

From Collegiality to Managerialism in Lithuanian Higher Education

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Abstract. In this paper we focus on the development and academics' perceptions of managerialism in Lithuanian higher education (HE). We systematically investigate historical changes in HE governance and policies in Lithuania and conduct an analysis of data collected through the APIKS Lithuania project survey of academics at Lithuanian public universities (N=389). We find that Lithuanian HE policies shifted to a rather market-oriented paradigm. The survey results reveal that the majority of respondents perceive their university as highly managerial, which points out to high managerialism in practice in line with the policies. Based on our key findings, we discuss theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: managerial university; higher education policy; higher education governance; New Public Management; Lithuania.

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Nuo kolegialumo link vadybiškumo Lietuvos aukštajame moksle

Santrauka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama vadybiškumo raida Lietuvos aukštajame moksle (AM) ir suvokimas akademinėje bendruomenėje. Sistemškai aptariami istoriniai Lietuvos AM valdymo ir politikos pokyčiai bei atlikta APIKS projekto įgyvendinimo Lietuvoje metu vykusios valstybinių universitetų akademinės bendruomenės apklausos (N = 389) duomenų analizė. Tyrimas atskleidė Lietuvos AM politikos slinktį link į rinką orientuotos paradigmos. Apklausos rezultatai parodė, kad dauguma respondentų mano universitetą esant labai orientuotą į vadybą, taigi aukštas vadybiškumo lygis praktiniu lygmeniu atitinka vykdomą AM politiką. Straipsnyje aptariami reikšmingiausi teoriniai ir praktiniai tyrimo rezultatai.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: vadybiškas universitetas; aukštojo mokslo politika; aukštojo mokslo valdymas; naujoji viešoji vadyba; Lietuva.

1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s, we have witnessed a spread of New Public Management-inspired governmental policies aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of universities in European countries (de Boer, Enders, Schimank, 2007) and worldwide. These reforms entail a shift from the “collegium” to the “enterprise” model of higher education (Deem, Hillyard, Reed, 2007; Enders, de Weert, 2009; Musselin, 2009), and are therefore widely regarded as a threat to the principle of academic freedom. NPM-inspired reforms have led to significant changes in academic work conditions through the rising numbers of temporary contracts, the introduction of performance reviews as well as the stronger division of labor into different tasks related to academic work – teaching, research, and administration (Leišytė, Dee, 2012). These changes have manifold effects on academic work and academic knowledge production through (1) pressure to perform and show visible results, and increased competition for promotion (Carvalho, 2018), (2) interference in daily work through time management and other forms of control, such as filling out forms and writing performance reports, which may translate into the reduction of professional autonomy and possibly academic freedom (Leišytė, Zeeman 2019; Pinheiro, Geschwind, Hansen, Pulkkinen, 2019), (3) meeting sometimes conflicting requirements for quality and relevance of teaching and research, (4) reduced collegial self-governance and academic power, i.e. academics’ influence within their institutions and beyond, and (5) the impact on the academic identity and satisfaction with work in the academia (Bleiklie, Enders, Lepori 2017; Broucker, De Wit, Verhoeven, Leišytė, 2019; Krücken, Engwall, De Corte, 2018; Locke, Cummings, Fisher, 2011; Shin, Jung, 2014; Welpel, Wollersheim, Ringelham, Osterloh, 2015).

Although there are indications for a world-wide trend towards managerialism in higher education, there are differences in starting points for managerial reforms. Different path-dependencies, cultures and pace of reforms across different countries lead to various degrees of tensions for academics (Broucker et al. 2019; Paradeise, Reale, Bleiklie, Ferlie, 2009; Musselin, 2013). Moreover, the effects of managerialism have been by no means the same in different types of higher education institutions, different academic ranks or disciplines both within and across countries. Therefore, studies furthering our understanding of the effects of managerialism on the academic profession – especially

from longitudinal or comparative perspectives either within or across countries – are needed.

In this article, we focus on the development and academic perceptions of managerialism in Lithuanian higher education. The Post-Soviet higher education system of Lithuania has undergone profound transformation since the restoration of independence in 1990. As in the first decade of the independence, the restoration of autonomy was at the centre of reforms, Lithuania can be regarded as a late-comer with regard to the introduction of NPM-inspired reforms (Leišytė, 2002). While several laws and reforms introduced since the 2000s have led scholars to the conclusion that the governance of Lithuanian higher education is moving towards a market-oriented paradigm (e.g. Leišytė 2002; Leišytė, Kiznienė 2006; Dobbins, Leišytė, 2014), there have been no systematic studies conducted to date on academic perceptions of managerialism in Lithuanian higher education institutions. We therefore pose the following research questions:

How has managerialism developed in the Lithuanian higher education system?

How do Lithuanian academics perceive the level of managerialism at their universities?

In the following, we will give a short introduction to managerialism in higher education and briefly describe the key characteristics and main reforms towards managerialism in the Lithuanian higher education system. We will then provide information on the methodological design of our study and present the key findings of our statistical analysis, before moving to a discussion of managerialism in Lithuanian higher education.

2. Literature review

The changing governance of higher education has been discussed extensively in the literature in the past decades. Discourses stem largely from the triangle of coordination proposed by Burton Clark in 1983 and in the context of New Public Management reforms of higher education governance (de Boer et al., 2007; Krücken et al., 2018). The literature has distinguished between the Collegial university model and the Managerial university governance model as two extremes when it comes to the power of academics in decision making and the centralisation of power of university managers. To show this development, we first review the literature on managerialism in higher education in general and then introduce major reforms in the Lithuanian higher education context.

2.1. Managerialism in higher education

In the past decades, we have witnessed a shift in higher education governance from the model prioritising collegiality and academic values to a managerial model where market values and managerial control are dominant (O’Byrne, Bond, 2014). Such managerial models are seen as a necessity in the increasingly competitive higher education sector. Managerialism focuses on the management of organisations and the role of individual managers in managing them (Shepherd, 2018), and on the strengthened position and so-

cial status of managers. This is achieved through application of “control technologies” in the form of measurement of performance, new organisational structures and organisational culture changes (Shepherd, 2018).

There is no common definition of managerialism and the term cannot be fully distinguished from those of New Public Management and neoliberal practices. Despite that, most of the authors emphasise certain aspects when talking about managerialism. The main characteristic of managerialism is that managers have control over those who do the work and that the workforce is accountable to managers. This means the adaptation of private sector practices, such as increased competition among institutions, separation of management and academic work, increasing control and regulations of academic work, and consequently, weakening of the professional status of academics affected by managerialism (Shepherd, 2018).

Traditionally, the academic profession is associated with academic autonomy, self-regulation and collegiality in the workplace (Clark, 1983). New organisational cultures of higher education institutions based on managerialism are, however, based on different principles, such as transparency and accountability, which means a reliance on metrics, assessments and consumer needs (Leišytė, Dee, 2012). In this context, higher education institutions have become organisational actors with strengthened managerial capacities (Hüther, Krücken, 2018). In these circumstances, the importance of central management and centralisation of decision making, the use of control mechanisms such as performance-based pay, time accounting, performance reviews, explicit and transparent criteria for promotion have become commonplace (Leišytė, Dee, 2012; Welpe et al., 2015; Pinheiro et al., 2019).

It has been argued that the competing sets of values behind collegial and managerial models of higher education coexist, creating institutional complexity and causing identity crises. The shift from the long tradition of academic self-governance to more corporate-like higher education does not easily change academics’ professional identity and organisational culture (O’Byrne, Bond, 2014). Despite having occurred on the macro level of organisations, this identity crisis has had a powerful impact on individual academics. For some academics, managerialism has led to shifts in their professional identities (Leišytė, 2015). Other academics, although being aware that some of their activities and identities will not be rewarded under a managerial system, nevertheless do not change their identities to adhere to managerial norms (Archer, 2008).

It is argued that the system of audit, monitoring and control has increased insecurity amongst academics by limiting their autonomy, which is the main aspect of their professional identity (Shams, 2019; Leišytė et al. 2008). Introducing performance measurements to monitor, control and direct academics toward achieving certain unifying goals and objectives that ultimately add value to a university’s profile and enhance its reputation is one of the main tools to reconstruct social and power relations among academics and managers (Shams, 2019).

At the same time, the academia and higher education institutions are extremely diverse, with different cultures and histories, thus, the effects of managerialism on higher

education may be varied. Locke, Cummings, and Fisher (2011) have shown that certain strata, e.g. a country or a higher education system, an academic rank (senior versus junior academics), the type of a higher education institution, or an academic function (teaching or research), may be playing a decisive role in how managerial imperatives are perceived and experienced by academics and what impact they have on academic work and profession in general. Further, the discipline may be a strong mediating factor, as some of the criteria used in performance management systems have been strongly influenced by science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. This may serve as a disadvantage for the social sciences and humanities, which function in a different mode of knowledge production (de Rijcke et al., 2016; Guetzkow, Lamont, Mallard, 2004). Moreover, although some argue that it is merit-based and therefore promotes equality, there are indications that principles of New Public Management in higher education constitute a source of rising inequalities in the academia and may lead to disadvantages for female academics (e.g. Teelken, Deem, 2013; White, Carvalho, Riordan, 2011).

2.2. Managerialism in Lithuanian higher education

Lithuania is one of the three Baltic States and is located in Central and Eastern Europe. The Lithuanian HE system has a longstanding history. Vilnius University was founded in 1579 as one of the oldest universities in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, the country had a turbulent history, leading to several profound reforms of its HE system. After the end of the World War II until 1990, Lithuania was incorporated into the Soviet Union and the Soviet model of HE was established in the country. This model was characterised by a separation of teaching and research (research was not conducted in universities, but in separate Academies of Science), state control of curricula, and strong links between HE and the state (Leišytė, Rose, Schimmelpfennig, 2018).

Lithuania is a rather small country with a population of 2.794 million, yet it had a total of 43 HE institutions in the academic year 2017/2018, 21 of which can be classified as universities, while 22 are colleges – institutions developed on the basis of advanced vocational education institutions and providing first-cycle professional bachelor programmes. In the academic year 2017/2018, there were 7,284 academics in the Lithuanian HE system (Official Statistics Portal, 2020), most of which were employed on a part-time basis. According to data gathered in 2016, contract funding for professors was 0.97 full-time equivalents on average, while academics at earlier stages of their career were employed with 0.6 full-time equivalents on average (MOSTA, 2016) and oftentimes had to seek additional income sources outside the academia. Having peaked in 2008/2009 with 210,400 students (Leišytė, 2018), student numbers then saw a steady decrease to 105,942 in 2019/2020 (Official Statistics Portal, 2020) – mainly caused by demographic decline due to low birth rates and emigration.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence in Lithuania in 1990, the restoration of principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom and

an emphasis of collegiality in the governance of HE institutions stood at the centre of reforms. Since the early 2000s, however, several reforms were introduced implementing the principles of New Public Management in the Lithuanian HE system.

One of the first important steps towards introducing the elements of managerialism was the adoption of the 2000 version of the Law on Science and Higher Education, which introduced external governing boards and block funding instead of line budgeting. One of the main reasons for the introduction and later strengthening of the boards was that the existing self-governance system was hindering the necessary reform of university internal structures, i.e. changes that would lead to the optimisation of university work (Králíková, 2016). The attempt was partially successful as the external boards were made advisory bodies instead of managerial ones. In the early 2000s, a performance-based research funding scheme was introduced, and university funding became partially dependent on the quantity and quality of research production (Daujotis et al., 2002). Governmental legislation of 2002 laid down guidelines for strategic planning in public sector institutions, including higher education, and since 2004 universities started preparing strategic plans (Leišytė, Kiznienė, 2006). Joining the EU in 2004 granted researchers full access to the EU research funding. The Lithuanian Research Council became the key funding agency for the HE sector, distributing national and European research grants on a competitive basis. Possibilities of attracting full-fee paying students and competition with the emerging private HE sector have also contributed to the development of managerial approach to university governance. Changes were reflected in the internal structures of universities, where Public Procurement, Project Management, Quality Assurance and Public Relations Offices were established and expanded. In addition, universities started outsourcing external consultants for preparing strategic plans, developing research or infrastructural projects, and marketing their academic services.

The Law on Higher Education and Research adopted in 2009 extended the institutional autonomy of universities by changing their legal status to not-for-profit institutions and significantly strengthened the role of the central management of universities at the expense of the academic oligarchy (Králíková, 2015). The change in the legal status allowed universities to own their assets and take responsibility for their maintenance, and increased their autonomy in hiring and firing as well as setting wages for (academic) staff (Leišytė, 2018), which have been observed to be increasingly based on performance indicators. If external stakeholders had previously played only an advisory role in strategic management decisions, the power of the external boards was now expanded to cover the approval of university strategic plans, budgets and property related matters, the appointment of university rectors, and the approval of their annual reports. University senates, on the other hand, were weakened in their positions and became mainly responsible for academic affairs (Leišytė, 2018).

The 2009 Law further increased competition among HE institutions by changing the student financing system and introducing a money-follows-the-student system called the “student vouchers”. Further, the Lithuanian government increased the share of per-

formance-based funding for research (from 30% in 2009 to 50% in 2011). The remaining 50% of research funding is allocated on the basis of the previous overall research funding, expressed in terms of “the standard number of research staff” (OECD, 2016). Still, another part of funding is provided on a competitive basis. Since 2009, the allocation of funding to HE institutions depends increasingly on a mixture of input- and output-based indicators, in which research performance (Dobbins, Leišytė, 2014), as well as other research-based criteria such as the number of PhD students and number and type of research grants, is favoured over other criteria. The diversification of funding has significantly increased and now depends not only on state funding and student tuition, but also on national and EU research grants and private entities (Leišytė et al., 2018). Moreover, there are indications that the introduction and further development of rankings and league tables for study programmes and universities appear to be increasingly significant for policy-makers and institutional leaders. This provides another impetus for competitive behaviour and strategic gaming for the institutions (Leišytė et al., 2018).

In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Science granted the Centre for Quality Assurance in Higher Education the right to start evaluation of higher education institutions (HEIs), where the team of international experts has to assess four key areas of HEIs’ activities: management, quality assurance, research and studies, and impact on regional and national development. Experts also have to decide whether the resource base of the institutions is appropriate. Negative evaluation can result in the suspension of study and research activities, therefore effective managerial models and techniques of strategic management and quality assurance became even more demanded.

Demographic decline, concerns about the quality of HE and societal and labour market needs, and increased competition for students and financial resources evoked internal structural changes, namely, mergers of smaller faculties and institutes at the start and of universities later. At first, several research institutes were incorporated into universities. This was followed by a discussion about university mergers and the establishment of a working group in 2009 to present different scenarios for mergers among the then 50 HE institutions with the goal of supporting weaker institutions and improving the overall quality of HE in the country. However, most attempts to merge universities did not succeed and only two institutions – the Kaunas University of Medicine and the Lithuania Academy of Veterinary – were merged in 2010. The discussions of university mergers revived in 2016. First of all, the Kaunas University of Technology and the Lithuanian University of Health Science announced the plan to merge in order to create a world-class university. This attempt failed shortly after, just as most of other envisioned mergers. Nevertheless, a few university mergers, mostly incorporations of smaller universities into larger ones, have taken place to date.

Based on the above-mentioned reforms, we can conclude that since 2000 a process of at least moderate policy convergence towards a market-oriented paradigm has been taking place in Lithuanian higher education (Dobbins, Leišytė, 2014).

3. Methodology

In order to answer our research questions, we have conducted an analysis of data derived from a representative survey of Lithuanian academics, which has been carried out as part of the international project “The Academic Profession in Knowledge-Based Society (APIKS)” in 2017 and 2018. The survey, which was conducted in the Lithuanian language, targeted all academics in public universities in Lithuania and 389 valid responses were derived.

The independent variable “level of managerialism” is based on academics’ perception of the governance and management of their institution. To understand the level of managerialism, we built an additive index based on the level of respondents’ agreement with the following statements derived from the literature:

- a) “There is collegiality in decision-making processes”,
- b) “There is good communication between management and academics”, and
- c) “There is a top-down management style”.

For this question we used a 5-step Likert scale in the survey ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. We re-coded the variables by combining the negative values “strongly disagree” and “disagree” as well as the positive values “strongly agree” and “agree”. We then constructed the index for the variable “level of managerialism” with equal weightings of all three variables listed above.

Our independent variable “level of managerialism” has been constructed as a binary variable with the values “low level of managerialism” and “high level of managerialism”. In line with the pre-existing literature on managerialism in higher education, a high level of managerialism has been defined when (a) collegiality and (b) good communication have a negative value, and (c) top-down management has a positive value. In turn, a low level of managerialism has been defined when (a) collegiality and (b) communication have positive values, and (c) top-down management has a negative value.

The analysis was carried out in two steps. Firstly, we conducted a descriptive analysis of academics’ perceived level of managerialism at their institution. In the second step of our analysis, we examined the correlation between the level of managerialism and gender, academic career position, and discipline using a Chi-Square test.

4. Findings

In the following, the key results of the survey are presented. We start by drawing on the general perceptions of collegiality in decision making, communication and style of management at Lithuanian universities followed by the perceived level of managerialism at Lithuanian universities.

4.1. Academics’ perceptions of organisational practices within Lithuanian universities

The analysis of perceptions of collegiality, communication and management style at universities shows that Lithuanian academics perceive a lack of collegiality in decision-mak-

ing processes (see Figure 1). A substantial percentage of respondents (38%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “There is collegiality in decision-making processes”. This was closely followed by the similar number of academics (34%) who were neutral on this question. Only a minority of Lithuanian academics (21%) indicated that there is collegiality in decision making. In contrast, the academics surveyed seem to have agreed with a top-down management style. More than half of the respondents (57%) stated that their university had a top-down management style. Only 20% were not quite confident about the presence of such management style at their university, while 15% of those surveyed disagreed with this statement. Finally, we asked about communication between academics and management to ascertain what management climate could be found at Lithuanian universities. The majority of the respondents (44%) did not think they had good communication with the management; 29% of the academics surveyed were neutral and only a small percentage (21%) supported the statement that there was good communication between management and academics.

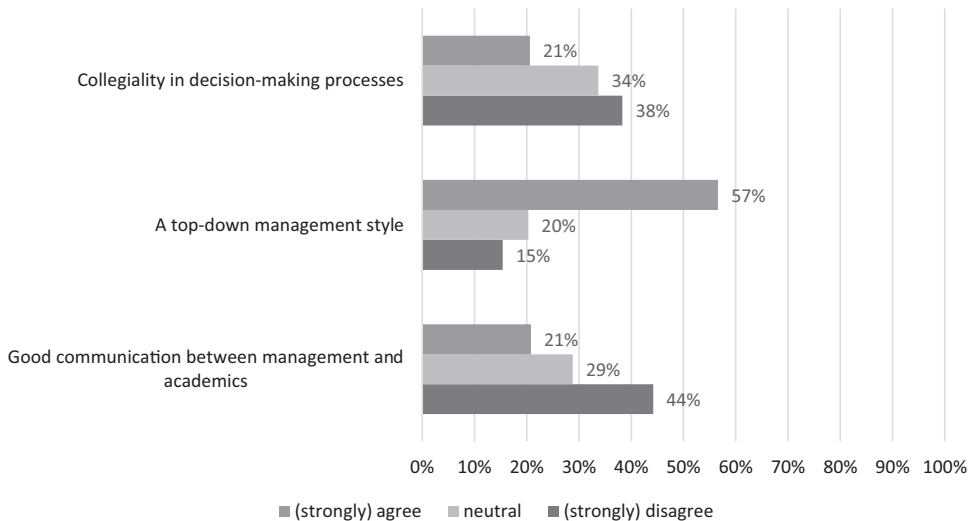


Figure 1: Academics' perception of organisational practices within their universities (figures in %)

Note: N=389.

This points to the tendency of the decreased collegiality in higher education governance in Lithuania and the strengthening of the managerial model. However, we needed to have a closer look at how these perceptions compare by gender, discipline, and career-level, as these variables may strongly influence them. For this purpose, we divided the various disciplines represented in our study into hard- and soft-sciences and distinguished between early-/mid-career researchers and senior-career researchers.

4.1.1. Collegiality

A more detailed analysis by gender shows that while only 18.7% of female academics agree or strongly agree with the statement “There is collegiality in decision-making processes”, 27.2% of male academics agree or strongly agree with this statement (See Figure 2). The difference is statistically significant, pointing out to the importance of gender in assessing the level of collegiality in decision-making processes at Lithuanian universities. Moreover, we see that academics working in the soft sciences and senior academics seem to experience less collegiality than their counterparts from the hard sciences or colleagues on early- and mid-career level.



Figure 2: Academics' perception of collegiality in decision-making processes by different strata (Agreement with the statement: “There is good communication between management and academics”; figures in %)

Note: N=389; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

The differences in the perception of collegiality in decision making by career level could be explained by the fact that senior academics are usually more involved in committee work and other decision-making bodies and have closer experience with decision making. Therefore, they may experience more management pressure and competition from colleagues, and thus have less favourable views than early- and mid-career academics regarding collegiality in decision making at Lithuanian universities. The differences between perceptions of academics by discipline seem intriguing, as academics in the soft sciences seem to be experiencing less collegiality compared to those in the hard sciences. This could be interpreted in terms of the levels of competition and resource bases that different disciplines have.

4.1.2. Communication between management and academics

The analysis of the perceptions of communication between academics and management also shows interesting similarities rather than differences by gender, discipline, and career level (see Figure 3). It is noticeable that all groups largely do not agree with the statement “There is good communication between management and academics”. However, we see that senior-career researchers (25.5%) are more likely than early- and mid-career researchers (16.7%) to report that communication is good, whereas academics from the hard sciences (24.5%) are more satisfied with communication between management and academics than academics from the soft sciences (18.4%). No clear tendencies could be observed in terms of gender. Men are more likely both to agree that there is good communication and to disagree with the statement than women, whereas women are more likely to give neutral answers on the statement. Thus, overall, no major differences can be found by gender, discipline, and career level in terms of perceptions of academics of their communication with management, as they rate the communication as poor in general or are neutral about it.

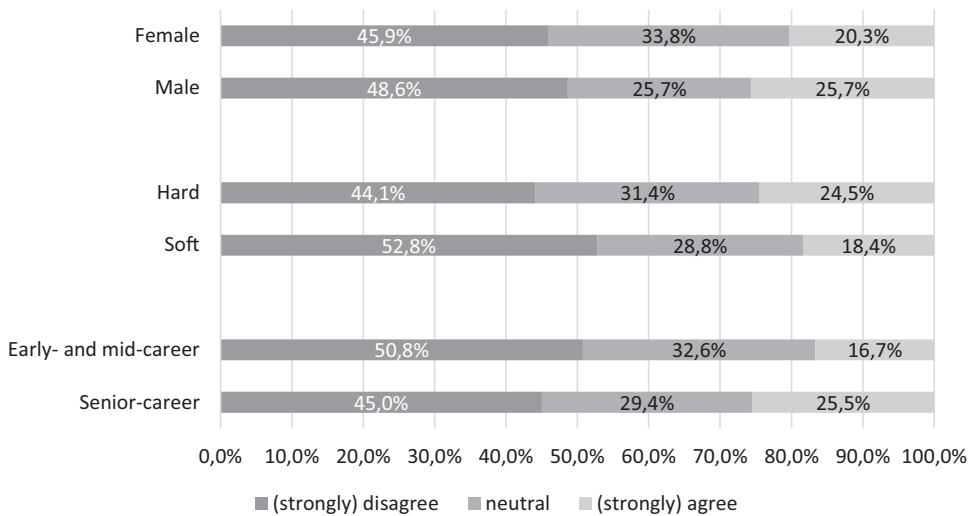


Figure 3: Academics' perception of communication between management and academics by different strata (Agreement with the statement: “There is good communication between management and academics”; figures in %)

Note: N=389; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

4.1.3. Top-down management

With regard to agreement with the statement “There is a top-down management style”, no significant differences can be found by the selected strata (gender, discipline, and career-level). Our results show that slightly more women (63.5%) than men (58.5%) and more early- and mid-career researchers (62.3%) than senior-career ones (60.4%) agree or

strongly agree that there is a top-down management style. The biggest differences have been found between disciplines, where we can see that academics from the hard sciences (64.7%) are more likely to report the presence of a top-down management style than those from the soft sciences (57.8%).

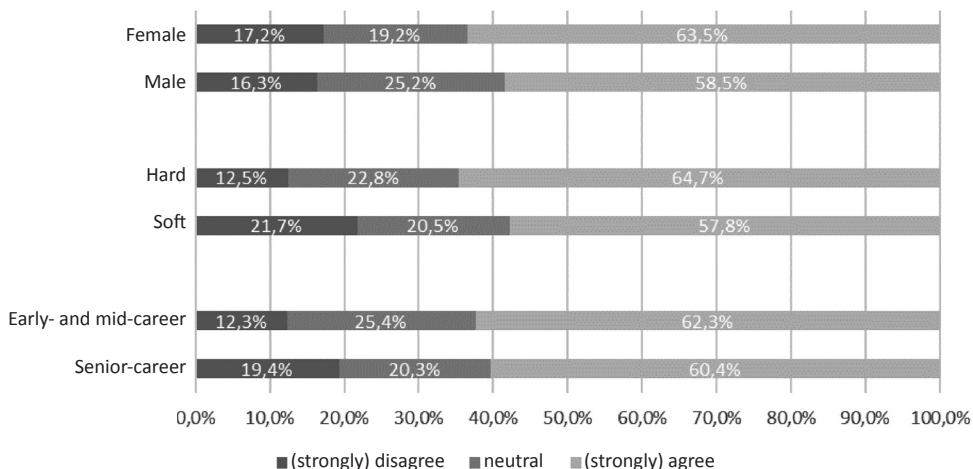


Figure 4: Academics' perceptions of top-down management by different strata (Agreement with the statement: "There is a top-down management style"; figures in %)

Note: N=389; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Surprisingly, the differences between gender, discipline, and career level are low in the perceptions of the top-down management style. This demonstrates that experiences of top-down management have been strongly embedded in the universities and that the overall academic scepticism towards management crosses the borders of gender, career level and type of discipline, as the traditional ethos of the academia is threatened.

4.2 Academics' perception of the level of managerialism at Lithuanian universities

Based on the index we developed to understand the overall perceived level of managerialism at Lithuanian public universities, we find that the majority of academics (70%) consider their university to be highly managerial. Less than a third of the respondents (30%) perceive a low level of managerialism at their university.

After investigating whether there are differences in the perception of managerialism by academics at their universities by the selected strata, we observe a rather uniform picture. Figure 5 below shows the results of the correlation analysis with the three variables: gender, career-level and discipline.

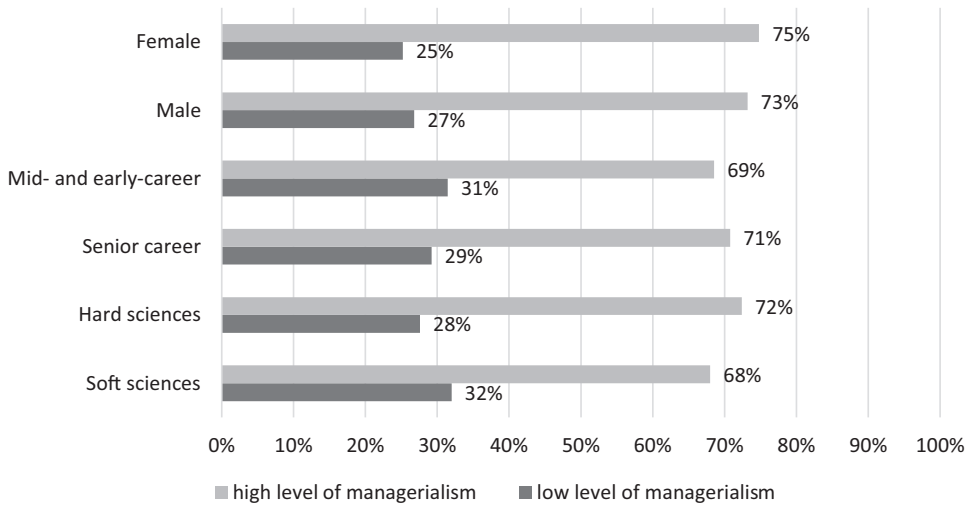


Figure 5: Academics' perception of the level of managerialism by different strata (figures in %)

Note: N= 375-386; Chi-Squared significance test with no significances.

Overall, our results show many similarities and very slight differences between the groups of respondents regarding the perceived level of managerialism at Lithuanian universities. No statistically significant differences could be found between gender, discipline, and career level when it comes to the perception of the level of managerialism. Regarding the perception of managerialism at the university and the gender of academics, we can see that women (75%) more often than men (73%) consider the university to be highly managerial. We obtain similar results when analysing career levels. Senior-career academics (71%) more often state that the university is highly managerial compared with early- and mid-career academics. The greatest differences are observed among different disciplines. Hard scientists (72%) tend to perceive universities as highly managerial by 4 percentage points more often than soft scientists (68%). Thus, although the results show small differences among the specific groups of academics, there seems to be a consensus among our respondents that Lithuanian universities display high levels of managerialism.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Our study of academic attitudes towards collegiality in university decision making, communication between academics and management, and the style of management have shown that a large majority of respondents perceive their higher education institutions as highly managerial. It is striking that a clear minority of the respondents (22%) think that there is collegiality in decision making and good communication between managers and academics at Lithuanian universities. This shows that one of the core governance mechanisms, academic self-governance, has eroded over the past decade. Previous studies have shown an incremental erosion of the power of academic oligarchy (Leišytė, 2002;

Leišytė, Kiznienė, 2006), and today we can see that the New Public Management reforms and the increasing competition for students due to expansion of higher education, on the one hand, and the decreasing cohorts of incoming students due to demographic decline, on the other hand, have resulted in clear professionalisation of university management and lower collegiality in university decision making. This is confirmed by the answers of our respondents, where the majority (61%) agrees that Lithuanian universities adopted a top-down management style.

Our analysis by gender, discipline, and career-level has revealed only small differences between different groups of our respondents. However, gender seems to be significant regarding the perceptions of collegiality in decision making at universities. Women perceive decision-making processes significantly less collegial compared with men. It could be most probably attributed to the gendered notions of leadership with masculine styles being the norm of good leadership, which may be perceived as less collegial and consensual by female academics (Eagly, Johnson, 1990).

Thus, overall, our findings show that the Lithuanian higher education system meets two important criteria of the managerial model of higher education described in the higher education governance literature (de Boer et al., 2007). We see a low degree of academic self-governance and a high degree of managerial governance. The dominance of the managerial model of self-governance in higher education in Lithuania is in line with the trends and developments in the Anglo-Saxon higher education systems (Leišytė, Dee, 2012) and seems to be stronger compared with Continental European governance systems such as the German system, where collegial power of academics in decision making remains a stronghold despite the clear tendencies towards managerialism in terms of performance management systems (Hasse, Krücken 2013; Lauer, Wilkesmann, 2017). This development could be partly attributed to the strengthening of academic self-governance based on the chair model of higher education (e.g. found in Germany) compared with the departmental model prevalent in Lithuania. Further, the governance reforms involving the establishment of external boards at university and giving powers to these boards to appoint the top university management could be another important factor accounting for the perceived high level of managerialism in Lithuanian universities.

Overall, our study shows that the earlier claims in the existing literature, arguing that a moderate convergence towards a market-oriented paradigm has taken place in Lithuanian higher education through several reforms introduced since the early 2000s (Dobbins, Leišytė, 2014), need to be revisited, as our findings demonstrate strong managerialism and significantly weakened academic self-governance in Lithuanian higher education. This raises questions for the future of the academic profession in Lithuania, especially regarding the conflict between managerialism, academic identities and professional autonomy of Lithuanian academics. Therefore, further research should examine how the changing governance and increase in managerialism in Lithuanian universities affect the academic profession and different areas of academic work – research, teaching, and external engagement.

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