Strategic actions and strategy changes in European universities: Clues from institutional evaluation reports of the European University Association

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This research examined strategic actions in European universities through the institutional evaluation reports of the EUA. EUA reports for 21 universities from seven European countries were included in the data set. Qualitative inquiry was carried out and six sub-sections in the reports were used as established themes. The findings were then integrated into a node map. The analysis reveals that European universities follow similar strategies in organisational management, quality assurance, teaching/learning, societal service, and internationalisation. However, environmental factors such as economic conditions, demographical changes, the industrial/business sector, and higher education regulations and institutional characteristics lead to differences in their strategic perspectives. European-wide policies and practices also influence their strategies related to continental integration and international visibility. It is shown that these factors add various requirements to the institutional strategies of the sample universities, which have to adapt them to meet contemporary threats and catch developmental opportunities in their environment.

Keywords: European University Association; Institutional Evaluation Programme; Institutional strategies of European universities, Strategic flexibility in key performance areas

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Introduction

Many theories on university structures (Clark 1998; de Wit 2010; Sporn 2001) have strongly underlined the need for universities to be re-organised in a more flexible form to better respond to rapidly changing demands in their environment. In addition, adaptation, opportunism, and income generation are among the list of strategic keywords for universities to successfully increase their self-reliance in their changing environment (Shattock 2000). Furthermore, flexible strategic thinking (instead of highly formal planning) is one of the main characteristics of highly productive universities

(Gibb, Haskins, and Robertson 2013). As a threshold matter for their organisational adaptation, universities have to react by flexible strategies to various requirements and threats.

Ceylan (2001) developed a theoretical framework for organisational flexibility in service institutions and labelled strategic flexibility as a sub-dimension of organisational flexibility. He also identified six more sub-dimensions of organisational flexibility: Managerial Flexibility, Precept Flexibility, Labour Flexibility, Communication Flexibility, Organisational Structure Flexibility, and Organisational Clarity and Appreciation. He defined organisational flexibility (as cited in Uslu 2015, 40-41) as "the ability of organisations to give proper responses at the right times to the changes in their environments" while defining strategic flexibility as "shifting organisational strategies according to changes in the environment and competitors".

By following the framework in Ceylan's (2001) study, Uslu (2017) examined organisational flexibility in Turkish universities through their institutional evaluation reports prepared by the European University Association (EUA). Although he did not offer a clear definition for flexibility in university strategies, he found that alterations in organisational strategies change the formation of relevant structures and units in Turkish universities and guide managerial operations and work procedures. These and further findings can be analysed by referring to a definition of organisational strategy given by Eden and Ackermann (2012) who argued that each strategy includes setting institutional goals, determining strategic actions to achieve these goals, and mobilising necessary resources to operate these actions. Along with this organisational management approach, Uslu (2017) also concluded that strategic flexibility in Turkish universities does not solely depend on changes in organisational goals but is also associated with

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modifications in strategic actions and resource allocation preferences that are largely shaped by national and international higher education (HE) regulations.

For example, Turkish universities are members of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and have pursued the Bologna Process since 2001 (EHEA 2014). The entailments of the EHEA and Bologna implementations have strongly influenced HE policies in Turkey, as well as various strategies and operations in Turkish universities (Çalık and Bumin-Süzen 2013; Çetinsaya 2014; Esen, Gürleyen, and Binatlı 2012; Kooji 2015). In the same way, the formation of the EHEA and Bologna imperatives have strongly influenced strategies and implementations (largely related to the governance approach, quality culture, teaching philosophy, credit transfer, regional[i] research partnerships, and student/staff mobility) in universities in European countries (Bollaert 2014; Elken and Stensaker 2011; Kushnir 2017; Magalhães et al. 2012; Santa 2011; Teichler 2017; Van Bouwel and Veugelers 2013). In this respect, to improve political compatibility and operational comparability between universities in the EHEA (as stated in the London Communique 2007), it is important to know the prominent strategies of European universities and the environmental factors affecting these strategies.

Although many researchers have examined the EHEA structure and Bologna Process and how they are reflected in European HE (Curaj et al. 2012; 2015; Deca 2013; Esen, Gürleyen, and Binatlı 2012; Kehm, Huisman, and Stensaker 2009; Kooji 2015; Kushnir 2017; Santa 2011; Vukasovic 2017), there is a limited number of studies that mention adaptive management strategies in European universities (Shattock 2000; Sporn 2001; Westerheijden et al 2010). These studies showed that strategic variety in

[i] Here, "region" indicates Europe or at least several neighbouring European countries.

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universities involves many conjoint criteria with the following four dimensions of university autonomy. The four most important aspects depend on the capacity to design their own strategies regarding academic and administrative structures (organisational autonomy), physical and technological investments (financial autonomy), own recruitment/promotion/dismissal procedures (staffing autonomy), and independence on opening programmes and student admission (academic autonomy).

The EUA itself has carried out broad research on university autonomy in Europe (EUA 2016). However, the EUA's University Autonomy Tool does not provide clear data related to strategic flexibility, whereas the institutional evaluation reports of the EUA provide rich data for evaluating the strategies of European universities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the factors that induce the changes in university strategies and actions around Europe and to analyse the essentialities of the strategic flexibility in European universities via the institutional evaluation reports of the EUA. For this purpose, the research questions are:

(1) What are the environmental factors that influence strategies in European universities?
(2) How do environmental factors cause strategic differentiation/variety in European universities?
(3) What are the common requirements for strategic flexibility in European universities?

Methodology

Research Model

This study was designed in the phenomenology pattern as one of five qualitative research approaches outlined by Creswell (2013). In the phenomenology pattern, "there

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is a sharp focus on the essence of an experience [related to the phenomenon]; that is, on trying to understand the basic structure of that experience and interpreting the meaning it has for a […] group" (Suter 2012, 366-367). Therefore, the phenomenological approach allows researchers to interpret common aspects of a phenomenon via qualitative data analysis (Mertens 2015). Accordingly, the researcher benefitted from the phenomenological approach to inquire into institutional strategic actions and strategy changes in European universities through the qualitative analysis of the institutional evaluation reports of EUA.

Data Sources

The researcher followed the Criterion Sampling Strategy (Creswell 2013) to choose data sources. Although common HE policies and practices around Europe have a longer history due to the start of the Bologna Process in 1999, he took the establishment of the EHEA in 2009-2010 as the beginning of the time-line in order to analyse the EUA's institutional evaluation reports. After this date, the EUA has published all reports on its website, although the large number of universities from developed European countries took the EUA's institutional evaluation service before the establishment of the EHEA (EUA 2017). The researcher then included only EHEA countries that have reports for at least three universities on the EUA website.

Based on the two criteria above, the researcher could add EUA reports for universities from only seven EHEA countries in the potential data sources. These countries are Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey. The researcher could access reports for only three universities in Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro and Slovenia, while he had a chance to choose reports for three universities among many alternatives from Portugal, Romania, and Turkey. As a result, he included EUA evaluation reports of 21 universities in the data set (Table 1).

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Table 1. Distribution of institutional evaluation reports of universities in data set

Data Analysis

The researcher downloaded the institutional evaluation reports of the selected 21 EHEA universities from the EUA website. He then analysed these reports using descriptive thematic analysis, as one of the qualitative data analysis techniques. He assigned the sub-sections in the EUA reports as themes, namely: Governance and Institutional Decision-Making, Quality Culture, Teaching and Learning, Research, Internationalisation, and Service to Society. During the analysis, he followed the steps suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014): i) Data Condensation, ii) Data Display, and iii) Drawing/Verifying Conclusions.

The researcher then coded the EUA evaluation report of each university in the sample by selecting important keywords and phrases under the themes and formed a complete code-list. A colleague experienced in qualitative inquiry also coded the reports using the same code-list. Inter-coder reliability was calculated as .81 using Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula [Consensus on data / (Consensus on data + Dissidence on data)]. An inter-coder reliability of .70 and above is generally accepted as evidence of adequate internal reliability. After ensuring internal reliability, the researcher presented the results in the next section by supporting with direct quotations from the EUA's reports and summarised the findings in a node map.

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Findings[ii]

Strategic Actions in Governance and Institutional Decision-Making

Major strategies related to governance and decision-making in European universities focus on fund allocation, financial stability, management structure, central operation units, and operational monitoring. However, these strategies have been largely shaped by national HE policies. For example, "significant changes to the Italian higher education landscape were introduced by the new Law 240/2010, in effect since January 2011, affecting primarily the internal governance system and the academic structure of the universities" (Politecnico di Torino 2012, 9)[iii] or "following the 2011 Law on Education [in Romania] which devolved some governance and human resources arrangements to universities, BU needs to take the opportunity to address the internal governance and decision-making within its own organisation" (University of Bucharest 2012, 7). Another example is from Slovenia:

> The new national funding allocation system comprises two parts: basic funding depending on costs estimated the previous year, and development funding, linked to quality parameters […] [However,] the financial constraints did not allow the ministry to launch the development funding. The university budget is therefore tied to the basic funding, the level of which decreased by 6.5% in 2011 (University of Maribor 2013, 10).

Furthermore, "Review[ing] the composition of the Governing Board to ensure representation by [internal] and external stakeholders" (European Humanities University 2014, 20), including academic staff and researchers, non-academic staff,

[ii] Throughout the Findings section, 'European universities' indicates the 21 EHEA universities in the research sample, while 'European university' indicates a sample EHEA university.

[iii] This type of reference indicates the EUA report of the university in the quotation.

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students, and local partners, and "[the] establishment of […] strategic areas around which all education and research activities [and] restructuring of academic units (Faculties, Faculty-like Institutes and Research Centres)" (Universidade de Lisboa 2010, 13-14) are also among the primary governance strategies in European universities. In addition to national regulations, international requirements, workforce expectations, and their institutional approaches largely influence strategic actions related to both governance and academic structures in European universities. For example, many universities in Europe have only provided seats for students (generally without voting rights) in their senates as a Bologna imperative while others have voluntarily included representatives from industry and business organisations in their meetings to keep their strategies up-to-date related to graduate abilities. Several European universities have also made an effort to take global, regional, and local dynamics into consideration in planning their schools and research centres whereas most universities have established faculties housing only popular study programmes in order to attract more students.

Strategic Actions in Quality Assurance in Learning and Teaching

European universities have generally aimed to establish an internal quality assurance (QA) system to monitor the outcomes of quality practices, such as student course evaluations or a graduate qualifications follow-up system. They have also developed strategies to increase the recognition of their degree programmes both nationally and internationally. Universities in many European countries must even secure the accreditation of their degree programmes from national agencies (largely based on sufficiency of physical/technological infrastructure and academic workforce) to be able to accept students for these programmes. For example, "bachelor programmes (23 out of 28) were accredited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher

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Education (ARACIS) during the period 2002-2013, while […] all 17 Master programmes were accredited by ARACIS during the period 2008-2013" ("Constantin Brancoveanu" University of Pitesti 2014, 5) or "the national quality assurance framework relies on programme accreditation [in Montenegro], and the quality assurance agency is to a large extent dependent on the government" (University of Montenegro 2014, 4).

On the other hand, "there is the perception among universities that insufficient attention is paid to quality assessment […] [due to], in particular, the absence of a National Quality Agency or a similar organisation [such as in Italy]" (University of Calabria 2010, 15). Similarly, Turkey has newly-established a Council of Quality in Higher Education, which is not active yet; thus, Turkish universities have mostly participated in "external quality assurance and accreditation exercises" (Marmara University 2014, 5). In this respect, universities generally preferred to have accredited their programmes by profession-based associations and international, especially European, agencies such as "international associations in Europe (EADTU, EDEN) and Asia (AAOU), […] Pearson Assured, UK […] [and] MÜDEK [Turkish Association for Evaluation, and Accreditation of Engineering Programs]" (Anadolu University 2015, 12-18).

Strategic Actions in Teaching and Learning

Empowering student-centred and practical education is the general strategy related to teaching/learning in European universities. In line with this strategy, developing alternative assessment methods (especially evaluation of the learning process, not only learning outcomes) is another common teaching/learning strategy among European universities. However, these strategies have driven European universities to develop various actions related to modern teaching methods. For example, "as far as the student-

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centred learning approach is concerned, […] [the university should] focus on learning and reduce teaching with the goal to introduce innovative, diverse and flexible teaching and assessment methods" (Mykolas Romeris University 2013, 13).

European universities have also taken seriously the integration of their teaching programmes into the European framework. For this strategic goal, European university followed the "Bologna Processes principles" (University of Nova Gorica 2015, 12) and "ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area) recommendations" (University of Tras-Os-Montes e Alto Douro 2012, 18) to adapt their teaching/learning practices to EHEA approaches. In addition, most European universities "formal[ly] implement […] the Bologna cycles and introduc[e] ECTS (European Credit Transfer System)" (Mykolas Romeris University 2013, 12) to ensure recognition of their degree programmes internationally in other EHEA countries.

Furthermore, European universities have developed strategies to respond to recent opportunities to multiply their student population. Most European universities have acted to benefit from the "high [student] potential of interdisciplinary programmes […] [and] creat[ed] incentives to increase interdisciplinary teaching and learning" (ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa 2013, 14). Some European universities have also established "Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as an innovative supplement to its teaching and learning activities" (University of Donja Gorica 2014, 17) or a "huge distance and open education enterprise, which has well over a million active students in many countries" (Anadolu University 2015, 5) to increase their teaching income.

Another common strategy related to teaching/learning (as well as research) in European universities is to increase the postgraduate student population. However, European universities adopt different practices to attract more postgraduate students in accordance with changes in national demographics and economic conditions. For

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example, against "a demographic decline, […] introducing portable loans allow[s] students to enrol in the accredited programmes […] to support the growth of [Montenegrin universities]" (University of Donja Gorica 2014, 7), or "to support PhD studies, […] set[ting] up some individual scholarships as incentive, in addition to the funding received from the Lithuanian Research Council" (Vytautas Magnus University 2014, 15).

Strategic Actions in Research and Research-Based Teaching

The goal of increasing the postgraduate student population in European universities brings with it another popular strategy, that of promoting student participation in research. For this goal, European universities adopted various approaches such as project studies in bachelor programmes (in addition to thesis research in master and PhD programmes) (e.g. Bülent Ecevit University 2016, 13), formal connections between research centres and graduate schools (e.g. Politecnico di Torino 2012, 14), or co-publication(s) requirement for PhD students and their supervisors (University of Donja Gorica 2014, 18). Although mandatory national accreditation for PhD supervisors in a developing European country "limited [the] number of professors […] for teaching doctoral programmes [a]s another problem with severe consequences on the number of PhD students enrolled" (University of Oradea 2013, 16), some European universities initiated various programmes to expand research partnership with industry/business via external supervision. An example from Slovenia:

> [T]he University of Maribor introduced the Demola concept, which has been developed and tested in Tampere (Finland) in order to encourage cooperation between students, companies and higher education institutions through project assignments that could be of interest to the economy. Within the framework of DEMOLA, companies publish project assignments to be completed by groups of

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students under the mentorship of companies and researchers from UM (University of Maribor 2013, 13).

European universities have also developed similar strategies related to recent research trends such as "the practical application of academic knowledge" (Mediterranean University 2014, 9) and "encouraging and nurturing interdisciplinary [research] projects" (University of Primorska 2010, 12). However, European universities have taken various factors into consideration and then developed their strategic actions to raise their competitive power in obtaining external research funds via solution-based, practical research as well as inter-/multi-disciplinary projects. The following may be cited as examples, "its practical application and alignment with external stakeholder needs (private or contract research) [of research] are viable options […] for "selling" the specialities within the University's profile […] Practical research should, therefore, be seen as an activity of its own merit" (University of Tras-Os-Montes e Alto Douro 2012, 11). Furthermore, European universities largely "rethink the structure and roles of the Departments and Doctoral Schools to encourage multidisciplinarity [...] Greater multidisciplinarity should also include collaboration with other Universities, both nationally and internationally, that may complement and strengthen the University's research potential and strategic priorities" (University of Verona 2009, 13). Although European universities have considered the practical outcomes of these collaborative projects as opportunities to increase their research reputation via international publications in various disciplines, only few European universities have developed supportive mechanisms (e.g. interdisciplinary research hubs/centres, pilot grants for multidisciplinary projects, extra travel funds for international project meetings, or academic staff responsible for international development).

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Strategic Actions in Internationalisation

In addition to international publications, another European-wide strategy is to increase the number of international students in universities. European universities can benefit from their locational, historical or cultural (especially language partnership) characteristics to form strategies related to international students. For example, "UNG is a small, multi-campus university situated at the western border of Slovenia […] [and] Gorizia ([northern] Italy)... UNG's specific interest [is] in providing higher education and research opportunities for the Slovenian minority across the border in Italy" (University of Nova Gorica 2015, 4-12). For one Turkish university, "the university has increased the number of incoming international students by 10 times in the last five years, with students coming mostly from Arab and Central Asian countries [that are geographically and culturally closer regions]" (Bülent Ecevit University 2016, 17). It is a common situation in Portuguese universities that, "37% [of students] are from outside Europe which, given the common language, entails a majority coming from Brazil" (ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa 2013, 22-23). There is also a unique case in Europe, as follows:

> By 2005, EHU had relocated to Vilnius, in Lithuania, electing to continue its Belarusian mission from across the border […] While its legal base is in Vilnius, much of its operations are conducted on a cross-border basis. That is to say, the majority of its academic staff commute daily or weekly from Belarus (Minsk is a three-hour train journey away), while two thirds of the student body, resident in Belarus, study on a distance learning basis (European Humanities University 2014, 4).

Furthermore, European universities have generally developed study programmes taught in foreign languages to attract more international students. In many European countries, "English is no longer considered as a foreign language […] [In this respect,] students are interested in having courses in English and professors are willing to do this

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as well" (University of Donja Gorica 2014, 25). Therefore, European universities mostly run study programmes in English directed towards both domestic and international students. In addition, some European universities "offer several programmes in more than one language, i.e. Turkish, English, German, French and Arabic, [which] is thought to give the institution a market advantage" (Marmara University 2014, 4). European universities also "elaborate a strategy for […] joint study programmes" (University of Oradea 2013, 25) with prestigious universities abroad. To run study programmes in foreign languages smoothly, European universities generally prefer to strengthen their human resources with international staff.

However, universities in several countries have struggled with legal challenges to their appointing international staff, as "national scientific qualifications for new teaching staff [in Italy] hinder further international staff mobility" (University of Verona 2009, 15), while others have enjoyed "open staff recruitment policies […] resulting in relatively high proportions of international staff" (University of Nova Gorica 2015, 28). Despite such supportive policies for international staff appointments, economic conditions in the sample countries seriously inhibit their competitive power to attract international staff, especially native-English-speaking academics. At this point, European universities have largely modified their strategies to prioritise the recruitment of domestic academics with extensive international experience (e.g. Mykolas Romeris University 2013, 19; University of Bucharest 2012, 17; University of Donja Gorica 2014, 10).

European universities have also cooperated with foreign universities regarding academic mobility to generate internationalisation opportunities for their staff and also students. They have taken advantage of European exchange programmes, especially Erasmus [now Erasmus+] programme. For example, "UO […] [has] 274 contract

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agreements […] (for the most part under the Erasmus programme) […] [from] 34 countries. France (39 contracts), Italy (36), Turkey (35), Poland (20), Spain (19) and Germany (17) are the countries most represented on the agreements list" (University of Oreda 2013, 24). Additionally, most European universities are "active participant[s] in the EU Lifelong Learning programmes (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig and Jean Monnet), as well as national and international research programmes (FP6, FP7 and COST [and now Horizon 2020])" (Vytautas Magnus University 2014, 19) in order to establish international project partnerships.

Strategic Actions in Service to Society

Many European universities devise strategies to contribute to the economic and social development of the local, national, and regional[iv] (even global) community. Knowledge and technology (K&T) transfer to society is a prominent strategy of the Third Mission in European universities. In line with this strategy, the "main institutional aspirations [in European universities] […] are to provide the region with all the required research infrastructure in one place [and] to serve the region with the outcomes of its research" (Bülent Ecevit University 2016, 6). However, the historical and locational characteristics of European universities have a significant impact on perceptions related to their 'Third Mission success' in society. For example, "being the oldest […] university existing in Lisbon has led to very close bonds between […] the University and the city […] [Even,] the growth and the specialisation of the UL is a mirror of the emerging of scientific knowledge in Portugal" (Universidade de Lisboa 2010, 12). As another example, "the University […] is located in one of the most underdeveloped

[iv] Here, "regional" refers to at least some parts of Europe, including several countries from the EHEA.

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Italian regions […] Nevertheless, the University has played a very important role in the local and regional[v] […] development […] This has contributed to a very positive image for the outside community" (University of Calabria 2010, 5).

In addition to their investments in becoming research hubs for their environment, European universities have included teaching activities in their service to society. Therefore, European universities have largely operated strategies to meet "the demands of non-traditional learners by developing lifelong learning (LLL) and part-time courses" (Mykolas Romeris University 2013, 15). European universities have mostly accepted LLL programmes as opportunities to increase their teaching income, so many European universities preferred to develop "distance education projects which are being implemented for distinct target groups […] [and] the community at large" (Vytautas Magnus University 2014, 16).

Taking the specific characteristics of their external collaborators into consideration, European universities also develop various strategic activities to improve their public face. For example, many universities around Europe "work with the schools in [the city] through information campaigns and counselling" (University of Bucharest 2012, 12) or "work with local civil society organisations across a range of cultural and educational projects" (University of Nova Gorica 2015, 24). Furthermore, universities contribute to the social life in their region as a part of their societal service (as well as entrepreneurship strategies) by organising cultural events or participating in joint activities with their local partners. The types of activity organised are exemplified below:

[v] Here, "regional" indicates the specific area including several cities from the country.

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> Throughout the year, together with the city Governor's office, its sister Eskişehir Osmangazi University and others, Anadolu University offers a wide range of art and cultural events. These include a large annual festival held in late autumn. Its symphony orchestra is one of two in the city and it has choirs, musical, dance and theatrical ensembles with folk and international repertoires (Anadolu University 2015, 17).

The findings of the research have been integrated into a node map (Figure 1) to summarise the requirements for strategic flexibility in European universities.

Figure 1. Node map (requirements of strategic flexibility in European universities)

Conclusion

This study explored strategic actions in European universities through their institutional evaluation reports prepared by the EUA. It analysed clues related to organisational strategies outlined in the reports of 21 selected universities from seven European countries using qualitative research methodology. The study adopted the phenomenological approach and employed descriptive analysis by using the sub-section titles in the EUA reports of the selected universities as the established themes.

The analysis revealed that European universities in the research sample have similar strategies in the various performance areas mentioned in Figure 1. Indeed, according to the university strategies discussed in the study of Morphew, Fumasoli, and Stensaker (2016), these strategies have similarities not only with universities from other European countries but also from outside of Europe. However, strategic perspectives in each sample university differ greatly from one another in terms of their local, national, and even international circumstances.

The sampled European universities, for example, follow similar strategies in terms of organisational management, QA operations, teaching/learning activities, research and innovation, service to society, and internationalisation practices. However,

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environmental factors such as their specific local industry/business sectors, local/national demographics, national HE regulations, and national/global economic conditions as well as their organisational approaches lead to differences in their strategic actions. Moreover, Europe-wide HE policies and practices largely influence their strategies related to continental integration and international visibility. All these factors bring various obstacles to European universities in the sample regarding freedom to change their institutional strategies, especially related to their governance and decision-making systems, unit formations, programme structures, and QA mechanisms. On the other hand, these factors assist in developing new strategies in the sample of European universities to take advantage of recent opportunities in their environment such as inter-/multi-disciplinary programmes, contract research with the industry/business sector, educational/cultural service to society, and cross-border partnership for international funds.

Accordingly, strategic flexibility in the sampled European universities has to come to grips with a broad range of influencing factors related to their institutional goals, operational modifications, and investment preferences. The factors requiring flexibility in university strategies as outlined in the node map are in accordance with the model of strategic change in universities proposed by Gallardo and Navarro (2003). In view of these factors, it might be asserted that strategic flexibility in (at least, the sample) universities has to tackle a combination of updating institutional goals, changes in the related actions, and re-design of the resource mobilisation processes to adapt universities to a fluctuating environment. However, many studies (Çalık and Bumin-Süzen 2013; Fumasoli, Gornitzka, and Maassen 2014; Fumasoli and Huisman 2013; Fumasoli and Lepori 2011; Uslu 2017) exemplified how strengthened university autonomy can provide advantages for universities to develop their specific strategies in

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the face of environmental changes. Estermann and Pruvot (2011) also argued that higher institutional autonomy encourages European universities to develop their own income-generation strategies in order to overcome potential obstacles to their financial sustainability. Therefore, European universities need high-level institutional autonomy to be able to update their strategies and operate timely organisational changes to catch new opportunities.

For this reason, policy-makers should review the HE policies in their countries to generate more space for universities to design their own financial strategies, management structures, internal QA operations, and staffing systems. Furthermore, European HE authorities may contribute to strategic flexibility by overseeing the effect of national HE policies on universities, and they should continue to develop policies and practices that induce university autonomy. On the other hand, higher university autonomy alone does not ensure the formation of a comprehensive strategic framework in European universities. Therefore, European university managers should take the unique characteristics of their institutions into account when designing strategies and operations to respond better to changing demands in their environment. As stated in Rosa et al. (2011), Europe-wide HE units can also disseminate examples of effective strategies and successful institutional actions integrated by universities so that other universities can incorporate them in their strategic framework, if appropriate.

This study revealed similarities in major institutional strategies of (only) 21 European sample universities from (only) seven countries in the EHEA. Therefore, further research with a larger sample, including further universities from the EHEA (and probably outside the EHEA), is necessary to better understand institutional strategies and strategy changes in European universities. In addition to the EUA reports,

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researchers can also examine universities' self-evaluation reports to discover how they adapt their institutional strategies in response to changes in their environment.

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Table 1. Distribution of institutional evaluation reports of universities in data set*

Report Date / Country	*2009-10*	*2011-12*	*2013-14*	*2015-16*
Italy	Uni. of Calabria, Uni. of Verona	Politecnico di Torino		
Lithuania			European Humanities Uni., Mykolas Romeris Uni., Vytautas Magnus Uni.	
Montenegro			Uni. of Donja Gorica, Mediterranean Uni., Uni. of Montenegro	
Portugal	Universidade de Lisboa	Uni. of Tras-Os-Montes e Alto Douro	ISCTE – Instituto Universitario de Lisboa	
Romania		Uni. of Bucharest	Uni. of Oradea, "Constantin Brancoveanu" Uni. of Pitesti	
Slovenia	Uni. of Primorska		Uni. of Maribor	Uni. of Nova Gorica
Turkey			Marmara Uni.	Anadolu Uni., Bülent Ecevit Uni.

* The reports are accessible on the website of EUA (http://www.iep-qaa.org/reports-publications.html)

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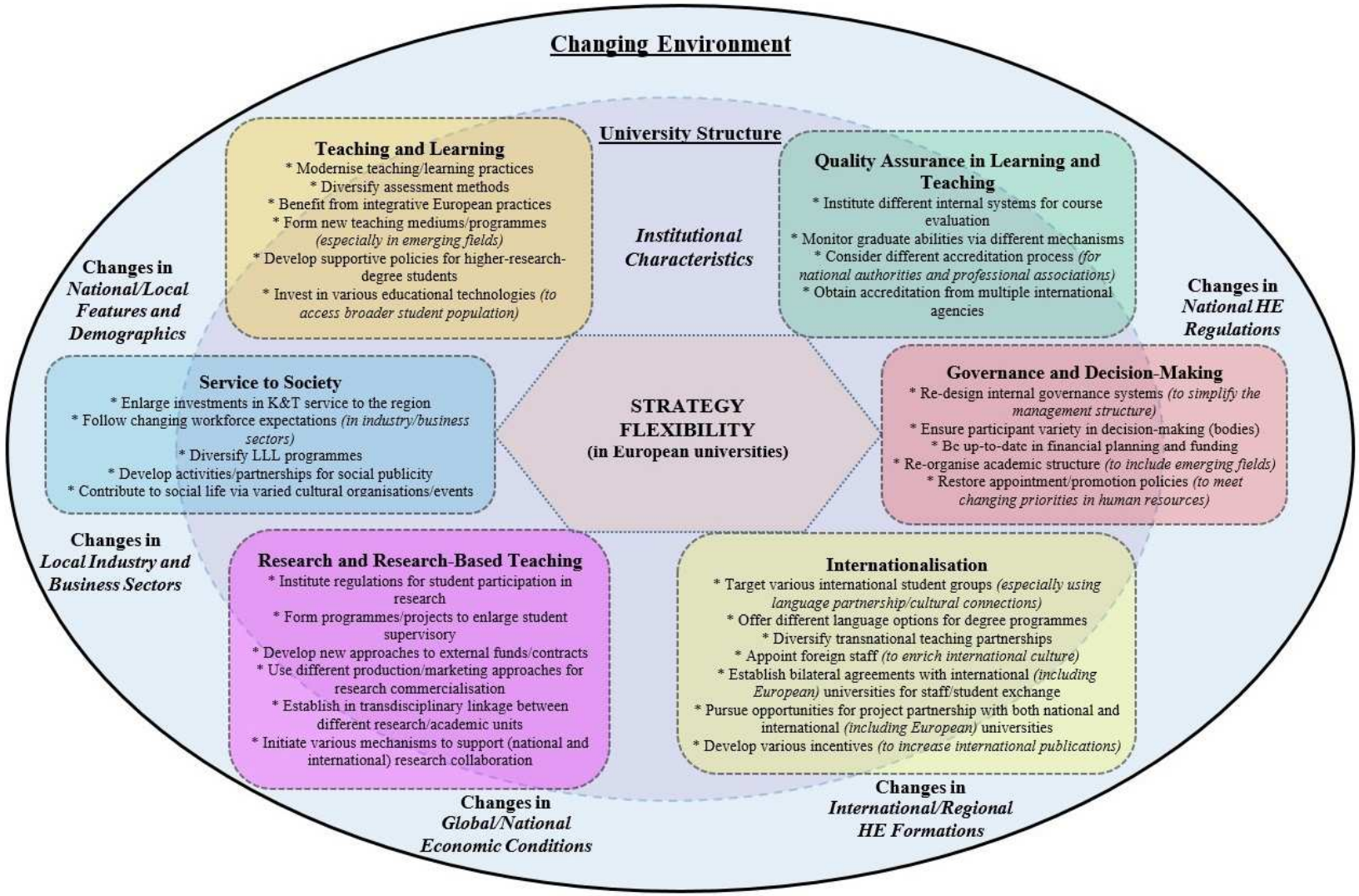


Figure 1. Node map (requirements of strategic flexibility in European universities)