

CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION REFORM AND NATIONAL REINVENTION IN POST-INDEPENDENCE UKRAINE: THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK, BRIDGING STATE AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: The concepts of internationalization, Europeanization, and globalization form the policy backdrop for this paper about contemporary education reform in Ukraine. The domain of education reform in any context presents a dilemmatic space fraught with tensions and paradoxes, deriving from multiple understandings of policy. Policies are snapshots of living experience with profound impact on individuals, communities, and societies. They delineate the action parameters of people, processes, and relationships by defining governance, risk, and compliance. They respond to new situations in history and so, are never settled entities. For these reasons, policies are embedded in daily lives of all citizens and this is why policies matter, especially true of education policies which attempt to weave the development and future of each individual together. Hence, a critical analysis of education policy, one which brings evidence and interpretation to bear on decision-making and social practice, can help to address a policy complex function in driving societal reforms. Specifically, this paper sets out to investigate the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Ukraine (2011), a policy technology which represents an undisguised neoliberal approach of the modern national curriculum system reform of Ukraine. This is the example of “globalized localism” through the intermediation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and Ukraine participation in the Bologna Process. The author concludes that, in Ukraine, the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of education policy reform embodied in the NQF are held together in intimate tension; a governance-innovation tension, the hope of the further institutional democratization that will permit the NQF mechanism to include more voices and to actualize more equitable social development opportunities.

Keywords: *national qualifications framework; education policy; Bologna process; EHEA; Post-Soviet; Ukraine*

INTRODUCTION

The interconnected and often confusing concepts of internationalization, Europeanization, and globalization (Keeling, 2004; Olssen, Codd, and O’Neill, 2004), which continue to be probed for their distinct meaningfulness (van der Wende, Lub, & Huisman, 2002) form the policy backdrop for this paper about contemporary education reform in Ukraine. The domain of education reform in any context presents a dilemmatic space (Fransson & Jan Grannäs, 2013; Honig, 1996; Berlak & Berlak, 1981) fraught with tensions and paradoxes (Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018), deriving from multiple understandings of policy. This is because the concept of policy is a noun in verbal garb; it is at

once a product and a process (Ball, 1994) although it is the dynamism of the process which interests scholars most and renders the concept more understandable in diverse policy settings (Keeling, 2004; Trowler, 2003). Far from simply being textual artifacts within a chain of command, policies are snapshots of living experience with profound impact on individuals, communities, and societies. They delineate the action parameters of people, processes, and relationships by defining governance, risk, and compliance (Shlager, 2007). They respond to new situations in history and so are never settled entities. For these reasons, policies are embedded in the daily lives of all citizens and this is why policies matter. This is especially true

of education policies which attempt to weave the development and future of each individual together. Therefore, a critical analysis of education policy, one which brings evidence and interpretation to bear on decision-making and social practice, can help to address a policy complex function in driving societal reforms (Fischer, 2003).

Specifically, this paper sets out to investigate the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Ukraine (2011), a policy technology (Ball, 2003) which represents an undisguised neoliberal approach to the reform of the modern national curriculum system of Ukraine, according to borrowed notions about good or better practices around qualifications and quality education:

The National Qualifications Framework is based on European and national standards and principles of quality assurance, takes labour market requirements, labour relations, promotion of national, and international recognition of qualifications obtained in Ukraine, establishing effective cooperation between education and the labour market into account (Adam, 2011).

As being considered, this policy is an example of “globalized localism” (de Sousa Santos in Dale & Robertson, 2004, p.149) through the intermediation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and Ukraine participation in the Bologna Process, while the country continues to struggle to redefine and recontextualize itself as an independent nation. The intent and composition of the NQF in Ukraine will be examined with several research questions in mind:

1. Whose policy agendas are represented by the Europeanization of higher education (HE) in Ukraine, and how has this been reflected in the formulation of the NQF?
2. How is the NQF, a reflection of the current role of the Ukrainian state in education delivery?
3. Does the NQF of Ukraine attempt to address socio-economic and educational inequalities and where does it fail to do so?
4. How does the Ukrainian experience compare with that of other post-Soviet countries in the region?

Analytical Approach

To accomplish this critical exploration, the

NQF of Ukraine is examined from the perspective of the Basic Layered Policy Model (Doherty, 2011; EdD, 2006), pictured below in Figure 1:

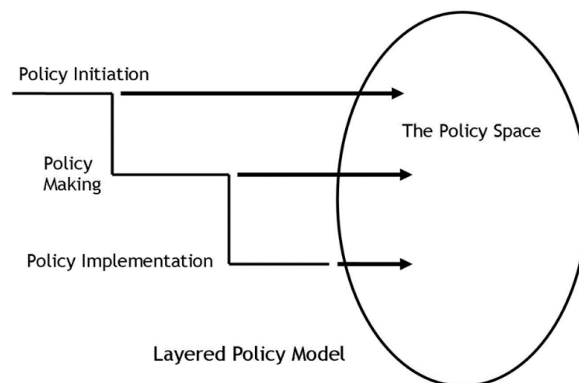


Figure 1. *Basic layered policy model*

The Basic Layered Policy Model offers a discernible view of the main components of the policy process. This paper concentrated on the initiation phase or “agenda-setting” (Hill, 2012), along with the policy making phase or “formulation” (Hill, 2012), as they have been shown to be inextricably linked (Hill, 1997). The layered model also serves as a broad foundation which can comfortably host other models whose specificities lend further insights into policy development across the initiation-formulation continuum. For example, the debated yet pragmatic stagiest policy cycle (Lasswell, 1956) embodies continuous connections between phases. Its value, including to the current research, lies in the fact that it acknowledges a problem that needs to be solved, the joint efforts at problem definition, and optimization of a resolution (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995). A more nuanced understanding has been proposed by Trowler (2003) in the encoding-decoding scheme, whereby different interpretations, interests, and intentions related to the policy problem are expressed and formulated into a policy statement by policy makers. All these models describe how change is affected by policy making, as in the case of qualification frameworks aimed at education reform.

In addition, important ideas that underpin the different factors precipitating and shaping policy, such as actor constellations and behaviour, triggering events, politics, economics, intended and

unintended outcomes, and other explanatory social phenomena (Oakley, Pesta, Ciftci and Blomberg, 2013; Knoepfel, Larrue, Varone, & Hill, 2007) arise from critical and policy systems theories. Bowe, Ball, & Gold (1992) spoke about the interactive and interrelated contexts of influence (power) and text production, social mediation of influence, embedding of intentions, the compromises, and accommodations in the making of policy. According to Considine (1994), policy systems theory helps to determine all the connections between phases (stages) and the different consequences of policy making over time. Moreover, the time factor (or process history) in policy making reveals how change (or reform) is constituted (Newton & van Deth, 2010). In fact, the historical aspect of policy making is a vital component of policy learning (Kushnir, 2019a; Levin, 2010; Zarkin, 2008), defined as "a tendency for some policy decisions to be made on the basis of knowledge and past experiences and knowledge-based judgments as to future expectations" (Bennett and Howlett, 1992, p.278). Additionally, most theoretical explanations of the policy process focus on identifying what initiates policy making (or change). For example, Kingdon (2003) placed emphasis on social crises or unpredictable events. Important for this paper, all these different accounts stress in common the essential relationship between policy initiation and the larger context of society in determining how policy opportunities are identified. Policy making, then, is responsive to and informed by various social, political, and economic events in which it takes place and actors to whom it is relevant. This is particularly applicable to the contemporary education policy in Ukraine related to qualifications. A brief look at the history of qualifications frameworks provides further insight.

The rise of qualifications frameworks

The concept of qualifications as it is understood in terms of outcomes, derives from research in occupational psychology in the United States and later, from related approaches to measurement of teacher competence (Young, 2003). By extension, the idea of a national qualifications framework is originated from the Scottish 16+ Action Plan, established in 1984, and the National Vocational Framework rolled out across the UK in 1986 (Young, 2003). Investigation suggests that, from

the start, most early qualifications frameworks were directly related to broader neoliberal public sector reform, focused on creating a market for education and training, so as to reduce the so-called 'monopoly' of public education institutions whose efficacy had been called into question (Allais, 2010). These include the National Vocational Qualifications in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales (Young, 2009), the National Qualifications Framework in New Zealand (Strathdee, 2009; Phillips, 1998), competence-based reform of vocational education in Australia (Wheelahan, 2010, 2009), and the South African National Qualifications Framework (Allais, 2007c; 2007b). The early qualifications frameworks have influenced the spread of counterparts and competency-based training reforms throughout the world (Allais, 2010). National qualifications frameworks reflect the internationalization (interrelation) and globalization (integration) of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) agenda (Hoff and Hickling-Hudson, 2011), and their importance is growing, particularly in the European Training Foundation's (ETF) partner countries (ISCED, 2011; Chakroun, 2010). As a result, today, over 150 countries have developed or adopted national, regional, or transnational qualifications frameworks (Cedefop, 2019).

The attraction of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks as education policy can be explained by neoclassical economics which still infuses the academic and policy fields (Allais, 2012). Early 'economics imperialism', particularly, the notion of 'human capital', and later, the emphasis on market deficiencies which is thought to be caused by knowledge inequalities, help to clarify the pervasiveness of this policy (Allais, 2012). To this end, qualifications frameworks have been seen as tools to improve the individual ability to make sensible choices about their investment in learning, and also the government ability to regulate and support markets in the delivery of education and training (Allais, 2010). As an expression of neoliberalism, qualifications frameworks represent the pursuit of equality of opportunity, while learning outcomes conveyed in qualification policy documents are considered criteria against which governments can measure the quality of education provided (Gilbert, 2013). In relation to Human Capital Theory, qualifications frameworks identify

learners as ‘knowledge workers’, prioritizing and stratifying preferred types of knowledge in a knowledge economy (KE), as stated by Allais (2012 in Luhovy, 2011, p.10), “The set of basic competencies overarching the qualification levels in the NQF of Ukraine are: [subject] knowledge, skills (application of knowledge), communication, autonomy and responsibility, [and] integration competence.”

The frame of reference and point of departure for developing NQF in Ukraine was the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF or EQF/LL) which had effect on April 23, 2008 by the recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (Hanf, 2015). The aim of these recommendations was to encourage member states of the EU to (Hanf, 2015): (1) Use the European Qualifications Framework as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of the different qualifications systems and to promote both lifelong learning and equal opportunities in the knowledge-based society, as well as the further integration of the European labour market while respecting the rich diversity of national education systems; (2) Relate their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework [by 2010], in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualification levels to the levels of the EQF, and, where appropriate, by developing national qualifications frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice.

As a translation device for “the transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications in Europe” (Pevec, Nomden, & Branco, 2016, p.5), the EQF is considered as the most advanced regional framework and has inspired NQF developments outside of EU member states (as in Ukraine), notably in the ‘European neighbourhood’ (Pevec, Nomden, and Branco, 2016). European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) or “neighborhood Europeanization” is germane to the current discussion, as it has been shown that when a neighboring (that is, non-member) country adopts, imports or embeds EU policy, the subsequent impact on domestic political systems is significant (Gawrich, Melnykovska, and Schweickert, 2010). For instance, the conference entitled “The European Qualifications Framework: Linking to a Globalised World” which took place in 2009 at the

European Parliament was attended by representatives of Ukrainian government and gave impetus to their efforts to develop their country’s qualifications tool to enhance and support mobility, as well as market Ukraine’s education and train internationally (Chakroun, 2010). This aligns with neoliberal ideology, whereby the main role of the state includes creating markets in previously non-market areas of society (Gilbert, 2013; Allais, 2012). The political economy motivation for modern education policy initiation and formulation in Ukraine becomes more comprehensible when it is contextualized by the country’s recent history.

NQF of Ukraine policy background: A confluence of contexts

Policy and reform decisions in the post-Soviet space have been rife with contradiction (Sakwa, 2012). The post-Soviet period has been marked by economic transformation or transition in former communist states located in parts of Europe (and Asia) in which new governments have aimed to create free-market oriented capitalist economies (Havrylyshyn, Meng, and Tupy, 2016). Craig and Cotterell (2007) described this process in terms of the messiness of change and continuity. In most countries of the former Eastern Bloc that followed the fall of communist-led governments in 1989, the communist parties split into two factions: a reformist social democratic party and a new less reform-oriented communist party. The newly created social democratic parties were generally larger and more powerful than the remaining communist parties (Orlowski, 2001). This shift in political dominance is well-illustrated by the case of Ukraine which has progressed to its seventh democratic president and through each of their distinct political cultures since declaring independence in 1991. Immediate past president, Petro Poroshenko, whose government was in power since the Euromaidan Revolution in 2014, increased the focus on external markets, particularly in the EU, where he had established his first business (Coyle, 2018). In line with this vision, his Minister of Education and Science since 2016, Liliya Hrynevych, one of the founders of the Ukrainian Centre for Educational Quality Assessment, concentrated on external independent assessment and qualifications parity at the national level (Verkhovna Rada, 2019). It is not

insignificant that the new Law on Education in Ukraine, which showcases the National Qualifications Framework, was ratified in September of 2017, just days after the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement came into full force (EEAS, 2017). Contemporary discourse which theorizes internationalized education policy shifts in Ukraine discusses these developments in terms of “the rationalities of ‘catching-up’ Europeanization” (Fimyar, 2010).

The earlier law of education in Ukraine was one of the longest-standing pieces of legislation, adopted in 1991 at the time of the country’s proclamation of independence and formal secession from the Soviet Union. Efforts were made to modernize the education system, including a national education program introduced in 1993 that focused on the decentralization of schooling, life-long learning, and education for personal development (Fimyar, 2010). However, these efforts remained largely unrealized (Shandra, 2017). The possibility of change appeared more likely immediately following the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution, when the Ministry of Education and Science invited the selected teachers, academics, experts, and students to help drafting a new law which aimed to account for contemporary realities (Shandra, 2017). The Conceptual Principles of the Law stated that “the new educational standards will be based on, but not limited to, the Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the European Council, on key competencies for lifelong learning...” (MESU, 2016, p.10).

Thereafter, the education sector in Ukraine began to experience sweeping and long-awaited reforms rooted in the conviction that they would contribute to internationally oriented transformation (Kahkonen, 2018). These included building a new, innovative National Qualifications System (NSC) with the assistance of the European Education Foundation (EFF) and diverse stakeholders, both internal and external (The World Bank, 2018). It is within this context that the National Qualifications Framework was elevated to the top of the state education agenda. Echoing the EQF, the NQF of Ukraine comprises eight (recently reduced from an original 11) fixed qualification levels from one (“Basic general knowledge, understanding of the simplest concepts about yourself and the environment, the basics of safe behavior”) to eight

(“Conceptual and methodological knowledge in the field or on the border of fields of knowledge or professional activity”) (Cabinet of Ministers, 2020). Although the NQF was to be phased in over three periods (2016-2018, 2019-2022, and 2023-2029), implementation has been uneven or delayed, particularly in the area of professional qualifications and their credentialization (Balaniuk, 2020; Nychkalo, 2017). In an attempt to address the situation regarding professional qualifications, the Ministry of Education and Science recently opened discussion with its twenty international partners about the level descriptors for professions in order to harmonize them with the international standard classification of professions ISCO-08 (Balaniuk, 2020).

It has been observed that nation-states form and develop their identities in relation to others (Verger and Novelli, 2012; Crofts Wiley, 2004). Hence, the contemporary emphasis on harmonized national qualifications frameworks can be considered as the successful emulation of practices elsewhere (Pang, 2005). The political decision in Ukraine to develop NQF is indicative of the effects of globalization on education policy, whereby states reorganize their priorities to make them more competitive (Dale, 1999). This became clear in 2008 when, at a conference of education ministers from six Bologna Process countries, as well as three observer countries, the next Ukrainian education minister revealed details of the supranational dynamics of influence (Verger and Novelli, 2012) involved in the development of contemporary Ukrainian education policy. She reported that in 2003, Ukraine officially declared its intention to reform its system of higher education according to European standards by submitting its membership application to the Bologna Process (Hrynevych, 2008). Then, in 2005, the country formalized its obligations to reform its system of HE according to the standards and recommendations of the EHEA by signing the Bologna Declaration (Hrynevych, 2008).

The case of EHEA sway in Ukraine serves as an example of what has been termed ‘governance without government’ (Rosenau, 1992). The EHEA originated in 1998 through the signing of a joint declaration in Paris (at the Sorbonne) by ministerial representatives of France, Germany, Italy, and the UK regarding a common frame of reference for the

European higher education system (EHEA, 1998). The Sorbonne Declaration was affirmed through the Bologna Declaration (1999), signed by 29 countries (now numbering 48), all of whom were interested in a more competitive European Higher Education Area (EHEA, 1999). The prevailing influence of the EHEA on Ukraine's education policy in general and the NQF in particular stems from an even longer and more storied political-economic history dating back to 1991, when the next, newly independent state expressed its interest in establishing relations with European Union and eventually seeking membership in there (MFA, 2012).

The objectives of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union which followed, proved to be conducive to the introduction of qualifications-related reforms, including convergence in tertiary education, as well as the implementation of national frameworks to advance transparency and recognition of skills based on the EU model (Deij, 2019a). This is evidenced by the terminology prefacing the NQF of Ukraine's qualification levels:

- Qualification: the official result of evaluation and recognition received when a competent authority has established that the person has attained competencies (training results) according to given standards.
- Qualification level: the structural unit of the National Qualifications Framework that is determined by a certain set of competencies that are typical for the qualifications of the given level.
- Competence: the ability of a person to perform a certain type of activity expressed through knowledge, understanding, skills, values, and other personal qualities.
- Learning outcomes: competencies (knowledge, understanding, skills, values, and other personal qualities) which are acquired and / or can be demonstrated after the completion of training.

The NQF references to align Ukraine's vocational training with current EU VET work through the European Qualifications Framework mentioned earlier, the European Credit system for VET (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF) (Deij, 2019a).

These alignments have helped to give the Ukrainian NQF its form, the initial level of professional (vocational) education through to qualification for Junior Bachelor of Arts, BA, MA, PhD (Cabinet of Ministers, 2020), as well as its central place in education reform.

The apparatus established to support the harmonization of local NQFs with that of the EHEA is the network of Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs), a pool of advisors assigned to the modernization of higher education in countries neighbouring the EU (SPHERE, 2015). These transnational advisors provide their services in contract with the Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission (SPHERE, 2015). Their role is to assist in developing policies and to encourage reforms within individual countries, as well as to train local stakeholders, compose reports and other official documents, and to advise institutions and policy makers (SPHERE, 2015). These international organization activities localized in Ukraine are a reflection of the way in which Europeanization is at once a response to and a conduit of globalization (Rosamond, 2003).

In addition, the EHEA acts through various sub-initiatives, such as the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe Program, which directly impacted the formation of the NQF of Ukraine (Pálvölgyi, 2017). The Tuning Program commenced in the year 2000 as a project to link the political objectives of the Bologna Process (and, at a later stage, the Lisbon Strategy) to the higher education sector (Pálvölgyi, 2017). Over time, Tuning has developed into a process to (re-) design, develop, implement, evaluate, and enhance quality in first, second, and third cycle (Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral) degree programs (Education and Culture DG, 2019). While the Tuning Process was established to encourage convergence and common understanding, rather than uniform degree programs, in reality, it has been a significant driver of uniformity which is presented as a key element of the successful reform of education in the countries participating in the Bologna Process (Education and Culture DG, 2019). In the case of Ukraine, the role of the state in coordinating this hegemonic uniformity represents a carryover from Soviet times but in a new iteration:

as manager of external and internal forces with similarly vested interests in education.

In Ukraine, The Ministry of Education and Science is the main policy body as both originator and main promoter of the NQF (Deij, 2019a). Its key partner is the Ministry of Social Policy, whose responsibility is to validate non-formal and informal learning, as well as occupational standards (Deij, 2019a). However, since the beginning of the NQF drive in the country, a range of macro and meso level stakeholders has been involved in its initiation and development: the Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministries of Economic Development and Trade, Regional Development, Finance, Culture, and Agriculture, as well as the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament), the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, the Academy of Sciences, the Institute of the Modernization of Education, the State Employment Service, the VET Research Institute, regional training and methodological centres, the Federation of Employers, the Institute for Professional Qualifications, the Chamber of Industry, professional associations, economic clusters, sector committees, leading business enterprises, the state railways, trade unions, universities, NGOs, and other training providers (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010). The representatives of these bodies, who form an Interdepartmental Working Group, participate regularly in meetings about the NQF (Deij, 2019a). The agents of the EHEA are involved in closely monitoring and consulting at these meetings (Hanf, 2015).

Note that the above-mentioned Federation of Employers actively lobbied the Ministries of Education and Social Policy to formulate the NQF as soon as Ukraine entered the Bologna Process (Deij, 2019b). In addition, the Federation successfully advocated for the establishment of the National Qualifications Agency (NQA) to oversee the framework (Deij, 2019b). This aligns with the conclusions of Knoepfel et al. (2007) concerning actor impact on substantive elements of public policy during the first two stages of its development. As well, such stakeholder involvements and influences along with and alongside government bodies suggest a partial relaxation of traditional top-down power relations in the modern politics of Ukrainian education (Kushnir, 2019b). From a critical analysis standpoint, they exemplify Foucaultian

governmentality, whereby the state in this analysis is only one authority and policy that becomes a “social artefact” (McKee, 2009, p.468). As emphasized by Rose and Miller (1992), in such an arrangement, policy makers work with other actors to link what is seen as desirable with what can be realized by translating political ambitions into something considered more broadly practical.

However, representatives of students and student unions, parent councils, and local community and activist organizations have not been a major part of the consultation and collaboratory design of the NQF (Rashkevych, 2014). The literature about Ukrainian policy making states that a cooperation gap between the central bodies of policy making and civic organizations has a long history (Protsyk, 2003). Also, dissident voices have not been heard (Rashkevych, 2014). In fact, the ensued identification of the NQF as a reform priority and the policy document was not uncontested (Rashkevych, 2014). There was opposition from traditionalists, who are components of any policy making environment, and whom the NQF represented a paradigm shift in education policy for (Adam, 2011). Provocative questions arose which was spoken to the challenges presented by localizing external priorities (Ball, 2007): What does the NQF aim to reform regarding qualifications that Ukraine actually needs (or does not need)? What structural and processual changes are needed in HE to accommodate the European three-cycle framework and to improve its uptake as it is still poorly understood in Ukraine? Is the NQF mechanism capable of recognizing informal and non-formal learning in a country where these types of learning activities have been given little consideration in the past and now? And finally, should all educational standards be based on professional (occupational) criteria that is set out in competences? (Adam, 2011).

In addition, educational inequality among young people of different social backgrounds in Ukraine has not been factored into education policy making in general and the formulation of the NQF in particular (Oksamytna and Khmelko, 2007). For example, research notes that factors which influence the complex post-secondary education decision-making of orphans and children in state care (there are over 100,000 in Ukraine) include peer pressure to attend vocational school

(completing only basic qualification levels), teacher-directed versus teacher-encouraged decisions, and informed independent decisions stymied by structural constraints (Korz, 2013). Current policy discourse surrounding education in Ukraine exemplifies a form of educational product or commodity which overlooks education as a living socio-cultural experience (Korz, 2013). Knowledge is valued as objectified, measurable, and transferable. As a result, the sign value of qualifications promotes the prestige attached to higher levels of accreditation (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011). These value assumptions frame social opportunity and educational needs unproblematically, in terms of equally accessible 'upskilling' potential, and they obscure social difference (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011). From a post-structuralist perspective, this troubling phenomenon of performativity (Ball, 1990) has been referred to "the hegemony of competency-based training" (McKay, 2004).

Comparing the experiences of neighbouring countries

The situation is similar among some of Ukraine's neighbors. For example, Bologna has accelerated and reinforced the market-oriented trend in Romanian higher education, having side effects on numerous social issues (Dobbins and Knill, 2009). Romanian policy makers tend to view the Bologna Process as a means of changing the functioning of universities and bringing them in line with the demands of globalization and the economy knowledge. (Shtompel, 2014; Fimyar, 2008). Hence, a new system of accreditation inspired by Bologna guidelines was established in 2006 (Dobbins and Knill, 2009) and NQF followed in 2013 (Deij, Graham, Bjornavold, Grm, Villalba, Christensen, & Singh, 2015).

Research relating to a range of countries in the EU indicates some thorny issues in common. Significantly, the implementation of the Bologna Process and other European education standards does not guarantee solutions to problems with the labour market and innovation development (Duřová Spiřáková, Gontkovicova, Hajduova, 2016; Oleksiyenko, 2016; Štimac and Šimić, 2012). Understanding how different education systems generate or mitigate social inequalities in education illuminates how societies negotiate change. This is

particularly true of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (Kogan, Gebel, and Noelke, 2012; Iannelli, 2003). Comparing a number of these countries, it is found that the relative advantage of having more educated parents is stronger in the Eastern European countries than in Nordic European countries. This prevailing situation in Eastern Europe has had a profound impact on agenda setting favouring NQFs, notwithstanding persistent social access inequalities (Kogan, Gebel, and Noelke, 2012; Fimyar, 2008; Oksamytna and Khmelko, 2007).

Another important factor contributing to the maintenance of social inequality in such CEE countries, as the Czech Republic, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Hungary, Poland, and Russia, is stratification within the post-secondary education sector, which has been exacerbated by the requirements outlined in qualifications frameworks (Kogan, Gebel, and Noelke, 2012). In sequentially organized university systems (three-cycles based on NQFs), access to higher cycles continues to be more selective (Noelke et al., 2012). A study on Russia, for example, described a strong culture of valuing formal education in that country; even regulatory frameworks specify that qualifications must be linked to formal education and training (Allais, 2011). As Novoa (2002) has pointed out, the notion of 'employability' redefines unemployment as a learning problem that can and should be solved by individuals. The qualifications-based learning paradigm, like employability, is set up to blame individuals who fail to take advantage of opportunities, fail to invest in themselves, and fail to climb the qualifications ladder. A fundamental of difficulty that underlies on all these conditions are the key concepts contained in qualifications frameworks. Although it is described as essential components, it is widely recognized that the terms 'learning outcomes' and 'competence' are used in different ways in different countries and contexts (Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch 2008; Cedefop, 2008; Bohlinger, 2007). As a result, the extensively referenced International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which defines these terms from a KE stance, creates challenges for subjective interpretation based on local country social conditions, which in turn contributes to confusion and disagreement at the initiation and formulation stages of qualifications frameworks, and delays in

their implementation (Shtompel, 2014).

CONCLUSION

As presented in this paper, the state continues to serve as the institutionalizing force of globalization in Ukraine, a neoliberal knowledge economy based European social model which helps to explain the complexity of introducing NQF in the country. Intended as a democratic emancipation narrative, the NQF of Ukraine is nonetheless, ultimately, about conformism. Given that the goal of ongoing reforms in Ukraine is to realize the aspirations of recent independence and civil society movements, it is ironic that the policy process of the NQF has nevertheless resumed a mostly top-down distribution of decision-making in education. What remains to be seen is if the newly-established National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is able to actualize a more inclusive, collaborative and transparent public policy consultation process, as promised by its newly-appointed Chair (Kyiv Mohyla Foundation, 2019), since this would have a ripple effect on the workings of its close partner, the National Qualifications Agency, which is administers the NQF.

It has been argued that contemporary education reform in Ukraine, particularly in regarding to recognition conventions, is currently undergoing transformation. The initiation and formulation process of the NQF has become an essential pillar of this new architecture. However, the policy making agenda in this area is hampered and contested, both in terms of the understanding of higher education as a public or personal good and in terms of the role of national identity in education policy formulation (Zapp and Ramirez, 2019). Significantly, there is little empirical evidence to back claims made for national qualifications frameworks, their rapid dispersion notwithstanding (Allais, 2010). Notably, those which have been successful do not emphasize learning outcomes over learning programs and have ensured a broad-based vetting process (Allais, 2010; Raffe 2009b, 2009a).

As part of the tertiary education policy repertoire, NQFs are complex, dynamic, and evolving policy instruments that touch on important power relations in each country, whereas official reports about them tending to be political

documents designed to convey a consensus (Allais, 2011). This has been the case in Ukraine and other countries struggling with their Soviet past. Policy makers, driven by economic imperatives, find themselves challenged by the multidimensional complexity of social reality on the new road to democracy (Fischer, 2003). From the viewpoint of policy borrowing, the consequence is that the policy borrower often does not see the social problems as the case in Ukraine. For example, the borrowed prestige of credentialization inherent to qualifications frameworks essentially reduces the individual to a set of skills to be maximized; the higher the individual's qualifications, the more they are worth (a form of meritocracy). The main dilemma for former communist countries is that their traditional bureaucratic methods work poorly in higher education reform (Oleksiyenko, 2016; Soltys, 2015). Another problem is that deeply embedded elite and social values make it difficult to bring new ideas into countries with very different cultures, although outward organizational forms may indicate some policy adoption (Elliott and Tudge, 2007). As a result, in Ukraine, the 'already' and the 'not yet' of education policy reform embodied in the NQF are held together in intimate tension, a governance innovation tension (Oleksiyenko et al., 2018), the hope being that further institutional democratization will permit the NQF mechanism to include more voices and to actualize more equitable social development opportunities.

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