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.

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-Cabanillas, & Lopez-Herrera, 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-
ysis of business and economics research output in Slovenia. Slove-
nia 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 illus-
trated in the recent analyses of accounting research (Cadez, Slapni-
car, & Valentinic, 2011; Chan et al., 2007a).

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, contempo-
rary 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 out-
lined, 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 increas-
ing challenge for tangible evaluation of research achievements of
organizations and individuals. Many argue that bibliometric meth-
ods 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,

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; Tri-
eschmann, 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 Univer-
sity. 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%), pa-
ers published in SCI and SSCI indexed journals (20%), and institu-
tion’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 (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 busi-
ness researchers still publish predominantly in national business
journals and are only starting to secure publications in interna-
tional outlets (Capkun & Pervan, 2010), Slovenian researchers al-
ready 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 aspi-
rations however are not yet at this stage of development.

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 how-
ever the limit between critical interpretation of the socialist eco-

nomic 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 maga-
rines 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 social-
ism and its replacement with market economy system. Central
planning was replaced by market mechanism, social and govern-
ment ownership was replaced by private ownership, and produc-
tion motive was replaced by profit motive (Garrod & Turk, 1994).
Another important turmoil was political. This includes the intro-
duction 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 pro-
gressively more weight on research and its international relevance.
This trend is manifest through increasing number of Eastern Euro-
pean scholars attending major international academic conferences
and growing number of papers published in international journals
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2.3. The Slovenian context

Slovenian business schools started implementing international
research standards soon after gaining independence from Yugosla-
via in 1991. In the first stage, universities started promoting and
funding established research practices from the West, such as pa-
per 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
every university explicitly require publications in international sci-
entific 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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