



# Social change, institutional pressures and knowledge creation: A bibliometric analysis



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## ABSTRACT

Contemporary academic environment can be characterized by an overwhelming trend toward enhancing research productivity and knowledge creation. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of radical social change and subsequent institutional pressures on internationally relevant knowledge creation. The setting examined is business and economics science in Eastern Europe. Using a case study of Slovenian business schools and deploying a bibliometric analysis we find that research productivity is increasing significantly. We note however dilemmas pertaining to the content and quality of knowledge created. Further, we find that international research cooperation has positive quality effects. From a theoretical perspective, we argue that radical social change was not mirrored by such change in normative institutions, whereas recent changes in regulatory institutions seem to have a substantial positive effect on research performance.

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## 1. Introduction

Contemporary academic environment can be characterized by an overwhelming trend toward enhancing research productivity and knowledge creation (Colyvas, Crow, & Gelijns, 2002; Silver, 2009) best represented by the “publish or perish” adage (Gendron, 2008; Long, Crawford, White, & Davis, 2009). In the EU and USA, more than 90% of scientific discovery is disseminated to wider audience in the form of scientific publications (Abramo, D’Angelo, & Pugini, 2008; Cohen, Nelson, & Walsh, 2002; Munoz-Leivaa, Sanchez-Fernandez, Liebana-Cabanillasa, & López-Herrerab, 2012). There are three main reasons for such trend. First, due to increasing social pressures for accountability of academia, research productivity represents a method of legitimization of the academic profession (Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby, & Sahlin, 2008; Modell, 2003; Suchman, 1995). Second, research productivity is a mean of reducing information asymmetry between supply (universities) and demand (students) in the knowledge market by serving as a proxy for organization’s overall quality (Bonner, Hesford, & Van der Stede, 2006; Chan, Chen, & Cheng, 2007a; Velasco, 2012). Third, research productivity is also a vehicle for reducing information asymmetry in the funding market by providing a yardstick for allocation of (public) research funds (Abramo & D’Angelo, 2009; Bonaccorsi, Daraio, & Simar, 2006; Geuna & Martin 2003; Reidpath & Allotey, 2010).

While the “publish or perish” convention has a long tradition in Anglo-Saxon countries (Geuna & Martin, 2003; Van Raan, 2005), it is becoming increasingly embraced in other countries (Knowledge, networks and nations, 2011). Nevertheless, despite this surge, researchers from other countries still find it very difficult to secure publications in top tier journals traditionally dominated by Anglo-Saxon researchers (Chan et al., 2007a; Raffournier & Schatt, 2010). This suggests either low quality of non-Anglo-Saxon research (Bonner et al., 2006), editorial bias (Moizer, 2009) or different motivational forces of those authors (Trkman & Desouza, 2012).

Changes in research practices are particularly profound in Eastern Europe. After the radical social change incorporating economic and political upheaval in the 1990s once isolated researchers are now augmenting their presence in international journals (Knowledge, networks, and nations, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to examine the transition of research practices in business and economics science following radical social change associated with the transition of Eastern European countries into capitalism and democracy. The context of business and economics science in Eastern Europe is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, genuine academic freedom in this discipline was only instituted with the introduction of democracy. Second, research transition in this discipline was radical also in terms of research topics (Garrod & Turk, 1994). From a theoretical perspective, the paper draws on institutional theory and attempts to provide linkage between organizational contexts, organizational actions, and human behavior (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Puky, 2009; Oliver, 1991). The method used is a longitudinal bibliometric anal-

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ysis of business and economics research output in Slovenia. Slovenia was chosen because Slovenian researchers in business science are at the forefront of Eastern European researchers in terms of adopting internationally acknowledged research practices as illustrated in the recent analyses of accounting research (Cadez, Slapnicar, & Valentincic, 2011; Chan et al., 2007a).

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, contemporary trends in research are described on a global and Eastern European level. Next, the institutional framework and research questions are presented. In section four, research method is outlined, followed by data analysis. The paper ends with a discussion of the findings and conclusion.

## 2. Contemporary research changes in academia

### 2.1. Global upsurge of bibliometric paradigm

The global expansion of publish or perish convention (Abramo, D'Angelo, & Pugini, 2008) coincides with the global upsurge of the bibliometric paradigm. The increasing importance of school quality rankings and external funding (Parker, 2012) provides an increasing challenge for tangible evaluation of research achievements of organizations and individuals. Many argue that bibliometric methods are an objective and universal means of research evaluation since the number of publications and citations are measurable and internationally comparable categories (Abramo & D'Angelo, 2009; Deng & Lin, 2012).

Despite their embedded shortcomings (for a review see Abramo & D'Angelo, 2009; Bonaccorsi et al., 2006; Juznic et al., 2010; Van Raan, 2005) bibliometric methods are being increasingly deployed in international initiatives to rank the best universities, schools, and researchers (Brown, 1996; Chan, Chen, & Lung, 2007b; Chan et al., 2007a; Conroy, Dusansky, Drukker, & Kildegaard, 1995; Trieschmann, Dennis, Northcraft, & Niemi, 2000; Van Raan, 2005; Williams, Jenkins, & Ingraham, 2006). One of the most influential rankings is the so-called Shanghai Ranking of the world's 500 best universities prepared annually by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Their criteria for evaluation is exclusively bibliometric, namely: Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals for researchers and alumni (30% weight), number of university's highly cited researchers (20%), papers published in Nature and Science journals, (20%), papers published in SCI and SSCI indexed journals (20%), and institution's per capita academic performance with regard to all indicators listed above (10%). A number of ranking initiatives exist also for business schools. Jiao Tong University is preparing a special ranking of the best business schools that is also based exclusively on bibliometric indicators. Probably even more influential business school rankings are provided by established business newspapers (e.g. Financial Times) and magazines (e.g. Business Week, Forbes) (Bonner et al., 2006).

Further, bibliometric methods are being also increasingly deployed for the purposes of research funds allocation (Abramo & D'Angelo, 2009; Juznic et al., 2010). In some countries, a significant part of funds is allocated to universities on the basis of research performance as opposed to a traditional way of allocating funds based on student numbers (Geuna & Martin, 2003; Obadic & Aristovnik, 2011; Parker, 2012).

### 2.2. Research change in Eastern Europe

In the times of socialism, business research in Eastern Europe could have been characterized as isolated and unconventional by international research standards. The main property of research output was low appearance in international scientific journals. The reasons for absence were many and mutually reinforcing: little

faculty exchange between the East and the West, deficient fluency in English language, academic inbreeding, unorthodox promotion criteria in the academia, etc. Perhaps the most important reason was pertinent particularly to the business and economics science. A prerequisite for quality and internationally relevant research is critical interpretation of observed phenomenon. In socialism however the limit between critical interpretation of the socialist economic system and political dissent was very thin thus deterring researchers from such interpretations. In such circumstances, the main focus of "research" was publishing textbooks for students in national languages and papers in national professional magazines or at best in regional business journals with limited or no international recognition (Cadez et al., 2011; Capkun & Pervan, 2010).

An important cataclysm concerns the abandonment of socialism and its replacement with market economy system. Central planning was replaced by market mechanism, social and government ownership was replaced by private ownership, and production motive was replaced by profit motive (Garrod & Turk, 1994). Another important turmoil was political. This includes the introduction of democracy, institution of basic human rights (such as free travel to the West), and the disintegration of former federal entities (i.e. Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union, Yugoslavia) into a large number of new independent states (Aristovnik, 2012).

The radical social change in Eastern Europe was reflected also in the academia. The main contemporary policy in academia is increasing adoption of Western research standards by putting progressively more weight on research and its international relevance. This trend is manifest through increasing number of Eastern European scholars attending major international academic conferences and growing number of papers published in international journals (Knowledge, nations, and nations, 2011). Yet, despite the same general trend, different countries are at a divergent stage of this development. Croatia and Slovenia, two republics of the former state Yugoslavia, provide a palpable example. While Croatian business researchers still publish predominantly in national business journals and are only starting to secure publications in international outlets (Capkun & Pervan, 2010), Slovenian researchers already secure publications even in the most prestigious international journals in the field (Cadez et al., 2011).

Very divergent levels of progress are also evident at the level of business schools. The most unwavering business schools in Eastern Europe are the Faculty of Economics at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia (despite the name this is de facto a business school) and the Kozminski University in Poland. As a part of their commitment to join world's top business schools these are the only institutions in Eastern Europe that have acquired two most prestigious business education accreditations in the world, i.e. EQUIS and AACSB (FELU's annual report, 2012). Other business schools may have similar aspirations however are not yet at this stage of development.

### 2.3. The Slovenian context

Slovenian business schools started implementing international research standards soon after gaining independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. In the first stage, universities started promoting and funding established research practices from the West, such as paper presentations at international conferences, short and long term international exchanges of academics, and foremost, publications in reputable international outlets (Cadez et al., 2011). Gradually, carrot was replaced by a stick. At present promotion criteria at all universities explicitly require publications in international scientific journals and long term visits of foreign research institutions in order to secure promotions (FELU's Annual Report, 2012).

Alongside growing focus on research Slovenian universities also developed highly quantified models of research evaluation. The

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