Typical and top-ranked Polish private higher education: Intersectoral and intrasectoral distinctiveness

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2012

This dissertation analyzes the degree and shape of differences between private and public sectors (intersectoral) and within the private sector (intrasectoral) in Polish higher education. The intersectoral hypothesis is that Poland's two sectors are quite different and that these differences mostly follow those claimed and so far found in leading literature on private higher education globally. The intrasectoral analysis focuses on the top-ranked private institutions, for which I hypothesize characteristics of "semi-elite" institutions.

The research develops eight explicit and specific intersectoral hypotheses and then, for intrasectoral analysis, eight such hypotheses on parallel subject matter--Enrollment size, Primary function, Field subject matter, Concentration of institutional offerings, Student quality, Faculty quality, Source of funding, and International orientation.

Each hypothesis is investigated empirically. To do so, I refine indicators employed on other higher education topics and develop some wholly new indicators, statistical ones, on which pertinent data could be gathered. I survey top-ranked private universities to compare these to private sector averages. Interviews supplement the statistical analysis, cross-checking that analysis and extending it.

The findings strongly substantiate the overall hypothesis that intersectoral differences are major and in anticipated directions. Four of the eight specific hypotheses are strongly supported, three others are moderately supported, and for only one the indicators and data are insufficient to draw a conclusion. The findings on whether the top-ranked institutions are semi-elite are mixed, though generally positive. Two hypotheses are strongly supported, three moderately supported, two supported in only limited ways, and one is basically not supported.

This national case study not only fits and illustrates but also greatly fleshes out the global findings on intersectoral differences. The intrasectoral analysis--only the second large national study--proves promising for the semi-elite concept, charting new territory but revealing ambiguities and contradictions. Aside from its substantive findings, this study makes methodological strides, on both the intersectoral and intrasectoral fronts, by introducing systematically developed hypotheses, finding indicators for analyzing them, and using data to fuel the indicators. Additionally, the study provides detailed relevant material usable in policymaking by government agencies, private universities, and families.