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# 21 Addressing the Dilemmas of Governance in the Post-Soviet Context

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This concluding chapter focuses on the implications of the project's findings, both in terms of description and analysis of why these observations and findings matter and how to make sense of the individual country responses and their patterns.

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## 21.1 PATTERNS AND THEIR MEANINGS

From a common foundation set by the Soviet Union over thirty years ago, this book mapped and analyzed state University governance structures across the fifteen diverse countries that evolved through 2021. From the European-leaning Baltic countries to Russia and those in its direct sphere of influence and the Central Asian countries, the economic and cultural diversity across the set is immense. Yet, they all started their independent journeys from the same place, when the Soviet Union fell, and each had the opportunity to determine how to construct and govern their University sectors. This shared starting point presents a unique opportunity to understand evolutionary ways of development, compare current characteristics, and speculate on onward trajectories.

The rich detail in each of the case profiles allowed us to identify four patterns of governing structures – *state-extended*, *academic-focused*, *internal/external*, and *external civic* (see Table 21.1). The models are helpful to explain the choices made in each country and to determine if patterns emerged across a once like set.

Table 21.1 Emerging governance models by post-Soviet countries

Academic-focused	State-extended	Internal/External	External civic
Georgia Kyrgyzstan	Azerbaijan Belarus Russia Tajikistan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan	Armenia Estonia Latvia Lithuania Moldova Ukraine	Kazakhstan

The *state-extended* model described the dominant approach in six countries – Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In these countries, the government held the most direct influence. Their structures are not surprising given the role of government and structure of each economy, all highly centralized and very much grounded in their Soviet roots. The other common approach are those states that developed *internal/external* models. Armenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine adopted this approach that had stakeholders from inside the University working with external stakeholders to govern. In Moldova and Ukraine, the universities are governed in a bicameral or parallel structure with two bodies, one internal (*academic-focused*) and the other either *external civic* (Ukraine) or an *internal/external* model (Moldova). In the other countries, one body exists.

The other two models were much less common. The *academic-focused* structure is dominant in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. The final model, found only in Kazakhstan, is the *external civic* structure, with its wholly external body with the exception of the rector. This last model, depending on the backgrounds of board members involved, evolved the furthest from the Soviet centralized approach. The Balkan countries are the most Western leaning in terms of public policy and the structure of the economy and membership in the European Union. Moldova and Ukraine have been pulled both toward Europe and to Russia. Kazakhstan is the outlier of this group. Geopolitically, it had strong ties to Russia before Russia's invasion of Ukraine but has been pursuing a "multidirectional" approach, a tripartite foreign and economic policy, simultaneously engaging with Russia, the West, and China.

The models with non-university stakeholders reflect a desire to connect universities to the public and shift the locus of decision-making to a broader set of actors and away from both the state and the academics. That said, which external members serve matters. The more governmental appointees, the more the models, while structured differently, likely operate as *state-extended*. A fundamental question, regardless of structure, is how much

control are governments willing to give up and delegate to their universities and various stakeholders, both internal and external?

Furthermore, to make governance more open to nongovernmental influence (which is different from authority), some countries put in place external advisory bodies. These include Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia for some of its universities. Although the authoritative decision-making body was either *state-extended*, where the influence remained in the government, or *academic-focused*, where the influence was from within the institution, these advisory bodies present opportunities to bring outside perspectives into University decision-making. But even then, questions remain regarding who is appointed to these advisory bodies. Our understanding is that often it was government officials who comprised these external advisory boards, but not exclusively, suggesting an opening for the inclusion of some nongovernmental voices in University strategy, even in centrally controlled higher education systems.

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## 21.2 ADDRESSING THE DILEMMAS OF GOVERNANCE

University governance broadly construed is intended to make universities better by framing and solving problems, making decisions, ensuring fidelity to stated goals, and holding institutions accountable – but also advancing strategy, counseling University leaders, advocating on behalf of the universities, and serving as a bridge to relevant external stakeholders, which can be represented by the state, the community, or a combination of both, depending on the context. Governance works across three levels – oversight and accountability, problem solving in partnership with University leaders, and strategy with an eye on the long-term future of the University (Eckel & Trower, 2018). Yet this work can be problematic because of the inherent contradictions in the roles and expectations (Austin & Jones, 2015; Chait et al., 2005). Larsen and colleagues (2009) identified four common “dilemmas of governance” (pp. 5–8) as they studied governance reforms in Europe.

- Dilemma between representative democracy and organizational effectiveness. A tension exists between who is involved in actively governing. On one side are externally identified, often appointed by government, actors who engage because of increased expectations for University accountability and performance-driven outputs. On the other side are internal stakeholders whose representation increased in Europe in the in the 1960s and 1970s

as a response to the idea of workplace democracy. As the authors rightly point out, an increase in workplace democracy actually works against a broader representative stakeholder democratic engagement. Thus, a dilemma exists within a dilemma.

- Dilemma between integrated management structures and dual management structures. Just as composition (who governs) matters to University governance, the structures through which those individuals govern also matter. This dilemma concerns itself with how the structures for making academic and administrative decisions are integrated into a single body or the extent to which they coexist within two separate decision tracks. The latter recognizes independence of two types of decisions and a separation of decision-makers. The former combines decisions, and the bodies that make them, often making the academic decision-makers advisory rather than definitive.
- Dilemma between external and internal influence in governance decision-making. This dilemma can be understood through a single question: how integrated with and responsive to the external environment should universities be? One side implies openness is fundamental and suggests that governing bodies be composed of external stakeholders. The other side argues for independence and thus expects internal or University (academic) community members.
- Dilemma between centralization and decentralization in autonomous universities. The final dilemma addresses the locus of decision-making and who holds authority and responsibility for organizationally salient decisions. In this framework, the decentralized approach to decision-making means academic units within the University have supremacy over their decisions and outcomes; whereas a centralized approach consolidates influence in the hands of those individuals at the organization's administrative level, or what is sometimes called the corporate level. This is a different type of centralization/decentralization between University and government.

These dilemmas of governance require universities to consider who is involved in governance, how those individuals come together to make decisions, what decisions they make, and for what purpose they make those decisions. In the European context, those dilemmas came to light as being driven by changes in public policy and changing expectations for universities; that is, universities were expected to become increasingly relevant, competitive, responsive, efficient, and effective (Larsen, et. al., 2009).

Table 21.2 Governance dilemmas by PSS governance model

	State-extended	Academic-focused	Internal/external	External civic
Representative democracy/ Organizational effectiveness	Organizational effectiveness	Representative democracy	Organizational effectiveness	Organizational effectiveness
Integrated management/ Dual management	Dual management	Dual management	Integrated management (Armenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and Dual management (Moldova; Ukraine)	Integrated management
External/ Internal influence	External influence	Internal influence	External influence	External influence
Centralization/ Decentralization	Centralization	Unclear	Centralization	Centralization

The four models of governance in the post-Soviet era provide insight regarding how they address these governance dilemmas, which are outlined in Table 21.2.

The models, even though they differ, resolve some of these dilemmas consistently. Three out of four prioritize organizational effectiveness over representative democracy, the *academic-focused* model being the only exception. However, even as they prioritize organizational effectiveness, *state-extended*, *internal/external*, and *external civic* models approach this idea differently. In the *state-extended* model, organizational effectiveness is in the hands of the government, whereas in the other two models it reflects the views of various stakeholders. For the last two models, they approach the idea of representation not internal to the University, as in the traditional European context, but externally to society.

Three of the PSS governance models reflect centralization of decision making. *State-extended*, *internal/external*, and *external civic* all consolidate decisions in a central body or administration, away from the academic units. How centralized decision-making is in the *academic-focused* structure is unclear in this project. Decisions may be devolved to units, though this is unlikely in Kyrgyzstan given its low levels of autonomy. Additionally, the same three models that favor organizational effectiveness over representation are also biased toward external influence on the third dilemma.

*State-extended* and *academic-focused* models have dual management. The *external civic* model adopts integrated management. Whereas the *internal/external* model addresses this dilemma differently depending on country. Governance is either integrated where there is a single body (Armenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) or with two bodies with delegated, parallel responsibilities (Moldova and Ukraine).

Beyond the dilemmas identified in the European context, the four post-Soviet University governance models suggest other dilemmas. First, a pressing question across the four models is not external versus internal influence but which external influence and how much influence? The post-Soviet dilemma focuses on the role of the State and the extent to which it devolves governance to a broader set of stakeholders. To further complicate this dilemma, governance structure may matter only a little as governmental influence reportedly exists in both the *external civic* and *internal/external* governing bodies.

A second dilemma across the post-Soviet set centers on the degree of centralization and decentralization at the system level. The Larsen et al. (2009) framework focused on the centralization/decentralization dilemma between the administrative core and the academic units within an institution. In the post-Soviet context, centralization is about the consolidation of decisions in the ministry or ministries rather than at the University level. How shared is shared governance?

A third dilemma that surfaces from this context is to whom the University is responsive. This is a nuanced version of the above European dilemma. Is the University most responsive to the government singularly or more broadly to the needs of the country or region (economic, social)? The *state-extended* model provides one answer – the State. The *external civic* and *internal/external* suggest a different response – multiple external stakeholders.

Furthermore, these post-Soviet governance dilemmas stand in comparison to still another set of governance dilemmas in Western contexts. For example, in Canada, a key dilemma is determining how to advance the “best interests” of the University (Shahahan, 2019, p. 14) given the strong representation of elected University staff (academic and administrative) on the mostly externally appointed governing boards. The best interests of academics serving on governing bodies may be different from those of external fiduciaries. Because of the representative nature of Canadian board members, “tension between the guardianship view and the constituency representation view of University governance has existed for decades in Canada” (p. 16). Guardianship and constituency tensions are a helpful way to frame the dynamics in these

boards. Among the four models, only the *internal/external* model has the potential for this to exist.

Further south in the United States, Chait (2009) identifies three dilemmas in the US University governance that he calls gremlins. The first is the attention given to board structure over board culture. He argues that governance members debate board size, committee structure, and meeting frequency, while ignoring the more important determinant of board behavior – board culture. The second gremlin Chait identifies is the allure of strategic planning over strategic thinking. Operationally, US boards tend to focus on plans and get caught up in details rather than “articulate a few sensible, feasible, and comprehensible ideas that create comparative advantage” (p. 3). The final gremlin is the impact of philanthropy on governance given the role of wealthy individuals who are philanthropic donors serving on University boards. Although the focus of this book is on structure, one can speculate about board culture, particularly contrasting the *academic-focused* and *state-extended* models. Does culture matter more than structure or are they reflective of one another and are they reinforcing? When the context changes or is misaligned does the culture of these models impede modifying structures? The allure of strategic planning over strategic thinking also raises questions in the countries studied here. Fundamentally, what is the role of the supreme governing body regarding setting strategy? Different models may respond differently to this question. The name of the Strategic and Institutional Development Council in Moldova signals one response as does the *external civic* model in Kazakhstan. Those countries with strong state control answer a different way.

The North American dilemmas may not be transferable in the same way to the post-Soviet contexts, but they are helpful in demonstrating how governance is contextually dependent. Across contexts, dilemmas exist, some common and others unique. What may be more important is the recognition that dilemmas in governance exist and being intentional in design and function can help to surface and resolve these often underlying tensions.

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### 21.3 IMPLICATIONS

This chapter explores the implications of this study’s findings. This final section looks further at implications with more practical purposes for policy-makers and for University leaders.

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## For Policymakers

Policymakers and ministerial leaders play a key role in developing, evolving, and reforming their University governance models. We hope that this book is useful to them to think more intentionally about how sensibly to organize University governance: First, by providing an overview of the different governance models so they can see the range of options that countries similar and dissimilar have pursued given a common history; and second, by demonstrating some of the probable benefits and drawbacks of these approaches via the contexts in which they operate.

*Understand the level of autonomy and capacity and autonomy and competition.* As two of the analysis chapters demonstrate, many of the countries in this study may have a mismatch between their levels of autonomy and capacity and between levels of autonomy and competition. For example, according to our admittedly rough analysis, Russia and Georgia have both capacity and competition that outpaces autonomy; Kyrgyzstan and Belarus have competition that outpaces autonomy. Providing more autonomy with appropriate accountability schemas in these contexts might be important to University sector development. It would free up universities to pursue more actively new strategic directions; be less costly to oversee, direct, and coordinate; and encourage universities to move beyond compliance to performance. Conversely, Lithuania, Estonia, and Kazakhstan seem to have insufficient competition given their high levels of autonomy. Creating a more dynamic and competitive context may further strengthen the University sector, recognizing that competition to an extreme can impede public purposes (Morphew & Eckel 2009). Kazakhstan and Latvia, and to some extent Moldova, have autonomy that seems to outpace capacity. Lessening autonomy may create more efficiencies across the University sector by allowing for greater coordination and integration (Lane & Johnstone, 2013).

Conducting a deeper analysis with more robust data would be helpful. The analyses in this book would benefit from additional attention to the concepts presented, a more rigorous analysis, and a more comprehensive set of locally relevant and robust data. The second step is to enact policy changes that either shift autonomy levels or increase or decrease competition. Capacity seems to be the element more difficult to shift but nonetheless would benefit from investment.

*Develop context-appropriate University governance structures.* One point of the analysis was to understand the extent to which the governing structures seem appropriate for the governing context. In some instances, the structures



seemed consistent with need. But in other cases, the structures seem misaligned. Understanding the extent to which each of the models and their variations might be better suited to the context is a valuable policy conversation, and one in which to involve University leaders. What this book offers, and what most comparative governance studies fail to provide, is the close analysis of the interplay of the context and University governance structures. For example, those universities operating in highly competitive and autonomous contexts might explore using the *external civic* model to provide more stakeholder involvement, benefit from their understanding, and increase and improve environmental scanning. Those in less competitive and autonomous contexts may be better served by the *state-extended* or *internal/external* models. One governance model does not and should not fit all contexts.

One might also question the utility of the *academic-focused* model given either the importance of government stakeholders in low autonomy contexts or external voices in more competitive and autonomous contexts. Is this a model worth retiring? Has it outlived its purpose? How well does it fit the demands of the times? Taking this perspective invites pushback from academics who value their place and authority in institutional decisions. Nevertheless, it is a worthwhile discussion.

*Understand that governance structures are also linked to histories, expectations, and legitimacies.* Changing governance is much easier said than done. Each model, regardless of its alignment with context, will have defenders and beneficiaries who will protect the current order (cue Machiavelli on that point). Bringing about change, particularly abruptly, can be difficult if not disruptive. Changing governance approaches, such as what is occurring in Kazakhstan (Hartley et al., 2015), requires changes in structures, processes, and expectations at both the University and the ministerial levels. Most central to change is the ability to change mindsets and adopt new ones. Change for the future is often constrained by an inability to overcome the past. Ensuring that the new models implemented work as designed requires additional diligence. The case of Kazakhstan, Latvia, and some other countries in the post-Soviet contexts suggest that intentional change is doable. Some of the countries that started from similar governance models have developed differently and, in some cases, comparatively quickly.

*Invest in strengthening governance capacity.* Governance requires intentionality and thought, and the better structures continue to evolve as needs change (Chait et al., 2005; Eckel & Trower, 2018). Ensuring that those involved in governing have the skills, capacities, and knowledge to govern effectively is important. Developing and offering training and development programs and

workshops and creating and sustaining ongoing networks of practice that bring together governing body members and University leaders – together or separately – are useful strategies to strengthen governance.

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### For University Leaders

The second key group of individuals are University leaders who live with and hopefully benefit from appropriate and effective governance structures.

*Advocate for systems that match context.* As with the implications to policy-makers above, University leaders can and should advocate for creating higher education policy contexts that align levels of autonomy with those of competition and capacity. Too little autonomy per competition and/or capacity can tie the hands of leaders creating frustration. Too much autonomy can risk leaders not knowing what activities to prioritize or how to be accountable for progress and can lead to institutional drift and possible inefficiencies.

*Recognize that increased autonomy may not be a panacea.* Relatedly, it seems like most if not all University leaders want to advocate for more autonomy. The EUA's Autonomy Scorecard provides a framework for such conversations. However, as the discussions throughout this book indicate, such an ask is best treated carefully. Without ensuring sufficient competition and capacity, autonomy may become a greater challenge than benefit. Some of the countries in this study – Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Ukraine – might provide ongoing case studies of that point.

*Spend the time ensuring effective University governance.* Good governance takes effort. While beyond the scope of this project, one can assume that the different models of governance will require different types of effort by University leaders and their teams and academic staff – and different support structures to make governance work. Regardless of the model, governance requires intentionality, deliberateness, and constant attention.

*Ask for and participate in trainings and ongoing development.* Capacity to govern takes skill, knowledge, and aptitude at the University and ministerial levels, as well as at the individual level. If governance systems change, ensure that leaders ask for and participate in capacity-building activities.

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## 21.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

Governance and international comparisons of it have strong histories (see, e.g., Austin & Jones, 2016; Larsen et al., 2009; Shattock, 2014) and more work

should be done in this tradition, as should further work on this area of the world as it is often overlooked (Kuzhabekova, 2020; Muller, 2020), but in many ways it is a unique as well as important group of countries. Some additional lines of inquiry include the following:

- This research focused on surrogates for performance of both the higher education sector and University governance. Better understanding and assessing of governance performance are important lines of inquiry within these countries and governance contexts.
- Understanding within country differences raises another set of questions valuable to explore. We conducted country-level analysis establishing a strong understanding of between-country differences. Yet we recognize that in some countries different types of universities exist, such as in Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. To what extent is governance different within a particular country across types of institutions, for example, comparing regional and national universities? With the growth of private higher education across the countries, further analysis inclusive of private and international/autonomous universities may be beneficial.
- Understanding the role of external advisory boards. Many of the countries, particularly in our *state-extended* model have external advisory boards. What is the role of these boards? How are they used by universities and governments? Who comprises their membership?
- This effort did not get inside governing processes and bodies. How these bodies work is another line of potentially promising inquiry. What decisions do they make? Who is involved and through what processes? Who specifically are the stakeholders involved and to what extent does government have a presence – direct or indirect – via appointees?
- How do the models identified here reflect governance in other parts of the world? What are the local dilemmas of governance? What governance processes and structures exist? Can we create a broader international comparison?

A final set of questions focus on the conceptual elements we used in this project's analyses, particularly related to notions of autonomy, competition, and capacity.

- EUA's autonomy scorecard is an exceptionally useful tool. Might there be value in a parallel, competition scorecard? Such a framework might shed light on the degree of strength as well as the nature of competition in various

countries. The two combined could become even more powerful tools for a more integrated analysis of the context in which universities operate.

- This study's most competitive countries had different types and levels of competition. As we wrote in that Chapter 20: the elements that make up the composites across this set differ. For example, Georgia is highly competitive with tuition fees, regarding international students, and with research. Whereas Kyrgyzstan competitiveness is tied to tuition and international students but comparatively low on research and private University competition. Russia is low on tuition and private University competition but high in research and international students. Armenia is high on tuition and research, but low on private University competition and international students.
- Finding more rigorous ways to understand, capture, and describe similarities and differences in competition and their implications might be important. What should be the elements of competition and what are the weights of those elements that can help paint a comprehensive picture?
- We defined competition nationally but recognize that countries differ in their populations and numbers of students. Many are members of the European student mobility space. Is the right unit of analysis for competition the country or a different unit? Competition in Latvia with its few universities and small number of students is very different from Russia simply given scale of students and institutions. What is the role of national policies that impede or facilitate competition?

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## 21.5 THE FUTURE OF THE REGION

When we started writing this book, we had much hope for the region. From the Soviet days, the majority of these countries have made much progress on economic, political, and educational reforms. We anticipated that some chose different pathways forward for their universities and the bodies that govern them. Many have advanced differently and at different rates. We were looking for innovation and adaptation, differences, and similarities. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 puts much of this continued evaluation on hold and may embolden others to move quicker and in different ways. It does raise new sets of questions about progress and innovation throughout the region. Institutions and lives have been disrupted in those two countries but also across Europe. Universities are the hope for the future; our thoughts are with those continuing their good and hard work.