regulatory Impacts on Organizational Field Development

An organizational field consists, according to the now classic definition of DiMaggio and Powell (1983:148), of “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products.” DiMaggio and Powell and later others (e.g., DiMaggio 1987, Leblebici et al. 1991, Greenwood et al. 2002, Lawrence et al. 2002) have shown that once such a field is established, strong mechanisms drive its constituent organizations to become increasingly similar. With the formation of organizational fields relationships also tend to become more structured, with some organizations becoming more central and others more peripheral. Thus, in terms of status and power the formation of fields appears to intensify differences between organizations. Though fields should primarily be understood as analytical constructs (DiMaggio 1983), they also clearly have an objective existence “out there,” as they do shape both the identities and activities of the involved actors.

Together with defining organizational field, DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) article contributed a typology of mechanisms that both account for and bring about increasing isomorphism, namely, coercive, mimetic, and normative mechanisms. A closer look at the interconnectedness of these mechanisms reveals the impact of regulation on field formation and development. DiMaggio (1983) showed that state expansion had a profound impact on the field of arts. Through issuing binding rules and administrative decisions, the acceptance of which was a condition for the approval of certain grants, the state exerted coercive pressure on organizations in the field. Through such regulatory measures, the state also exerted more indirect influence on the other two isomorphic processes – mimetic and normative processes. The most enduring impact of state support, DiMaggio argued, may not be the direct effects on individual organizations, but rather indirect influences on the overall structure of organizational fields (DiMaggio 1983: 148). Those arts organizations

that gained state support came to be perceived as more successful by their peer organizations and hence tended to be imitated (DiMaggio 1983). Thus fields form as a result of regulations and state support, and imitation in turn appears to be stimulated by the formation of fields. We will return to the issue of imitation below, but first will consider the changed role of states and transformed modes of regulation, which have clear impacts on how fields are formed.

The papers by DiMaggio (1983) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) were written during a period of state expansion and increasingly complex and rationalized state intervention. The situation with regards to higher education started to change in the late 1980s (Hedmo 2004), concurrently with the transformation of regulatory states (Moran 2002, Djelic/Sahlin-Andersson 2006). These changes in the role of states as regulators do not imply, however, a retreat of regulation; rather, new groups of regulators and regulations have emerged and grown in importance (Knill/Lemkuhl 2002). Many such regulatory organizations are of an international or transnational character (Boli/Thomas 1999). The actual formulation of rules is not necessarily initiated by governments, but rather is often initiated by non-state actors having strong ideas about what is appropriate behavior in society. They struggle to protect their particular collective interests and to establish the ‘rules of the game’ by persuading, bargaining, and negotiating with other actors, including states (Risse-Kappen 1995, Keck/Sikkink 1998; Knill/Lehmkuhl 2002). Several studies have shown how non-state actors have rapidly acquired greater legitimacy and influence in the creation of soft rules such as policies, standards, recommendations, and guidelines (Loya/Boli 1999, Brunsson/Jacobsson 2000, Knill 2001, Hedmo 2004, Mörtz 2004 Djelic/Sahlin-Andersson 2006). Not all the activities – exchanging information, monitoring, and standardizing – initiated by this broad set of actors are intended to serve regulatory functions. However, as new elements such as scrutinizing, evaluating, and standardizing emerge and build upon each other, they become increasingly and intensively intertwined so that they together constitute an organized ‘regulatory knot.’ Even if no single actor controls the regulations issued or even seeks to govern by issuing regulations, together these monitoring, rule-setting, and assessment activities form a field that regulates.

Imitation and Field Formation

Imitation follows and intensifies when fields are formed. We suggest, however, that imitation is more fundamental than most studies of organ-

izational fields have assumed, not only developing in organizational fields but actually being central to their very formation (Hedmo *et al.* 2006). Imitation is thus the basic means whereby fields develop and become recognized as a particular area of institutional life. Imitation is a basic social mechanism tying people together (Tarde 1890/1962, Czarniawska/Sevón 2005), as actors tend to imitate those they wish to resemble (Sevón 1996). As certain models, actors, or practices become widely known, these shape the wishes, ideals, and desires of others and thus provide the impetus for further imitation. Thus, perceived identity shapes imitation: one imitates those to whom one relates and with whom one identifies. The opposite is also true, however, in that imitation shapes identity. Imitation constructs new relationships and references and opens up new avenues for comparison and for creating new identities (e.g., Sahlin-Andersson 1996, Sahlin-Andersson/Sevón 2003).

Imitation is an active and performative process (Sevón 1996, Sahlin-Andersson/Sevón 2003). The results of imitation may thus turn out to be quite different from the imitated model, a phenomenon variedly referred to as recombination (Westney 1987), accretion (Rottenburg 1989), hybridization (Boyer *et al.* 1998, Djelic 1998), translation (Czarniawska/Sevón 1996), and editing (Sahlin-Andersson 1996). These different terms emphasize the importance of understanding how ideas are translated, shaped, and changed through imitation processes. What is being transferred from one setting to another is not an idea or practice as such, but rather accounts and materializations of a certain idea or practice. Such accounts undergo translation as they spread, resulting in local versions of models and ideas in different local contexts (Czarniawska/Joerges 1996). Even in a globalized world, differences between continents, countries, sectors, and industries have an impact on how widely disseminated knowledge is translated and applied in a given local context. Models bearing the same label may acquire different local “flavors” as they are adopted and developed in different settings.

Even though many studies have pointed out that imitators combine ideas from various sources in various ways depending on the situation (Westney 1987, Rottenburg 1996), imitation still seems to be understood primarily in terms of individual relationships, in which single actors imitate one or several models. Our studies suggest, however, that greater emphasis should be placed on the complex webs of imitation processes where several imitation and translation processes may be interconnected, and where one process of imitation may lead to another. Furthermore, imitation does not always proceed from those imitated to those imitating. Many persons and organizations act as carriers and/or mediators (Sahlin-Andersson/Engwall 2002). If such carriers were only passive

mediators “passing on” ideas and models to others, there would be little point in paying attention to them. John Meyer (1994, 1996) has used the term “others” (inspired by Mead 1934) to describe such persons and organizations with their specific features and activities, thereby distinguishing them from “actors,” which are assumed to pursue their own interests and policies and are held responsible for their actions. Even though “others” may present themselves as neutral mediators, they engage in activities that are crucial for the circulation and translation of ideas; they not only report on and transmit ideas and experiences, but also formulate and reformulate, and thus frame and reshape them in the process. Again we find that while imitation may at first glance appear to result in organizations becoming increasingly similar, imitation can also result in variation and differentiation.

We now turn to our empirical example – the formation of the global organizational field of management education – in which we will particularly highlight the intertwined dynamics of imitation, (soft) regulation, and field formation.

The Expansion of Management Education

Business schools and management education programs began in the United States and Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the United States, the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce was established under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania in 1881, and before the end of the nineteenth century, the University of California and the University of Chicago had taken similar routes. In 1900, the Amos Tuck School at Dartmouth, the first exclusively graduate business school in the United States, was created under the auspices of Dartmouth College, and in 1902 the highly esteemed Harvard Business Graduate School (HBS) was established at Harvard University (Hugstad 1983).

Until the mid nineteenth century, management education in Europe was mainly supplied by technical or commercial schools outside the bounds of national higher education systems. For instance, in 1881 the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales was established as the first management school in Paris, an initiative followed by the establishment of other prestigious *écoles de commerce* across France. In the same decade, German management schools or *Handelshochschulen* were set up in national commercial centers such as Aachen, Cologne, Leipzig, and Berlin. In 1909, the first business school was established in Sweden with the

founding of the Stockholm School of Economics (for a complete list of such schools, see Engwall/Zamagni 1998: 5, 8).

If the turn of the previous century saw the birth of management education, the 1950s and 1960s saw its boom both in Europe and in the United States. The Second World War was a milestone in the history of management education, as it paved the way for the rapid expansion of institutions in Europe, providing courses in management on the basis of American ideals. From the 1980s onwards, in the wake of mounting international activity by business schools, management programs again enjoyed a remarkable expansion. Trends toward globalization, market deregulation, and rapid economic growth put pressure on managers around the world to adopt a more internationally oriented management style. This need was met by the rapid expansion of international MBA programs, and business schools started to cooperate across national boundaries, offering joint programs and degrees. The effect of all this activity was an expanding international market for management education, in which MBA programs formed a central part.

Imitating an “American Model”

Even though historical studies of the development of management education in Europe inform us that early European institutions such as “schools of economics” and German *Handelshochschulen* constituted important prototypes when establishing new schools in countries such as Sweden, the U.S. model is the one most widely imitated in Europe (Engwall/Zamagni 1998, Gourvish/Tiratsoo 1998). Although the American higher education system is highly diverse, talk about *an* American model is very common. Such talk generally refers to the model of a university-based graduate business school offering MBA programs (Locke 1989, Engwall/Zamagni 1998). Model business schools include those of Chicago, Harvard, Northwestern, Stanford, and UCLA (Engwall/Zamagni 1998:10). The expansion of management education in Europe since the 1950s thus exemplifies one particular track of imitation, namely, a shared reference to a U.S. model of management education and the traceable imitation of U.S. business schools and programs such as the Harvard Business School and the MBA program.

This European imitation of a perceived American model has occurred through several avenues. One such avenue is personal travel: individual scholars from various European educational institutions have visited U.S. schools and brought back ideas concerning how to develop and expand their teaching and educational programs. This might not have occurred as part of any general or explicit plan, but may simply

represent an effect of the increasing mobility of researchers. A second and more strategic and planned avenue has been the articulated desire of European schools to become more like their American counterparts, and to develop their own status and the reputations of their scholars and students. Such strategies of European schools were often supported by various American and European “missionaries and managers” (Gourvish/Tiratsoo 1998) who strongly advocated the value of adopting American management ideas and activities in restoring European economies after the Second World War (Gemelli 1998, Gourvish/Tiratsoo 1998). For example, the American Marshall Plan, the European Productivity Agency (EPA), and the Ford Foundation supplied a number of European governments with money and ideals to support “best practices.” They also promoted the founding of management training centers and business schools in Europe, so as to secure the future provision of American-inspired management education in the region (Locke 1996, Kipping/Nioche 1998). Accordingly, “experiments” with American-style schools and programs flourished in Europe from the 1950s onwards (Engwall 1992, Crainer/Dearlove 1999). INSEAD in France (1958), IMEDE in Switzerland (1957), IESE and ESADE in Spain (1958), and the London and Manchester Business Schools in the U.K. (1965) are examples of European imitations of U.S. business schools. In contrast to their American models, most of them were located outside the auspices of national university systems. However, the university sector in Europe was not unaffected by the current developments.

A salient feature of the imitation of American management education in Europe was the proliferation of MBA programs. The MBA has its roots in the United States, where it has been perceived as the “jewel” of graduate management studies (Kipping/Nioche 1998). In the United States, the first MBA program was offered by the Tuck School of Dartmouth College in 1900 (Daniel 1998, Crainer/Dearlove 1999). More than fifty years later, the first MBA program appeared in Europe with the founding of the French business school, INSEAD, in 1958. In 1964, IESE set up a Spanish version of the Harvard MBA program (Puig 2003). Moving forward to 2000, it was reported that about 2,200 MBA programs were being offered by 1,150 universities, business schools, and management colleges in 126 countries around the world (www.mbainfo.com 2003-10-13). These programs provide clear examples of the imitation of the U.S. management education model as well as obvious attempts to spread this model to other parts of the world. In these cases, explicit reference was made to the model imitated – through using the same or similar names or through formal agreements – in hopes of sharing the reputation of the model.

Translation and Diversity

The expansion of management education in Europe, however, is similar in pattern to other processes of Americanization (Djelic 1998) and imitation (Westney 1987, Sahlin-Andersson 1996, Sevón 1996). The U.S. models were only partly imitated: when imitated they were subject to translation and adjustment to fit into the new local circumstances. For example, with the exception of the two British business schools (Manchester and London), many of the early European business schools were, unlike their American prototypes, established outside universities and national university systems as independent schools of business.

There was also open antagonism to the American model in Europe. As time passed, European schools started to take action to protect their own identities against the encroachment of American models (Locke 1996). Increased efforts were made to emancipate Europe from the American heritage by, among other things, formulating a collective European doctrine of management education (Locke 1996, Hubert et al. 1998). From the 1980s onwards, more active steps were also taken politically in the EU to make European systems of higher education more competitive and part of a European “knowledge society” (see e.g., Kogan et al. 2000). The European Commission initiated a number of exchange programs and efforts to achieve transparency in the higher education systems of member states, and to create a strong competitive advantage vis-à-vis the Americans and the Japanese (Rosenthal 1991, Ryba 2000). After the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the EU authorities articulated more emphatically the relevance of developing a European dimension based on common European values. This dimension was to inform higher education systems (including management studies), but without infringing on the sovereignty of the member states when it came to determining the content and organization of their individual educational systems.

The proliferation of the MBA program in Europe provides a significant example of a U.S. model that has been widely imitated, and has assumed quite different forms in the process. Even though MBA programs in Europe all came to adopt the same label, considerable variation arose as the model proliferated, since the MBAs were embedded in different local contexts. The variation of MBA programs in Europe arose partly from national differences, partly from variation in the models imitated, and partly from the timing and procedures of the initiation of the programs (Sahlin-Andersson/Hedmo 2000, Mazza et al. 2005). However, all these programs share the “MBA” label and are, at some level at least,

regarded as comparable and as belonging to the same management education category.

To sum up, management education in Europe might at first sight seem to be a homogeneous field sharing common models and standards rooted in the American context. However, when we look more closely, we observe that management education programs, including MBAs, are offered in a variety of settings and institutions, including both independent business schools and university departments operating both within and outside the framework of national educational systems. Because of adaptation to regional and national contexts and the only partial imitation of the “U.S. model,” European business schools and MBA programs differ greatly, both from their American counterparts and from each other. Furthermore, since educational issues have traditionally been national concerns, historically, there has been no common system for regulating or comparing educational offerings (Hedmo 2004). However, in the late 1990s, two distinct systems for assessing and comparing management education at the international or transnational level were constructed and launched in Europe. These systems were provided by observers and mediators of management ideas and practices, actors that played important roles in both imitation processes and in making the management education field more global.

Mediating and Regulating Organizations

In addition to schools and individual scholars, a number of observers and mediators of ideas and experiences, such as experts, international organizations, consultants, and publicists, have been active in the imitation processes and in contributing to the formation of an organizational field of management education. We will single out the assessing and evaluating organizations, such as accreditation bodies and the media, as they have produced information and comparative ratings, reported on and proposed initiatives for change, and formed arenas for the exchange of experience, ideas, and ideals. In addition, and as will be further outlined below, these organizations have formulated and implemented soft regulatory measures, such as standards, guidelines, and criteria for assessing and comparing management education programs. In so doing, these organizations have also become important parts of the transnational regulatory set-up of management education.

Accreditation

In the 1990s, when the number and variety of business schools and competing management education programs was increasing dramatically in Europe, the issue of accreditation was raised in the European Foundation for Management Development (efmd), a professional organization in the field of European management education. The idea of developing a European accreditation system for European business schools initially met with an unenthusiastic reception from most efmd members. The appropriateness of developing a uniform system for the quality evaluation of business schools within the fragmented area of management education in Europe was questioned. However, attitudes changed when it became known that the main U.S. accreditation organization for management education, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International), was planning to start accrediting European business schools on the basis of U.S. standards. Efmd members then realized the importance of reacting and responding to the AACSB International strategy, to “defend and promote European values” by constructing a consistent European system (interview, efmd board member, 2000-11-08). Efmd also had organizational motives for launching this program: it was, for example, seen as a way for the organization to boost its financial profile and reputation in the management education market in Europe and elsewhere. More generally, the efmd strategy was also related to the expansion of the European Single Market, and political arguments for creating a common higher education area. Accordingly, in 1997 efmd launched the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) to be a European equivalent to the U.S. accreditation system (efmd 1998). To deal with resistance and diversity in Europe, EQUIS was formed and prepared in cooperation with European national accreditation organizations within an independent unit called European Quality Link (EQUAL). Even though the AACSB International accreditation system was severely criticized by most efmd members, the European accreditation scheme was formed partly in imitation of this U.S. model, and partly in imitation of the various schemes and standards of EQUAL members – albeit, national translations of the U.S. model. To accommodate the diversity of European management education organizations and programs, and to “guarantee” the system’s survival in Europe, EQUIS was equipped with a “flexible approach” allowing for the continuous development and refinement of the accreditation scheme, so that it would fit the fragmented European context. Also incorporated in EQUIS was the “European dimension” of management education, mainly being understood as an emphasis on efforts to internationalize schools and on

connections with the business world (interviews, EQUAL project manager, 1999-10-05; EQUIS director, 1999-06-16).

After an initial period of doubt on the part of European management education providers, EQUIS accreditation spread widely in Europe and elsewhere. The system adopted an inclusive approach, accepting a wider range of educational organizations. By May 2006, 92 management education institutions had been accredited after undergoing the EQUIS quality assessment process, and many more schools had announced interest in undergoing the assessment. This new accreditation process prompted schools to look at and imitate each other; as well, schools came to imitate the model captured by the published accreditation criteria – at least during the self-evaluation and self-presentation undertaken during the accreditation process.

Rankings

Arguments and reactions similar to those that arose in response to the initiation of accreditation can be identified as we trace the development of media rankings of business schools and MBA programs. The development of these rankings is linked to the general expansion of management education, and to a specific increase in media interest in it. Moon (2002) shows that media coverage of management education increased significantly, in both the popular and academic business press, in the early 1990s. Of particular media interest were the MBA programs that had spread and became institutionalized around the world. As more publications increased their coverage of management education issues, competition between them led to the publication of more, and more comprehensive, rankings of business schools and MBA programs. After the *Financial Times* international ranking was launched in 1999, *Business Week* followed suit with an international ranking in 2000, the *Wall Street Journal* in 2001, and the *Economist* in 2002.

While rankings were not new in management education, these *media-initiated* rankings launched a new, international perspective on business schools and MBA programs. The decision by the *Financial Times* to produce an international ranking list was largely in reaction to the proliferation of ranking lists of American institutions in U.S. media, predominantly in *Business Week* and in *US News & World Report* (which had produced rankings of U.S. schools since the mid 1980s), and to increasing press coverage of business schools in the United States. European business schools feared the dominance of U.S. schools would become too great, as ranking lists of American business schools grew in prominence outside the United States. They lobbied the *Financial Times*

to initiate an international ranking list that featured schools outside North America. These European rankings thus arose in reaction to a perceived U.S. dominance, and have provided a way for European schools to be compared with these U.S. schools and to be perceived as belonging to the same “top league.” Initially, the *Financial Times* intended to “bridge” differences between the American and European MBA markets, but has since increased its rankings to cover business schools globally.

International rankings have redefined institutional positions in the field and now cover European schools to a greater extent than before. In this way, they have mediated and “edited” business school models and ranking criteria so that they better fit the characteristics of European schools. Creating “global” ranking lists and international comparisons of business schools and programs proved to be difficult, however, and finding criteria that encompass differences between national contexts and systems, and within a large and diverse set of management education programs, was a lengthy process. After a failed attempt in 1998, the *Financial Times* consulted business schools in the United States and in Europe to develop their approach and criteria. Despite the fact that quite a few ranking lists have come to include more European schools and more “European” criteria, the opinion seems to persist that rankings in general promote and continue to perpetuate an “American model” of management education:

“It is questionable whether rankings can be based on criteria uniformly applied to all schools irrespective of their strategy and philosophy. The current rankings rely on a very specific (North American) model of what and how business schools should be set up to do [sic]. This model itself is very questionable.” (Survey comment, European business school dean)

An interesting feature of the development of both accreditation and ranking in Europe is that these systems have developed partly in reaction to existing evaluation systems, and also in reaction to a U.S. model of management education and to the perceived dominance of this model even in Europe. There is an endeavor to enhance the specifically European perspectives inherent in both the accreditation and ranking procedures. If we look at how these systems are set up, however, it is clear that they are largely influenced by U.S. models and have themselves been formed through processes of imitation and editing. Through making international comparisons between programs and schools, these assessments have been fundamental in forming the identities and roles of

business schools and other management education providers in the emerging global field of management education, as we will explore next.

An Emergent Global Field

The development of ranking and accreditation systems by actors such as professional associations and the media is not simply a response to the proliferation of management education programs and schools in Europe and elsewhere, and thus to the global expansion of management education. The development of ranking and accreditation has also helped drive and shape this very expansion and the imitation processes operative between and among schools and individuals. Ranking and accreditation systems do so by providing assessments, comparisons, and evaluations, and by constructing a global model that providers and observers of management education can follow. Such a model has also been constructed through processes of imitation: the accreditation and ranking bodies imitated other ranking and accreditation systems, themselves formulated in cooperation with prestigious business schools. The importance of international rankings and accreditation thus lies primarily in their ability not simply to define a particular group, but also to acknowledge conformity to an abstract model of what a business school is and what proper management education should entail. Such a model serves both as a template against which individual schools are compared and assessed, and as a prototype for schools and management education providers to imitate.

A central component of this template and prototype is the MBA program. An MBA program is considered a core feature of a business school, and is believed to be necessary if an institution is to be a “true” business school and a member of the “top league.” This is enhanced by international ranking lists, which focus mainly on full-time MBA and sometimes also on executive MBA programs, and is supported by the accreditation procedures, which use business school model assumptions in making their evaluations. The strength of the model and the central role of the MBA partly explain why the number of MBA programs on offer is still increasing. For example, Copenhagen Business School and Stockholm School of Economics started full-time MBA programs in the early 2000s, as strategic initiatives to strengthen their international profiles and to be considered “full-fledged business schools” eligible to participate in the rankings. Rankings and accreditation thus contribute to the formation and dissemination of a global business school model.

Rankings and accreditation have also themselves become important features of this model. To be considered part of the “top league” and to adhere to the model, it is important for business schools to have the

quality label and certificate of accreditation, and to be highly rated in the published rankings. Results from our survey of European business school deans indicate that business schools consider international accreditation and rankings to be the most important sources of reputation and status, even more important than, for example, national quality labels, alliances, or participation in professional networks (Wedlin 2006). Staying outside the rankings is not considered an option, at least not “if you want to run a major MBA school in the international market” (director of a European business school). The growing importance of ranking and accreditation systems for reputation and status in the field has led to the continued expansion of MBA programs, as noted above; it has also led to increasing interest in and attention to how the business school is presented to the public, for example, in the media. Along with the pressure to submit information, the desire has grown within the schools themselves to structure the information issued to the media more carefully, and to strive to increase press coverage of their schools and programs. Thus, external relations functions, such as PR departments, media offices, and press officers, have recently been established in almost all top business schools. Business schools’ PR efforts and attempts to attract media attention suggest that they are actively participating in constructing and disseminating a model of what proper and “good” business schools should be like, and how they should present their work; in so doing, they are also helping to structure the global business school model.

As is true of most actors, be they individuals or organizations, providers of management education strive to be well regarded – they strive for recognition, respect, and reputation. This is nothing new. What is new, however, is the wide audience that is now aware of such reputations and the large group of schools that is now being observed and compared by the same or overlapping audiences. Accreditation and ranking systems have prompted schools to devote greater energy to how they present themselves. Moreover, such self-presentations are shaped in relation to the accreditation and ranking templates. Thus the ranking and accreditation systems themselves structure the emerging field in terms of who is in and who is out, who is central and who is peripheral, and what counts as good management education. In this way, by framing and driving imitation they are active mediators of imitation; in other words, they are central to forming and developing a global field of management education.

A Global Field of Management Education

Our analysis has served to reveal the dynamics of the formation of a global field of management education. We have pointed out intertwined and mutually reinforcing processes of imitation and regulation, processes through which a global field – and market – of management education have formed. This field is clearly structured around a global model and a set of central actors. In tracing the spread of management education we noted that several schools and programs developed into prototypes to be imitated. Despite this, expansion has led to considerable variation. Hence, if we only look at interactions among schools, the dominance of the more prestigious programs is not so evident. When we add the development of monitoring and regulating measures to the picture, the circulation of ideas, ideals, and prestige displays a more complex pattern, but one in which the dominance of the leading schools appears to be more profound. Regulations have been formed on the basis of criteria that were largely adopted from the most prestigious schools. In addition, representatives of these schools appear as central actors in a number of regulating bodies and activities, and their participation was crucial for the initiation of the new regulatory systems in Europe. Hence, even though the European management education field may at first glance not appear to be hierarchical, but rather gives the impression of being quite dispersed and decentralized, closer examination reveals a highly centralized and stratified structure wherein a few schools appear not only to be regarded as models to be imitated, but also tend to become templates for shaping regulations and assessments.

Management Education as a Forerunner?

After our detailed analysis of the emergence of a European and global organizational field of management education it is time to return to the question posed in the introduction to this chapter: Can we expect higher education in general to follow the same development path worldwide? The history of higher education is of course quite different from that of management education. Universities include some of the oldest organizations in existence, and in many parts of the world they have remained amazingly robust and retained many local and national particularities, despite having been embedded in global and international networks all along. We can thus expect universities in general to be more robust and resistant to transnational processes than the specific management education institutions discussed above. On the other hand, we now see many

of the same transnational dynamics in play in universities in general as are found in the specific emergent field of management education. We have witnessed many phenomena: massive expansion in the number and size of higher education institutions, increased internationalization characterized by the escalating mobility of students and teachers across national boundaries, increased co-operation between academic departments and programs, the appearance of new forms of regulation, and efforts (including accreditation and ranking systems) to compare and standardize higher education between countries. These developments appear to be ushering in a global university model that serves both as a prototype to be imitated and a template used in assessing and monitoring. It remains to be seen to what extent this model will become of such importance that it will result in identity-shaping processes around the world. Recent developments, including the Bologna process, university rankings, intensified efforts to compare and coordinate universities around the world, and the many local reform and reorganization efforts that have ensued, clearly indicate that a global organizational field – and market – of higher education is in the making. We can expect that with the emergence of such a field universities will become increasingly similar in their appearance, but also clearly differentiated in terms of status and power.

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