

# Party Politics in Higher Education Policy

*Partisan Preferences, Coalition Positions and  
Higher Education Policy in Western Europe*

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## **Abstract**

Higher education underwent numerous changes in recent decades that have made it more prominent, on its own as well when it comes to its relevance and importance for other policy areas (e.g. economy, environment, energy). As a consequence, it is becoming a policy area that is of increasing political interest. This implies that political parties in parliamentary democracies are becoming more interested in higher education as a policy issue while they are also becoming more actively involved in higher education policy-making, in particular in comparison to the traditional policy-making approach in this area that relies more on bureaucracy, the involvement of experts or organised interests.

Political parties are the central partisan actors in parliamentary democracies, and their preferences potentially have a privileged role in policy-making in general and formulation of policy in particular. Given the aforementioned changes, with regard to salience and the politicisation of higher education, including political parties in higher education policy analysis might be necessary if one wants to do justice to contemporary dynamics in this area. This is not to assume that other actors do not matter in this process, but rather that a party perspective on higher education policy-making can be a valuable addition, as it allows the partisan political dynamics behind policy changes to be captured. This is particularly relevant given that academic knowledge on the role of parties for higher education policy is limited, and a party-political perspective is largely missing from the toolkit of higher education policy analysis. Additionally, most higher education policy studies begin their analysis at a point at which a government is already in place and such studies ignore the preceding negotiations about the government's agenda. Thus, to increase the knowledge base on higher education policy and to respond to the recent changes in this area, it is necessary to investigate whether a theoretical framework that links parties and their preferences to policy-making, adapted to the specificities of higher education policy, can provide valuable insights for higher education policy studies.

This study fills this gap by focusing on partisan preferences concerning higher education, formation of coalition positions and the influence of these positions on policy proposals. The central research question is how political parties and their preferences contribute to

policy-making in higher education. The core idea behind the analysis is that parties are expected to differ in their preferences in higher education policy, both with regard to using higher education for societal redistribution, and with regard to the public governance of higher education. These different preferences are based on the ideological background of political parties, as indicated by their belonging to a specific party family, and is also influenced by the context in which parties formulate their preferences. Furthermore, the differing preferences can be expected to influence policy-making activities of parties once they are in government.

The underlying intention and key problem is to investigate how parties from different party families vary in their preferences on higher education policy, how these preferences can be structured, how the preferences are translated into coalition positions, and the situations in which partisan preferences or coalition positions become relevant for policy proposals in the area of higher education. Therefore, the study contributes to the empirical and theoretical understanding of policy-making processes with an emphasis on the role of political parties in the area of higher education policy.

For its theoretical framework the study borrows concepts from political science as well as public policy, and employs them in the area of higher education policy analysis. First, the conceptual starting point is party divergence and the ‘partisan hypothesis’. While some studies argue that higher education policy is outside the realm of partisan competition, due (amongst other reasons) to a general trend towards educational expansion and increasing European policy coordination, this study highlights the idea that party families systematically differ in their preferences on higher education policy. These differences are in line with their ideological background and matching electorates. As higher education increases in prominence, parties use it more actively to realise their ideological preferences similar to the manner in which they realise other social policies. In this, it is argued that the differences between parties can be structured along two dimensions: one focusing on the redistributive characteristics and the other one focusing on the public governance of higher education. Generally speaking, left-wing parties are expected to favour a more expansive higher education system that is centrally controlled, while right-wing parties prefer a more restrictive higher education system whose control is organised de-centrally.

Second, theories of coalition formation have been used to study the transfer of partisan preferences to coalition positions. Multi-party coalitions are situations in which governing parties cannot simply transform their individual party preferences into policy proposals, but first have to negotiate and agree with the other parties on a common governmental agenda in the coalition agreement. This study therefore unpacks the process of transferring partisan preferences into coalition positions.

Third, public policy theories have been employed to describe the process of policy-making in coalition governments distinguishing situations in which a coalition has already agreed upon a policy in their agreement, and situations in which a coalition reacts to a new issue for which it does not have a joint position.

The empirical focus is on all relevant parties in parliamentary democracies in Western Europe, specifically in four country contexts (England, the Netherlands, Norway and the German *Bundesland* North-Rhine Westphalia). The study uses a qualitative comparative research design, relying on in-depth analysis of a limited number of cases to provide a robust understanding of an area that so far has not been sufficiently conceptualised. It uses original coding and qualitative content analysis of several types of documents (party manifestos, coalition agreements, and policy proposals) as well as a set of interviews with party officials who are experts on higher education policy.

The study demonstrates that party families do show differing preferences in higher education policy, both with regard to higher education's re-distributive characteristics and the public governance of higher education. These differing preferences are generally in aligned with the parties' ideology and respective electorates: parties from the family of social democrats, greens and anti-establishment parties have been found to prefer an expansive and centrally controlled higher education system; parties from the Liberal family prefer an expansive and de-centrally controlled higher education system, often with some form of private contribution to the costs of higher education; and parties from the Christian democratic and conservative family favour more restrictive and de-centrally controlled higher education. In the ensuing transfer of preferences to policy proposals in multi-party governments coalition agreements are of central importance, as they represent a way to

initiate substantial change through proactive policy-making and help to identify policies which are more likely to be tackled by the coalition during its term in office. However, they are also found to be based on negotiated coalition positions instead of partisan preferences. Thus, the coalition agreements have a mediating effect on the realisation of partisan preferences. The results clearly show that a partisan perspective can add important explanatory factors to studies of higher education policy, as it unpacks the formation and preferences of a government. Furthermore, by excluding political parties from such analyses, one ignores a group of actors that plays a crucial role especially in today's higher education policy. As parties have different preferences and become more interested in higher education policy, they will use their privileged position in policy formulation to shape higher education according to these preferences, and therefore the partisan composition of a government is an important factor in contemporary higher education policy-making.

## Sammendrag

Høyere utdanning har i løpet av de siste tiårene gjennomgått en rekke endringer som har ført til at feltet er blitt mer synlig, både når det gjelder egen relevans og betydning for andre politikkkfelt (for eksempel økonomi, miljø, energi). En konsekvens av denne utviklingen er at høyere utdanning har blitt et felt som har økende politisk interesse. Dette innebærer også at høyere utdanning har blitt en viktigere sak for politiske partier i parlamentariske demokratier. Politiske partier blir stadig mer aktivt involvert i politikkkutforming i høyere utdanning, særlig sammenlignet med den tradisjonelle måten politikken har blitt utformet på. Ofte har tradisjonen vært at byråkratiet spiller en betydelig rolle i politikkkutforming, gjerne med tett involvering av eksperter eller ulike organiserte interesser.

Politiske partier er sentrale aktører i parlamentariske demokratier, og deres preferanser spiller en viktig rolle i utforming av politikken generelt og formuleringen av sektorpolitikk spesielt. Dersom man ønsker å analysere dagens dynamikk på dette feltet, er det derfor nødvendig å inkludere politiske partier i analyser av hvordan politikken i høyere utdanning blir til. Dette betyr ikke at andre aktører er uviktige i denne prosessen, men heller at et parti-perspektiv på politikkkutforming i høyere utdanning kan være et verdifullt bidrag til forståelsen av utviklingen i sektoren. Forskningsbasert kunnskap om betydningen av politiske partier for politikkkutforming i høyere utdanning er begrenset, og et partipolitisk perspektiv kan sies å være fraværende i verktøykassen for politisk analyse av høyere utdanning. Ikke minst har et slikt perspektiv betydning for å bedre forstå selve utforming av politikken. Mange studier av politikken i høyere utdanning tar utgangspunkt i iverksettingsprosesser og har ofte ignorert forutgående forhandlinger som ledet frem til de beslutninger som satte den politiske agendaen. For å øke kunnskapsgrunnlaget innen politisk analyse av høyere utdanning, er det nødvendig å utvikle et teoretisk rammeverk som kan stimulere til komplementære innsikter på feltet.

Denne studien fyller dette rommet ved å studere og analysere ulike partipolitiske preferanser relatert til høyere utdanning, og hvordan dannelsen av ulike koalisjoner påvirker den endelige politikken på feltet. Den sentrale problemstillingen er hvordan bruken av et partipolitisk perspektiv kan bidra til å øke forståelse av den rolle politiske partier og deres

preferanser spiller i politikutformingene i høyere utdanning. Kjerneideen bak analysen er at det forventes at partiene har ulike preferanser når det gjelder høyere utdanning, både med hensyn til den rolle høyere utdanning spiller for samfunnsmessig omfordeling, og med hensyn til graden av offentlig styring av høyere utdanning. Disse preferansene er basert på den ideologiske basisen til politiske partier, noe som igjen relateres til deres tilhørighet til en bestemt gruppering av partier, og som også er påvirket av den konteksten som partiene formulerer sine preferanser i. Videre forventes det at ulike preferanser påvirker politikken partiene utformer når de er i regjering.

Den underliggende intensjonen og nøkkelproblemet er å undersøke hvordan partier fra forskjellige partigrupperinger varierer sine preferanser i politikken, hvordan disse preferansene kan være strukturert, hvordan preferansene eventuelt er oversatt til koalisjonsposisjoner, og i hvilke situasjoner partipreferanser eller koalisjonsposisjoner blir relevante for de konkrete politikkløslagene som fremmes på feltet. Studien bidrar altså til å styrke den empiriske og teoretiske forståelsen av politiske beslutningsprosesser på feltet høyere utdanning.

Studiens teoretiske rammeverk består av begreper og perspektiver hentet fra statsvitenskap og 'public policy'. Et sentralt konseptuelt utgangspunkt er begrepet partidivergens og det som på engelsk kalles 'the partisan hypothesis'. Mens noen studier argumenterer for at politikken i høyere utdanning er preget av konsensus og lite politisk uenighet, bl.a. på grunn av stort fokus på ekspansjon i tilbudet og økende grad av koordinering på europeisk nivå, forutsetter denne studien derimot at partigrupperinger har en systematisk variasjon i sine politiske preferanser – også innen høyere utdanning. Disse forskjellene antas å være i tråd med deres ideologiske basis og tilhørende velgergrupper. Det faktum at feltet høyere utdanning er blitt viktigere brukes aktivt av partier for å synliggjøre og realisere ideologiske preferanser. Denne fremgangsmåten kan gjenfinnes også på andre politikkløslag. I prinsippet tenkes det at forskjellene mellom partiene kan være strukturert langs to dimensjoner: For det første de re-distributive egenskapene til høyere utdanning, og for det andre i hvilken grad høyere utdanning skal eksponeres for offentlig styring. Generelt sett forventes det at mer venstreorienterte partier favoriserer et mer ekspansivt høyere utdanningssystem som også er sentralt styrt, mens mer høyreorienterte partier foretrekker et mer restriktivt høyere utdanningssystem der kontrollen også er desentralisert.

Et annet konseptuelt utgangspunkt for analysen er knyttet til teorier om koalisjonsdannelse. Analyser av koalisjonsdannelser har i mange studier i statsvitenskap blitt brukt for å studere overgangen fra partipreferanser til koalisjonsposisjoner. Tanken er at flerpartikoalisjoner oppstår i situasjoner der regjeringspartier ikke bare kan transformere sine individuelle partipreferanser til politikkforslag, men der de først må forhandle og bli enig med de andre partiene om en felles agenda i koalisjonsavtalen. Denne studien synliggjør dermed prosessen der partipreferanser transformeres til koalisjonsposisjoner.

Et tredje konseptuelt utgangspunkt i studien er hentet fra 'public policy' teorier og hvordan disse beskriver selve politikkutformingsprosessen i koalisjonsregjeringer. Her skilles det mellom situasjoner der en koalisjon allerede har avtalt en politikk i sin koalisjonsavtale, og situasjoner der en koalisjon responderer på eller tar stilling til en ny politisk sak hvor det i utgangspunktet ikke er determinert en felles posisjon.

De empiriske dataene studien bygger på er hentet fra fire parlamentariske demokratier i Vest-Europa (England, Nederland, Norge og den tyske delstaten Nordrhein-Westfalen). Studien benytter et kvalitativt komparativt forskningsdesign, basert på dybdeanalyse av et utvalgt antall case. Studien er basert på og har utviklet en unik koding og en detaljert kvalitativ innholdsanalyse av flere typer dokumenter (partiprogrammer, koalisjonsavtaler og politiske forslag). Disse dataene er komplementert med et sett av intervjuer med partifunksjonærer som har stor ekspertise på høyere utdanning.

Studien viser at partigrupperinger faktisk har ulike preferanser når det gjelder politikken på dette feltet, både med hensyn til de re-distributive egenskapene til høyere utdanning og graden av offentlig styring av sektoren. Generelt er disse ulike preferansene i tråd med partienes ideologi og deres respektive velgerkorps: Partier innen grupperinger som inkluderer sosialdemokrater, de grønne og 'anti-establishment' partiene synes å foretrekke et ekspansivt og sentralstyrt system for høyere utdanning. Partier fra mer liberale grupperinger foretrekker et ekspansivt og desentralisert system for høyere utdanning, gjerne med en form for privat støtte for å dekke kostnadene ved høyere utdanning. Partier fra mer kristelig-demokratiske og konservative partigrupperinger favoriserer en mer restriktiv og desentralisert politikk for høyere utdanning. Koalisjonsavtaler er av sentral betydning for

flerpartiregjeringer når det gjelder den påfølgende overføringen av partipreferanser til spesifikke politiske forslag. Slike avtaler representerer en mulighet for å få til substansielle endringer gjennom en mer proaktiv politikktutforming og identifiserer politiske grep som har større sannsynlighet for å få oppslutning av hele koalisjonen i løpet av embetsperioden. Noen koalisjonsavtaler er imidlertid også basert på forhandlede koalisjonsposisjoner i stedet for grunnleggende partipolitiske preferanser. Dermed har koalisjonsavtalene en medierende effekt på realiseringen av partipreferanser. Resultatene viser tydelig at et partipolitisk perspektiv kan tilføre viktige dimensjoner i analyser av politikken for høyere utdanning ettersom dette perspektivet også gir innsikt i de prosesser som ligger bak utformingen av en bestemt politikk. Ved å ekskludere politiske partier fra studier av endringer i politikken for høyere utdanning ignorerer man en aktørgruppe som synes å spille en meget sentral rolle. Politiske partier synes fremdeles å ha ulike preferanser når det gjelder politikken for høyere utdanning, og det kan antas at jo viktigere høyere utdanning blir som selvstendig politikkkfelt, jo mer vil partiene kunne bruke sin privilegerte posisjon for å forme sektoren i henhold til disse preferansene. Partisammensetningen av en regjering utgjør derfor en svært viktig faktor hvis man ønsker å forstå politikktutformingen i høyere utdanning.



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Getting along with your academic parents is a good foundation for a PhD project, but in my case I even had an exceptionally supportive and wonderful older academic sister. Martina

Vukasović had a significant role in me coming to Oslo, but she also helped me through the entire PhD process, from being my *fadder* in the early days, introducing me to the academic community, commenting on every paper that I wrote, sharing an office, and co-authoring several articles. Martina really was my third supervisor in recent years, and without all the discussions, joint venting of anger against theses, and laughter, I do not know whether I would have been able to keep my sanity during these years. My second academic sister Mari Elken also helped me a lot getting through the PhD. Her valuable comments on my work as well as her ability to lighten up every mood made the past few years much more enjoyable. I am also grateful to my mid-way as well as final reader Elin Allern. With her detailed and helpful comments, she ensured that my project was on-track, and also significantly contributed to making it more relevant towards my home discipline, political science. I additionally want to thank my academic uncle Bjørn Stensaker, whose door was always open whenever I needed feedback or someone to talk about my project. He provided me with valuable comments and I enjoyed our joint work very much.

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## **PART I - EXTENDED ABSTRACT**



# **1. Introduction**

The way in which political parties and their preferences for policy-making affect higher education policy is the prime focus of this dissertation. The underlying theoretical interest in undertaking this study was to examine how higher education policy-making as a process is influenced by partisan preferences, also in the context of coalition governments. Traditionally, higher education could be regarded as a specialised policy area that for a long time was characterised mainly by the central role of ministerial administration and bureaucracy in policy-making, and was strongly influenced by expert committees and organised sectoral interests (Paradeise, Reale, Goastellec, & Bleiklie, 2009). These actors were involved in the governance of a public sector that catered to a relatively small part of the population, and thus also used only a limited part of the public budget, due to the relatively selective access to higher education. Therefore, higher education policy was traditionally an area that was not particularly prominent in a political sense and thus also less politicised. The empirical contexts of this study are four cases in Western Europe, which include: England (the United Kingdom), the Netherlands, North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), and Norway.

## ***1.1. Rationale***

In most countries around the world, the political importance of higher education has increased over the last ten to fifteen years. Various factors have contributed to this development. First, there has been continuous massification of higher education, implying that an increasing percentage of the population is participating in higher education (Andres & Pechar, 2013). This has led to increased public (and private) investments in the sector (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Second, in a number of respects higher education has gradually become a policy area that is also more relevant for other policy areas, with the expectation that it will provide policy solutions and helps to address grand societal challenges (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2014). Finally, the move towards knowledge economies additionally strengthened the role for national economies of higher education and of research and innovation, (Maassen & Stensaker, 2011). All these factors led to greater political relevance of higher education and an increased politicisation of the area (Busemeyer, Franzmann, & Garritzmann, 2013). Additionally, the rise of concepts linked to New Public Management (NPM) (Paradeise, Bleiklie, et al., 2009; Paradeise, Reale, &

Goastellec, 2009) and a growing focus on the efficiency of public sectors combined with ideas about active welfare states (Gingrich, 2011, 2015), connected the development of higher education to political debates in other policy areas (Braun, 2008b). Thus, higher education became a more relevant issue in various policy arenas, and at the same time new actors became more active in policy-making for this sector.

One possible consequence of a growing salience and politicisation of a policy area is an increased interest of partisan actors in policy-making resulting in a potentially higher impact of these actors, especially in relation to state bureaucracy (Baekgaard, Blom-Hansen, & Serritzlew, 2014). Political parties are of high potential relevance in policy-making processes, as they are central actors in representative parliamentary democracies that through their preferences aggregate and transmit the public interest to policies (Dalton, Farrell, & McAllister, 2013). Thus, it can be argued that if a policy area becomes more important for (a larger part of) the electorate, parties can be expected to pay more attention to this area and become more actively involved in shaping policy. In relation to other actors in the policy process, parties have the advantage that they have control of central policy-making arenas. They organise legislative activity in the parliament and if they are successful in entering the government, they provide the personnel for the collegium of the government and the highest executive positions (Dalton et al., 2013). Parties can be constrained by their environment (including the structure of a public sector) or by other actors such as interest groups. However, if they focus on a policy area because it has become more politicised and salient their preferences can be expected to have a privileged position in this area's policy processes, especially with regard to processes in which policies are formulated, proposed, and legislatively decided.

Over the last fifteen to twenty years, research on higher education policy has especially focused on policy actors, such as the ministerial bureaucracy and organised sectoral interests (e.g. see: Enders, de Boer, & Weyer, 2013), or alternatively on the importance of existing politico-administrative structures (e.g. see: Bleiklie & Michelsen, 2013). Furthermore, governments have mainly been conceptualised as unitary entities with rather stable preferences. While the main underlying objective of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the role of political parties and their preferences in higher education policy-making, it is not assumed that other actors are unimportant in this process. Instead,



the study takes as its starting-point that a party perspective on higher education policy-making can be a valuable addition to the dominant analytic perspectives used in higher education policy studies, as it allows for the capture of the partisan political dynamics behind policy changes in this area, and unpacks a part of the policy process – the role of partisan preferences and the ideological composition of the government - which so far has been mainly treated as a ‘black box’.

## ***1.2. Theoretical foundation and research design***

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored in partisan politics approaches from political science. Three specific analytical perspectives have been combined to construct a theoretical framework that allows for the study of (1) the formulation and structure of partisan preferences, (2) the process of coalition building, and (3) subsequent policy-making in coalition governments. The underlying intention and key problems addressed are to investigate how parties from different party families vary in their preferences on higher education policy, how these preferences can be structured, as well as how they are translated into coalition positions, and the circumstances under which partisan preferences or coalition positions become relevant for policy proposals in the area of higher education.

The first of the three main components of the study’s theoretical framework is the party divergence theory (e.g. Hibbs, 1977). This approach assumes that political parties formulate systematically different preferences following their ideological background and matching electorates and, if they enter government, influence policy accordingly. In line with previous arguments about parties’ possible relevance in salient and politicised policy areas, the party divergence theory explains why parties prefer specific policies and how the preferences of different groups of parties, or party families, are structured. While there is an extensive body of literature on partisan differences in classically central policy areas, such as welfare or economic policy (e.g. Klingemann, Hofferbert, & Budge, 1994; Volkens, Bara, Budge, McDonald, & Klingemann, 2014), the existing party politics literature with regard to education and higher education policy is in general very limited (for an overview see: Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011; Gift & Wibbels, 2014), and few studies have specifically analysed partisan preferences on higher education (Garritzmann, 2014, 2015). All of these studies have in common that they focus on the question about how far higher education is used by parties to re-distribute wealth and create more socio-economic equality. In general,

these studies have come to the conclusion that parties have conflicting preferences in higher education, and that these preferences follow the classic left – right divide.

At the same time, political parties have recently been identified as promoting diverging preferences with regard to the way in which public sectors should be controlled or governed (e.g. Gingrich, 2011, 2015). As higher education witnessed significant changes in its public governance during the last fifteen to twenty years (e.g. Christensen, 2011; Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000; Paradeise, Reale, & Goastellec, 2009), this study broadens the commonly used re-distributive analytic perspective employed in studies on partisan higher education policy by adding another dimension of partisan conflict, namely the issue of how the governance arrangements between the state and higher education are organised. By analysing partisan preferences along both the re-distributive and public governance dimension, this study expands the conceptual understanding and the empirical knowledge on party positions with respect to higher education as a policy area. However, the results also hold the potential to be transferable to other areas of the welfare state, since a focus on partisan competition solely along a re-distributive dimension is a common approach in analysis of partisan policy preferences (e.g. Boix, 1998; Schmidt, 1996).

The second component of the theoretical framework is adopted from coalition theory and is used to explain what role partisan preferences play in forming governing coalitions in multi-party parliamentary democracies. The rationale behind this part of the framework is that governing coalitions are the most common form of government in Western Europe (Strøm, Müller, & Bergman, 2008). However, at the same time, coalition governments represent less likely circumstances for the direct enactment of partisan preferences, as a group of parties that enters government has to negotiate about and agree upon a common agenda for the following term, which is outlined in the coalition agreement. Therefore, to serve the aim of understanding the role of partisan preferences for higher education policy properly, it is necessary to include the process of the formation of coalition positions to determine how partisan preferences get translated into the coalition agreement.

The third part of the framework focuses on the different ways in which governing coalitions pursue policy-making activities. In this, two ideal-type alternatives can be identified: first a policy initiative is agreed upon in the coalition agreement, and second the government reacts to an issue that becomes relevant during its term in office and for which it does not

have a pre-negotiated position. The rationale for this is that in the case of where a coalition has already taken a policy position at the beginning of its term and included it in the coalition agreement, it can use its privileged position in the policy arena to push for a policy proposal that is in line with its position (Peters, Bovens, & Hart, 2001; Zohlnhöfer, 2009). In situations where the governing coalition has to react to an issue without a pre-negotiated agreement, its position is potentially weaker, since intra-governmental partisan conflicts are more likely in such a situation, giving more room for other parties or organised interests to derail discussions and prevent the acceptance of policy proposals by the government (Peters et al., 2001; Zohlnhöfer, 2009). For the framework of this study, the first alternative has been labelled *proactive policy-making*, while the second alternative has been referred to as *reactive policy-making*.

This theoretical approach is applied in a specific empirical setting. First, the thesis focuses on stable West European parliamentary democracies. These have been chosen because a similar historical background ensures a more comparable structure of partisan conflicts (Busemeyer et al., 2013), and parliamentary democracies are the common form of government in Western Europe. Second, for the process of transferring partisan preferences to policy proposals, the study focuses on coalition governments. Third, the analyses undertaken in this study are focused on the stage of policy formulation, since policy proposals are regarded as being documents in their own right, which value analysis without considering what follows them (March & Olsen, 1995, p.195). Finally, the study focuses on contemporary partisan dynamics in higher education policy, and therefore relies on recent data, thus excluding any analyses of historical trajectories.<sup>1</sup>

This study has used a qualitative comparative research design as well as qualitative methods to provide a detailed in-depth assessment of a small number of cases. Complementary to the more common comparisons that rely either on pre-coded data offered by, for example, the Manifesto Research Group / Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) (e.g. Ansell, 2010), or on expert surveys (e.g. Garritzmann, 2014), this thesis is based on an original coding of documents. As it focuses on one specific policy area, the study has sought to do justice to the level of detail of the information available in the original documents, and thus puts a

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<sup>1</sup> The oldest document in the corpus for this study is from 2005, while the most recent one is from 2013.

strong focus on the internal validity of the results. Furthermore, the focus on coalition agreements as central documents for incoming governments that partly replace or at least mediate the transfer of partisan preferences into policies represents an expansion of the usual analyses in party politics.

These theoretical, empirical, and methodological choices will be elaborated in Chapters 2 and 3. Here it suffices to state that these choices also reflect the intended theoretical, methodological, and empirical aims of this study. Given that this thesis is based on three separate articles, this extended abstract will present the overall research process, focusing on the overarching research questions, theoretical framework, research design, and findings. This introductory chapter will continue with a presentation of the study's research problem and research questions, as well as its delimitations and structure.

### ***1.3. Research questions***

The core idea behind this dissertation is that parties are expected to have differing preferences in higher education policy, and that the differing preferences are expected to influence the policy-making activities of parties once they are in government. The null hypothesis to this is that parties do not have differing preferences in higher education policy, but rather they converge to similar policy positions. Given the focus on the relevance of a partisan perspective for getting a better understanding of higher education policy-making the main research question guiding this thesis is:

*How do political parties and their preferences contribute to policy-making in higher education?*

This main research question has been addressed in the three articles that form the core of this thesis, and in an encompassing way in this extended abstract. To structure the overall thesis, the main research question has been divided into three sub-questions that reflect the research articles:

- 1. How can partisan preferences in Western Europe with regard to both higher education's re-distributive potential and its public governance be conceptualised, and what expectations can be formulated concerning different party families?*

This research question is addressed in the first article. It is a conceptual question, the answer to which connects the thesis with the existing body of literature, introduces political parties as relevant actors for the understanding of higher education policy-making, and presents the theoretical framework for the study of partisan positions in higher education.

2. *What preferences do parties formulate in their election manifestos, and how far are these preferences in line with conceptual expectations derived from the parties' ideological foundations in party families?*

To answer this empirical research question, which guides the second article, the conceptual expectations towards different party families with regard to higher education policy along the re-distributive as well as the public governance dimension<sup>2</sup> are reiterated and indicators are developed to make them measurable in texts. Afterwards, the expectations are tested using originally coded empirical material in the form of election manifestos of all relevant parties from four countries.

3. *How do partisan preferences transfer to policy proposals under conditions of coalition government, and how do partisan preferences and coalition positions influence policy formulation in situations of proactive or reactive policy-making?*

This final research question guides the third article of the thesis. Taking the differing partisan preferences in higher education as the starting point, this question shifts the emphasis towards the process of policy-making. Here, the focus is on situations of coalition government. In order to answer this question, first the match between the higher education policy preferences of governing parties, as expressed in their election manifestos, and the higher education policy part of the respective coalition agreement has been empirically analysed. Second, based on the conceptual differentiation between proactive and reactive policy-making, exemplary incidents of both processes have been studied focusing on the role of partisan preferences versus coalition positions with regard to the content of policy proposals as well as the question of whether the proposal was successfully introduced into the policy-making process.

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<sup>2</sup> Both analytic dimensions are introduced in greater detail in Chapter 3.

In designing this study it was necessary to make several choices concerning the empirical focus or the research methods, amongst other things. These choices have implications for the study, which need to be addressed. First, the focus of this thesis is on situations of coalition government and on parliamentary democracies. While these are not the only possible governing arrangements, they are the most common form of government especially in Western Europe (Strøm et al., 2008). Additionally, contrary to one-party governments, coalition governments represent situations in which the transfer of partisan preferences into policies is actually less likely, due to the need to agree with the other governing parties on a common set of coalition positions. Thus, if it is possible to identify successful cases of transfer of partisan preferences into policy proposals in these situations, it also makes a strong argument for the relevance of partisan preferences for higher education policy in situations of one-party governments. To limit the variation in the compared cases, the type of government was therefore kept constant and only different coalition governments were compared.

Second, this study unpacks a part of the policy process – partisan preferences and the ideological composition of the government - which so far has been mainly treated as a ‘black box’. Therefore, following Gornitzka’s (1999) call for an analytical separation of policy formation and implementation, the thesis stops at the policy formation ‘stage’ of the policy process. Thus, due also to limits of time and space, it does not include the subsequent stages of the policy process. In this, policy proposals are regarded as documents in their own right that value analysis even without considering what follows them (March & Olsen, 1995, p.195). As parties have a privileged position in the political arenas in which policy formulation takes place, it can be expected that their role is more important in this stage. Therefore, policy enactment and implementation have not been studied. The units of analysis for this thesis are political parties, and the preferences of each party have been analysed at two consecutive elections to increase the stability of the dataset. Comparisons between parties both inter- and intra-country were conducted afterwards. Finally, in the process of tracing the follow-up to the differing partisan preferences, different governing coalitions have been analysed, introducing a new analytical level to the study, while at the same time referring back to the parties’ positions.

The empirical focus of the study is Western Europe and the countries included are Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom. However, while in the Netherlands and Norway the country and the higher education system are congruent, higher education policy in Germany is within the authority of the *Bundesländer*. Thus the study will focus on one of the *Bundesländer*, that is, North Rhine-Westphalia, the *Bundesland* with the largest population. In the United Kingdom the focus is on England, as Scotland and partially also Wales have the authority to define separate higher education policies. The rationale behind this empirical setting lies in the role that parties play in the governance of these countries as all of them are stable multi-party democracies. Furthermore, while all these countries share a common socio-cultural background and thus a similar structure of partisan conflicts, they represent a variation in higher education systems and institutional settings in relation to which parties formulate their preferences. A more detailed description of the rationale behind the selection of cases will be presented in Chapter 4. As an additional limitation, the analysis following the third research question focused on three of the higher education systems, excluding England, since coalition governments are extraordinary situations in England and it was also not possible to collect necessary interview data.<sup>3</sup>

The main data sources are documents, including election manifestos for all relevant parties in the four countries, coalition agreements and policy documents. Furthermore, to investigate the role of the analysed manifestos and other documents especially for the transfer of partisan preferences to policies, interviews were conducted in three of the four countries with experts in the area of higher education policy from two major political parties.

#### ***1.4. Structure of the thesis***

This thesis consists of three research articles that have been published or are in the process of being reviewed, and this extended abstract. While the three articles represent separate building blocks of the project, the extended abstract itself serves several purposes. First, it provides an overview of the research project as a whole, presenting the motivation, background, overarching theoretical framework, and research design. Second, the extended abstract provides the links between the three articles clarifying how each article contributes to the overall research aim. Finally, the extended abstract provides a space to address details

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<sup>3</sup> More information on this can be found in chapter 4.

of the study that are under-reported in the articles as well as presenting some overarching conclusions of the project as a whole.

An article-based doctoral research project comes with specific challenges, two of which need to be highlighted in the context of this thesis. First, all research projects are moving constructs as they progress and the thinking of the participating researcher evolves. Contrary to projects that lead to the production of a monograph, article-based theses produce publications earlier in the process of the project, leading to the possibility that some of the published ideas and interpretations will be subjected to further development as the project continues. This can be illustrated by the following example. While in the first article the conceptual expectation for the preferences of Christian democratic parties on the public governance dimension was a support for more centralised governance, in the second article this expectation was amended towards a more nuanced preference. This change is related to the realisation that the ideological underpinning of Christian democratic parties is actually more complex than was presented in the first article.

A second challenge that is specific to this research project is that the project contributes to on-going discussions in different, but partly overlapping scholarly communities: higher education studies, party politics and public policy. Therefore, the three articles produced in the framework of this project have been submitted to journals linked to these communities. However, the different target audiences of the journals lead to differences in which parts of explanations are taken for granted and which ones have to be argued for. This causes some differentiation among the lines of argumentation presented in the articles produced in this project. Additionally, the peer-review processes for each article has the potential to veer the articles in differing directions creating the challenge for this extended abstract to reconnect the underlying ideas properly. By presenting the overarching research aim, discussing the role of each article for the thesis, and highlighting the results and implications of the project as a whole, this extended abstract strengthens the links between the articles by placing them in the context of the overall thesis.

This extended abstract is structured along six main chapters. This first chapter gives an introduction to both the doctoral research project as a whole and the extended abstract as a part of the project. The second chapter positions the research project in relation to the policy area that it focuses on by reviewing the relevant sections of the existing higher education



policy literature and highlighting how the thesis relates to, and advances, the existing studies. Chapter 3 provides the theoretical framework for the overall research project. It presents an overview of the two-dimensional analytical framework, the matching theoretical expectations of the preferences of different party families and the conceptualisation of the process of transferring partisan preferences to policy proposals. The fourth chapter introduces the research design, methodological tools, and data used for this project. Doing so, it outlines the ontological and epistemological foundations of the thesis, argues for the qualitative design chosen as well as the data used to answer the research questions. Finally, the rationale for the case selection and issues linked to reliability as well as different aspects of validity, and research ethical considerations are discussed. Chapter 5 provides a brief a summary of the three research articles that are part of this project. This includes an explanation of how the articles relate to one another as well as the role each article and its results play for the overall project. Finally, based on the results of the articles and the questions guiding the thesis, the last chapter presents the findings of the research project. Furthermore, it addresses limitations of the thesis, discusses these findings in relation to the relevant literature as well as highlights the contributions of the thesis, and proposes avenues for future research.

## **2. Positioning the study in higher education research**

Before the theoretical framework for this study is presented in Chapter 3, this chapter highlights the parts of the higher education policy literature in which a partisan view on policy-making might add a valid and relevant additional analytical perspective. Therefore, this chapter will provide a brief overview of the relevant literature, the focus of which is on potential links between this study and certain academic research traditions.

For the literature review, those studies that addressed change processes in relation to higher education policy and governance on a system level especially offer a good starting point (Tight, 2012, p.7). As change processes in higher education are linked most of the time to shifts in the regulatory environment of higher education institutions, such as reforms of the legal or funding framework, political parties as main actors in the legislative and executive process could be expected to influence these processes. The literature on change processes in higher education policy and governance can be divided into roughly four strands: (1) global and European processes and their influence on higher education policy, (2) national steering modes for higher education and the role of NPM, (3) changes in the structure of higher education systems as well as the belief system related to higher education, and (4) the influence of the politico-administrative structure on higher education. These four categories are not mutually exclusive, and due to their inter-relatedness, it is possible that specific studies span two or more of these categories. However, they provide a structure for the discussion that follows.

### ***2.1. Global and European processes in higher education policy***

The literature on the influence of global processes on higher education often relates to the claim that there is a worldwide trend towards educational expansion (Schofer & Meyer, 2005) as well as to so-called global reform scripts for higher education, which are assumed to result in uniform pressure for change and converging developments (Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, & Schofer, 2007). This perspective expects increased interaction between nations, growing importance of international organisations as well as dominant norms create these global scripts, which are argued to become prescriptions for policy changes throughout the world. It is expected that these scripts will override both specific traits of nations as well as

policy sectors. In such a research perspective there is only limited room for autonomous actors, such as political parties, to shape higher education policy due to the expected convergence. If all countries move towards similar higher education policies, due to global scripts, then higher education is not an area that can be actively shaped by parties. Therefore, if the ‘global scripts’ hypothesis is valid, parties should neither differ on their proposed higher education policies nor should changes in the composition of the government matter for higher education policy output.

The validity of the strong convergence argument inherent in the concept of global scripts is not uncontested. By comparing different perspectives on policy change and reform in higher education, Gornitzka and Maassen (2014) argue that even if global scripts exist, direct one-to-one transfer of these scripts is unlikely. Rather, it can be expected that national and sectoral filters will adapt global reform scripts to local realities, leading to differing outcomes even in regions with a high degree of policy integration (Christensen, Gornitzka, & Maassen, 2014, p.46; Paradeise, 2012). This perspective that acknowledges both global trends and local realities, provides a more convincing empirical track-record than the strict convergence assumption of the global scripts argument. Furthermore, the strong focus on structure, inherent in the classic institutionalist perspective of the global scripts, disregards the possibility of agency (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). Thus, the more nuanced approach that acknowledges the possibility of national or sectoral filters, as discussed by Christensen et al. (2014), is more encompassing and allows for the combination of dominant global ideas, local structure, and actors as explanatory factors for change in higher education. In this approach, political parties can be seen as parts of the national filters that handle pressures for change and converging developments by picking up and addressing issues linked to these pressures in their national political arena.

Another strand of research that addresses supranational developments and their impact on national higher education policy is the extensive literature on Europeanisation and multi-level governance of higher education, both in general and concerning the Bologna Process in particular.<sup>4</sup> While some studies that are situated in this area focus solely on the

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<sup>4</sup> This area of research has a strong European focus, mainly due to the unprecedented potential for international policy coordination that the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area offer.

supranational level or intergovernmental dynamics and are thus of less interest for this thesis (e.g. Corbett, 2003; Huisman, Stensaker, & Kehm, 2009), others focus on the interaction of different levels of policy-making and the impact of the supranational on the national level. These studies offer potential links to the topics explored in this thesis. On the one hand, political parties are potentially exposed to supranational influence when they participate in national governments, and might be more or less inclined to comply with them. On the other hand, once parties are in government, they also have the potential to shape the supranational developments by uploading their preferences to the supranational level.

Both Tomusk (2006) and Musselin (2009) show, for example, that national governments used the label of the Bologna Process to promote national higher education policy objectives and adapted and re-nationalised the supranational reform to their local reality. Furthermore, Vukasovic (2013a, 2013b) argues that European initiatives in higher education can have an impact on domestic policy change, especially in situations where the European initiatives provide clear prescriptions combined with high consequences of compliance. Both examples stress the influence of European initiatives for national policy change, but treat the national policy arena with its potentially shifting political alliances among parties in government as a 'black box'. In a similar way, the literature that claims to observe convergence in higher education policy due to the influence of the Bologna Process (Dobbins, 2015; Dobbins & Knill, 2009, 2014; Dobbins, Knill, & Vögtle, 2011; Kwiek, 2004; van Damme, 2009; Vögtle, Knill, & Dobbins, 2011; Vögtle & Martens, 2014), also tends to ignore the political interplay between political parties with differing ideological backgrounds that happens on the national level. Both strands of the literature treat national governments as unitary actors that have a stable set of national preferences. In this they ignore the political interaction between parties with very different ideological backgrounds that is the basis for most democratic governments. This disregards the possibility that with regard to international or supranational policy initiatives, national partisan actors can also act as filters. A focus on political parties for higher education policy, therefore, provides an additional explanatory factor for diverging national reactions to such policy initiatives.

## ***2.2. Higher education governance and steering***

The second strand of literature in higher education studies, related to this thesis, covers debates on higher education governance, national steering approaches as well as the role of

NPM for higher education. Research in this area has a longer tradition than the previous one, mainly because reforms of the classical relationship between the state and higher education started well before processes of globalisation or the Bologna Process and Europeanisation of higher education became prominent topics.

One of the classical works in higher education studies, Burton Clark's "The Higher Education System" (1983), even then discussed different forms of steering arrangements in relation to higher education. Clark identifies three main forces, which influence this arrangement: (1) the state authority, (2) the academic oligarchy, and (3) the market. He sees the steering arrangement of each higher education system as a unique combination of these factors, which is influenced by the historical development of the respective higher education system. While Clark's work rightfully points towards the importance of state authority, i.e. the government, for the framework in which higher education operates, he mainly focuses on the role of bureaucracy and disregards partisan political actors.

This specific view of the state is also reflected in more recent work on higher education steering. In the wake of the growing prominence of NPM-inspired governance approaches, several authors re-conceptualised the relationship between the state and higher education. Van Vught (1997), for example, differentiates the classical form of direct state control over higher education from the more recent state supervision. While the first one is characterised by direct involvement of state actors, such as the ministry, in many decision related to higher education, the latter one describes a situation where the state only ensures that higher education is held accountable and fulfils its expected duties without directly interfering with it. Van Vught's idea of state supervision is thus in line with arguments of a growing reliance on markets for the steering of higher education (Dill, 2007; Teixeira, Jongbloed, Dill, & Amaral, 2004), and his approach is also reflected in the work of Neave (2009, 2012), who identifies the rise of the "evaluative state" that shifts its focus from direct process-control towards output evaluation. While acknowledging that there are two different rationales for the rise of the "evaluative state", one based on a preference for NPM-related ideas of efficiency and another related to ideas of participatory democracy, Neave's work also does not address the potential of partisan political influences on a potential re-arrangement of the state – higher education relationship (Neave, 2009).

While van Vught and Neave focus in their work on the general decrease in direct state influence on higher education, other authors paint a more diverse picture. Paradeise and several groups of colleagues published a set of contributions highlighting three processes that in their view occur in parallel and lead to differences in national higher education steering arrangements (Paradeise, Bleiklie, et al., 2009; Paradeise, Reale, & Goastellec, 2009; Paradeise, Reale, Goastellec, et al., 2009): (1) an NPM-inspired focus on markets and quasi-markets as steering tools for higher education, (2) an institutionalisation of collective action in the framework of Network Governance, and (3) a Neo-Weberian approach focusing on the functions of governance and the formalisation of new aspects of public activities. In their view, these different approaches coexist in the higher education sector with varying national emphases leading to “different forms of expression of public authorities, different ways of being a policy actor” (Paradeise, Reale, Goastellec, et al., 2009, p.246). Although these contributions present a more refined concept of changes in the state – higher education relationship, they also have a more structural focus and ignore the potential for parties to matter in these choices as well as the possibility of differing partisan preferences on the identified change processes.

The contributions that have been presented so far focus on general changes in the state’s approach to govern higher education as a public sector. A second strand in this literature addresses the implications of these shifts for higher education. While this strand focuses more on the receiving end of the state – higher education relationship, the universities, it also presents assumptions and conceptualisations for changes taking place on the side of the government. Christensen (2011) discusses the impact of NPM-inspired reforms on the autonomy of higher education institutions and in line with the works of van Vught (1997) or Neave (2009, 2012), finds that it leads to an increase in the formal amount of autonomy of universities, and thus the distance from direct government control. At the same time, Christensen highlights that new forms of accountability and reporting emerged with this newly gained autonomy, and that this has led to shifts within the institutions, which strengthened the central administration and management vis-à-vis the academics. In a similar vein, Enders et al. (2013) have analysed changes in university autonomy in the Netherlands and their impact on the performance of these universities. They found that due to recent reforms, Dutch universities gained managerial autonomy while at the same time,

they lost institutional autonomy due to governmental re-regulation and accountability demands.

These findings provide a link to the topic of this thesis. Shifts in the relationship between higher education institutions and the government, as expressed in the growth of accountability measures or the partly re-regulation through a ministry, for example, are political decisions. Therefore, if political parties are found to have distinct preferences on the public governance of higher education, it is sensible to expect that shifts in the government will lead to shifts in the preferred state – higher education relationship. Thus, political shifts can create processes of layering of different steering approaches, which could be the explanation for the partly mixed picture presented in the above mentioned studies. If this is the case, countries are more likely to produce hybrids of differing models (Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013) rather than finding a pure public governance model.

While the literature that has been discussed so far has treated governments mainly as unitary actors and turned a blind-eye to potentially differing preferences concerning higher education governance, the work of Johan Olsen points towards differing preferences on how to steer higher education. Both in his early analysis of different governance approaches to public sectors in general (Olsen, 1988) and in his more recent work on differing views on contemporary European universities (Olsen, 2007) he stresses the existence of inherently different steering approaches. By raising the question “What kind of University for what kind of society?” (Olsen, 2007, p.25) he points to the potential competition between political actors on the question of how to govern higher education. If universities can serve as a tool to shape society, and if the governance mode used for higher education reflects inherently different approaches to public sectors, it can be expected that political parties will show diverging preferences in relation to this question. While Olsen addresses parties only marginally in his argumentation, his work as well as the further adaptation of his concepts to higher education as presented by Gornitzka and Maassen (2000), provide a clear link to the arguments put forward in this thesis and are addressed in Chapter 3.

### ***2.3. Changes in the structure and belief system linked to higher education***

The third part of the higher education literature related to this thesis, addresses changes in the political salience of higher education as a policy area, shifts in the belief systems linked to higher education as well as coordination problems in higher education governance. Higher education as a policy area has become more complex in the past decades. On the one hand, processes of horizontalisation have made the sector more diverse; on the other hand, coordination of the sector has become more challenging, as higher education is linked to a growing number of other policy areas (Braun, 2008a, 2008b). This growing complexity and increased need for coordination puts pressure on political actors to steer and shape the higher education sector in a way that produces the most effective outcomes. Furthermore, higher education has traditionally been a comparatively marginal policy area that gained additional importance in the last few decades, especially in the framework of the knowledge economy (Gornitzka, 2008; Maassen & Stensaker, 2011). With its growing salience, higher education is found to be treated as being less special and increasingly expected to deliver solutions to problems in other policy areas (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2011; Vukasovic et al., 2012). This is also linked to the emergence of a plurality of belief systems around higher education, which leads to a reorganisation of the relationship between state, society and universities (Gornitzka, Maassen, Olsen, & Stensaker, 2007). Due to this growth in political relevance, the increasing importance for other policy areas and the multitude of visions for higher education, it can be expected that political parties will become more interested in shaping higher education according to their own preferences. However, so far this process has not been investigated in detail in the literature.

### ***2.4. The influence of the politico-administrative structure on higher education***

The final strand of higher education literature that is related to this thesis addresses differences in higher education policy between countries, and traces those differences to structural arrangements. Bleiklie and Michelsen (2013), for example, analyse higher education policy in different European countries and argue that differences in the politico-administrative structure have deep implications for policy outcomes. However, the authors also acknowledge that the relationship between structure and policy outcome is partly



ambiguous and that the role of actors as an explanatory factor needs to be addressed in more detail. In a similar vein, Kauko (2013) argues that the possibility for change in higher education policy depends on opportune moments and the favourability of situations for said change. According to him, dynamics in higher education are often related to changes that happen outside of the realm of the higher education system and are linked to changing positions of actors in certain policies.

Overall, all four strands within the higher education policy literature provide ample links towards the topic discussed in this thesis. By focusing on political parties the analysis in this thesis addresses a group of actors that so far has been somewhat of a blind spot in higher education studies. In particular, the few analyses that address the influence of parties on higher education are either single case studies (e.g. Stern, 2000; Tapper, 2007), or focus mainly on their role for changes in public funding and treat them as one of several independent variables without discussing their differing preferences (for examples addressing North America see: Dar, 2012; McLendon, Hearn, & Mokher, 2009; McLendon & Ness, 2003; Rexe, 2015a, 2015b; Tandberg, 2010). Thus, this thesis attempts to overcome the “benign neglect” (McLendon, 2003, p.186) that the politics of higher education has suffered as a field of study, and aims at contributing to our understanding of the possible role of political parties in shaping higher education policy.

### **3. Theoretical framework<sup>5</sup>**

This thesis borrows conceptual tools from political science, especially party politics and public policy, combines them into a theoretical framework which has then been applied to the field of higher education. To analyse partisan preferences in higher education the framework is anchored in the concepts of party divergence as well as the ‘partisan hypothesis’. Additionally, theories on the formation of multi-party governments provide explanations for the creation of coalitions and the way in which they formalise their positions in coalition agreements. Finally, the subsequent process of policy-making is conceptualised with the help of parts of the public policy literature that distinguish between different policy-making circumstances based on the existence of pre-negotiated policy positions of a government.

#### ***3.1. Party divergence and the ‘partisan hypothesis’***

One possible conceptualisation of politics describes it as involving three levels: (1) the micro level of individual voters, (2) the meso level of political organisations, and (3) the macro level of nation states (Dalton et al., 2013). This thesis focusses mainly on the meso level, specifically on the role of political parties and their link to macro level policies in the area of higher education. Therefore, the unit of analysis for this thesis consists of political parties with differing ideological background in different countries and higher education systems. Political parties are thus seen as central organisations that provide input to the political system (Easton, 1965), either directly, based on their own ideology, or as transmitters for their electorate or other organised societal interest groups. At the same time, through their participation in parliament and the government, parties are also part of the process of governing. Thus, they can be seen as both ‘transmission belts’ for social demands and as strategic actors that use policies to cater to and consolidate their electoral base (Busemeyer, 2009).

Contrary to the classical Downsian idea of party convergence towards a median voter (Downs, 1957)<sup>6</sup>, this thesis takes its starting point in the concept of party divergence

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<sup>5</sup> Parts of the theoretical framework have already been outlined in the articles that belong to this thesis.

(Grofman, 2004; Kitschelt, 2000), the idea that ‘parties matter’ and more precisely the ‘partisan hypothesis’ (Hibbs, 1977; Schmidt, 1996; Tufte, 1978). This concept expects that different political parties hold divergent political positions, due to (1) their ideological background, and (2) electorates that match this background, while also being distinguished by their socio-economic characteristics. Parties are then expected to transform their ideological predispositions into policies thus also aggregating the interests of their electorate. As Hibbs (1977, p.1470) formulates it: “[...] *differences in the economic interests and preferences of income and occupational groups are reflected in the contrasting positions towards various economic goals associated with left- and right-wing political parties.*” In this understanding parties can be seen as both vote-maximizing, trying to attract as much electoral support as possible, as well as policy-maximizing, attempting to realise the largest number of their ideological preferences (Strøm & Müller, 1999).

Depending on the level of analysis and the conceptual entry point, there are two possible ways to study political parties and what drives them to take certain positions. First, the bottom-up approach focuses on the preferences of voters and sees the relation between voters and parties as a principal - agent relationship in which parties as agents align their preferences with those of their voters (Strøm & Müller, 1999). Second, the top-down approach understands parties as actors that are driven by their ideological background and that formulate their policy preferences accordingly (Strøm & Müller, 1999). While these approaches are not necessarily contradictory or exclusive, as there is a logic connection between a party’s electorate and its ideological basis, it is important to clarify the analytical starting point for this study. This thesis will follow the second approach and will focus on parties as organisations with a specific ideological background, as expressed, for example, in the idea of different families of parties (Mair & Mudde, 1998). While this does not exclude a party’s electorate as a rationale for partisan preferences, it reiterates the analytic focus on parties as units of analysis. Given the comparative component of this thesis, it will follow the party family approach because as Mair and Mudde (1998, p.212) point out: “[...] *the adoption of some notion of party families is a sine qua non of comparative research, because it is only by identifying links and equivalences among parties in different polities*

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<sup>6</sup> For an application of the median voter theorem to higher education policy see Dar (2012).

*that we can get a better sense of what should and what should not be compared or of what is like and unlike.”*

The categorisation of political parties using party families is a common procedure in comparative research and the approach has its background in the classical work on societal cleavages as foundational structures behind modern party systems (see: Inglehart, 1984; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan, 2009). Lipset and Rokkan’s central idea behind this is that the limited number of types of parties that historically emerged in Western Europe is an expression of the stabilisation and relevance of core societal cleavages, as political parties can only differ and therefore compete along these conflict lines. This foundational concept also formed the basis for several other classical analyses of political parties that either implicitly or explicitly developed or used a conceptualisation of different party families (e.g. Beyme, 1982; Duverger, 1972; Seiler, 1980).<sup>7</sup> Based on the arguments made by Mair and Mudde (1998) a party family is classified by a combination of (a) its origin, linked to the Rokkanian idea of cleavages, and (b) its ideology, thus first and foremost addressing what parties are and not what they do (Mair, 1997). This allows for members of the same party family in different national contexts to develop differing preferences or electoral programs without questioning their belonging to a specific family, but rather focusing on the influence of a given institutional and national setting on the development of a given party. As Schmidt (1996, p.155) formulates it:

*“[...] partisan theory is premised upon the assumption that the structure, the process and the outcome of the [political] market are contingent upon institutional and cultural circumstances which vary from country to country. Therefore, the emphasis in the partisan hypothesis is on a comparative approach to the study of the political market.”*

In general, differences between political parties can be captured and illustrated by referring to a spatial model of party competition, which in its simple form aligns parties along one

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<sup>7</sup> While there has been a lively debate in political science on the question, whether the cleavage concept is still relevant in today’s societies that have moved towards more individualised voters who are less determined by their belonging to larger social groups or classes (e.g. Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 1992), numerous more recent studies point to lasting effects of cleavages even in today’s party systems (e.g. Busemeyer et al., 2013; Knutsen, 2013).

dimension between left and right (Downs, 1957; Stokes, 1963). While more recent studies argue for the multi-dimensionality of partisan competition (e.g. Bonoli & Häusermann, 2009; Häusermann, Picot, & Geering, 2013), the classical one-dimensional division between left-wing and right-wing parties is still used extensively and is also found to be a good proxy for ideological core issues that summarise diverse political positions (J. Huber & Inglehart, 1995; Walczak, van der Brug, & de Vries, 2012). Therefore, behind the label of a left-wing or a right-wing party are ideological core ideas mostly concerning economic policies that manifest in a “[...] reversal in the relative preferences of the parties regarding various economic goals [e.g. full employment versus price stability] as one moves from left to right across the political spectrum.” (Hibbs, 1977, p.1471). This differentiation can also be translated in the difference between left-wing parties that favour a strong and active role of the state including re-distribution through welfare measures, and right-wing parties that focus on economic growth and a more limited role of the state, regardless of the resulting distributive effects (Boix, 1997; Castles & Obinger, 2007).

### **3.2. The ‘partisan hypothesis’ in higher education policy**

While there is ample literature analysing partisan preferences for more core policy areas, such as labour market or fiscal policy (e.g. Volkens et al., 2014), we know considerably less about partisan positions outside of these core areas. Even though higher education plays a crucial role in many political processes, political science has so far only given it a limited amount of attention. However, recent years have seen some calls for advancements on this topic (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011; Gift & Wibbels, 2014), and there are several studies that address the politics of higher education. It needs to be kept in mind though that this thesis is mainly interested in partisan preference and not in policy output, contrary to the ‘parties matter’ literature. One of the key arguments of this thesis is that before getting to the analysis of policy output we have first to get a better understanding of the dynamics behind partisan preferences and policy formation.

Based on the previous more general observations on the ‘partisan hypothesis’, and the existing studies on partisan conflicts on higher education, this section will build a theoretical framework for the assessment of partisan preferences that consist of two dimensions. The first dimension addresses re-distributive party conflicts in higher education, while the second dimension focuses on partisan preferences on public governance.

### **3.2.1. The re-distributive dimension in higher education**

An important pre-requisite for assessing partisan politics in higher education is to examine whether higher education policy actually is regarded as sufficiently salient for parties to take diverging positions and make them transparent, for example, in their manifestos. An analysis shows that in recent years (1) higher education policy becomes more politicised, (2) parties provide positions on higher education, and (3) that these positions diverge (Busemeyer et al., 2013). However, not all parties give higher education the same amount of attention and in particular, anti-establishment parties at the fringes of the political spectrum are found rather to neglect the issue (Ansell, 2010). Unfortunately, all these studies are based on CMP data, which, as mentioned before, is not the best basis for assessing partisan preferences on higher education policy. However, expert survey data reported in the work of Garritzmann (2014) also support the assessment that parties do hold distinct policy positions in higher education.

The majority of the existing studies that follow a partisan perspective and include higher education policy find a partisan effect that is similar to other areas of social policy. This literature has as a premise that macroeconomic and welfare policies are seen to have varying re-distributive effects on a society, and since political parties promote their specific preferences, they can be expected to position themselves accordingly (Gingrich, 2011, p.24f). In this, left-wing parties are expected to favour re-distributive activities of the state through support for low income groups, higher welfare spending and pro-employment macroeconomic policies, while right-wing parties, on the other hand, support more restrictive social transfers and pro-investor macroeconomic policies such as price stability, thus catering to more affluent parts of the electorate (Gingrich, 2011; Hicks & Swank, 1992). These conceptualised partisan preferences have been supported both by empirical research on party manifestos (e.g. Volkens et al., 2014) and by analyses of policy outputs of governments with differing partisan compositions (e.g. Boix, 1997; Castles & Obinger, 2007). In accordance with these approaches, most of the studies focusing on higher education link left-wing parties in government to more public spending on higher education, compared with right-wing parties, and explain this with the re-distributive potential of publically funded education (e.g. Busemeyer, 2007; Castles, 1989; Schmidt, 2007). Furthermore, social democratic parties in government are found to be linked to increased public spending on higher education, which is explained with a combination of re-

distributive policies as well as a shift of social democratic parties towards a middle-class electorate and supply-side policies (Busemeyer, 2009). Additionally, others show that the partisan composition of the government is linked to the level of private spending for higher education, and that conservative governments lead to increases in private spending (Wolf & Zohlnhöfer, 2009). Overall, this group of studies approaches partisan competition on higher education with assumptions about partisan preferences that are similar to other areas of the welfare state.

This congruence between partisan politics in higher education and the welfare state is reiterated in recent studies that focus on the historical developments of welfare states and education systems. In these studies, the development of welfare state regimes is found to be linked to a parallel development of education systems and skill regimes, including higher education, and the same party coalitions that support certain welfare states are also found to have similar preferences concerning education (Busemeyer, 2015; Willemsse & de Beer, 2012). Thus, based on this literature, one can deduce expectations concerning partisan positions towards the re-distributive dimension of party competition on higher education based on a party's ideological preferences linked to the welfare state. However, one has to exercise caution when doing so since re-distributive activities through the welfare state aim at achieving equality of outcomes, while education systems work towards equality of opportunities (Wilensky, 1975). Therefore, partisan preferences concerning the welfare state cannot simply be transferred to analyses of higher education policy. Rather, they have to be adapted to the specific policy area based on the ideological foundation of a given party family.

This complexity is also reflected in the arguments presented in studies that, contrary to the ones mentioned above, argue that due to the skewed access to higher education that favours the more affluent part of a population (see: Lucas, 2001; Raftery & Hout, 1993), higher education only has a limited redistributive potential (Fernandez & Rogerson, 1995; Rauh, Kirchner, & Kappe, 2011). These authors argue that increased public spending in times of low levels of participation actually leads to a reversal re-distribution, as it is mainly the children of the affluent part of the population that profit from it. In line with their argument, these studies empirically find that it is actually right-wing parties in government that lead to increased public higher education spending (Rauh et al., 2011), and thus they contradict the

group of studies that claims that partisan preferences on higher education are similar to other areas of the welfare state. However, both groups of studies agree that there is a partisan effect on higher education policy.

Besides the studies that follow the classical 'partisan hypothesis' there are some authors who combine the partisan focus with arguments from institutional theory that focus on constraints for political parties stemming from the existing institutional structures. One of these approaches is proposed by Christian Förster (2012) whose analysis looked at whether the European Higher Education Area is a driver for higher education policy convergence. Förster argues that two main factors drive policy convergence in European higher education: welfare state regimes and the partisan competition of the government. Taking the relationship between partisan factors and institutions one step further in the direction of the centrality of institutions, Iversen and Stephens (2008) combine partisan preferences with the varieties of capitalism (VoC) approach and focus on three worlds of human capital formation. Similar to Schmidt (1996), they argue, amongst other things, for a more refined approach to the role of parties moving beyond the left-right dichotomy and towards a party-family approach. The study with the strongest focus on institutional structures is the work by Jensen (2011), who claims that the main driver for educational spending is not partisan preferences but rather deindustrialisation. He argues that especially in coordinated market economies with their high skill specificity, deindustrialisation leads to the risk that workers have redundant skills. Furthermore, he stresses that since education spending is in general among the least re-distributive government programs, left-wing parties should rather channel public money to government programs which create more direct re-distribution.

One of the more elaborate approaches to the connection between partisan politics and higher education policy is the work of Ben Ansell (2008, 2010). He shows, on one hand, that there is an inverse-U shaped relationship between the left - right orientation of a party and the level of attention paid to higher education policy in its election manifesto (Ansell, 2010, p.137ff). This leads to the conclusions that (1) partisan competition on education policy exists, a result that is also corroborated by others (e.g. Bussemeyer et al., 2013), and that (2) parties at the extreme ends of the political spectrum do not offer electoral platforms with detailed higher education policies and thus pay only little attention to this policy field. On the other hand, Ansell proposes a solution to the contested question whether additional



public spending on higher education is an issue that is supported by left- or right-wing parties. His conditional partisan hypothesis synthesises the literature by arguing that partisan preferences towards higher education are not uniform but rather are contingent on the structure of the higher education system (Ansell, 2010). He finds a strong conditional effect of partisanship and enrolment levels in higher education, with right-wing parties favouring spending in higher education systems with less than 33% of gross enrolment rates and left-wing parties favouring it in higher education systems with a gross enrolment rate over 50% (2010, p.166f). Therefore, if a left-wing party is faced with a higher education system that ensures mass enrolment, it is more likely to expand public funding for higher education than a left-wing party facing an elite higher education system. This is due to the fact that in the first case the increase in expenditure has the possibility of having a positive re-distributive effect for the party's electorate, while in the second case enlarging the access to a mass level would be needed before increased spending in higher education would have positive effects on the party's electorate. Thus, Ansell demonstrates the importance of the institutional setting of the higher education system in a given country for partisan preferences on higher education policy.

Another elaborate and insightful approach to partisan higher education policy is the work of Julian Garritzmann (Garritzmann, 2014, 2015). Focusing on the political dynamics of tuition fees and student support systems, he conceptualises four worlds of student finance. In his work he explains their existence with the partisan composition of the government during the time when key characteristics of the respective higher education system have been formed, and the subsequent dominance of different partisan governments, in what he calls a time-sensitive partisan hypothesis (Garritzmann, 2014). Furthermore, he argues that after the characteristics of the higher education system have reached a certain level of institutionalisation, positive feedback effects from the electorate make changes in the existing system very costly and thus lead to relative stability (Garritzmann, 2015; Garritzmann & Seng, 2015). So while he agrees that there are differing partisan preferences in higher education, he is more sceptical towards parties' opportunities to influence policy output that might lead to radical changes in the higher education systems.

Overall, the literature presents three lines of argumentation concerning partisan higher education politics: (1) left-wing parties favour more public higher education spending, (2)

right-wing parties favour more higher education spending, and (3) the partisan effects in higher education are conditional on the existing level of enrolment. Even though these studies come to differing results, they all highlight the importance of several aspects of higher education policy for the re-distributive potential connected to higher education. Thus, they provide indicators that help to assess higher education's re-distributive aspects and develop conceptual expectations concerning partisan preferences based on this.

Therefore, the first analytical dimension of partisan competition on higher education is linked to higher education's re-distributive potential. It spans between a preference for a restrictive higher education system and a preference for an expansive higher education system. As has been argued in the literature as well as in the articles that are part of this thesis, the re-distributive potential of higher education depends on four key factors that also serve as indicators<sup>8</sup> for assessing a party's preference on this dimension:

1. Public spending on higher education.
2. Access to higher education.
3. Private spending on higher education.
4. Student support.

Based on the previously described ideological backgrounds of party families captured in their left-right preferences and reflected in their electorates, it is possible to deduce partisan preferences to capture whether parties favour a restrictive or an expansive higher education system.<sup>9</sup>

As investment in human-capital becomes a more viable approach to increasing re-distribution than Keynesian macroeconomic policies, due to increased internalisation and liberalisation, social democratic parties can be expected to support an expansive higher education system (Boix, 1997, 1998; Busemeyer, 2009). This allows for more social upward

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<sup>8</sup> Each indicator was used in the coding scheme for the analysis with three codes attached to every indicator to measure increase, decrease or stability. More information on this can be found in Chapter 4.

<sup>9</sup> These expectations are also described in the articles that are part of this thesis, but will be reiterated here due to their central importance for the analysis.

mobility and reduces the selectivity of participation in higher education. Additionally, by expanding the higher education sector, social democratic parties also cater to new voter groups in the middle-class without alienating their electoral basis, thus strengthening their base of support (Busemeyer, 2009).

In a similar way, due to their preference for a strong and active state that supports societal re-distribution and allows for social upward mobility, anti-establishment parties on the left fringe of the political spectrum can be expected to support an expansive higher education system (Boix, 1997, 1998). Anti-establishment parties to the right of the political spectrum can also be expected to support an expansive higher education system. The reason for this lies in the fact that these parties are mainly right-wing in a socio-cultural aspect and not in a socio-economic aspect, and especially since the 1990s, anti-establishment parties on the right have shown an economically protectionist profile and acted as “welfare chauvinists” (Rydgren, 2007, p.245).

Green parties are ideologically complex as on the one hand, they have ideological roots that highlight social justice and support left values like societal re-distribution (Richardson & Rootes, 1995), while on the other hand, they have an electorate that is more and more drawn from higher socio-economic strata (Rauh et al., 2011). Given their ideological roots, it can however be expected that they will support an expansive higher education system.

While liberal parties can be seen as the most heterogeneous party family with many internal differences, on a re-distributive dimension, most liberal parties are in favour of a limited involvement of the state (Franzmann, 2012). Since liberal parties have a focus on the individual and its abilities to improve its socio-economic status without state interference or support, while at the same time catering to the needs of the modern labour market for a highly educated work force, they can be expected to support an expansive higher education system. However, given the liberal parties’ focus on the state having a limited role, as well as their focus on individual responsibilities (Kirchner, 1988), they should also support some form of individuals meeting the costs of attending higher education, for example, in the form of tuition fees.

While Christian democratic values are often found to be connected to welfare states that can have similar spending patterns as social democratic parties, the structure of their preferred

welfare state regimes is inherently different (E. Huber, Ragin, & Stephens, 1993; E. Huber & Stephens, 1993; van Kersbergen, 1995). The Christian democratic idea of the welfare state focuses on families rather than individuals, favours a semi-public character of the execution of the welfare state over a strong centralised state control, and aims at reproduction of social status rather than increased social mobility (Kalyvas & van Kersbergen, 2010). Furthermore, Christian democrats accept societal stratification (Busemeyer, 2015). Therefore, Christian democratic parties also want to limit re-distribution in relation to higher education and focus on the quality of the existing higher education system instead of expanding it. Thus, they can be expected to support more restrictive higher education systems.

As their electoral support stems mainly from higher socio-economic strata and because they favour a limited role of the state, and low tax burdens, conservative parties are opposed to societal re-distribution (Iversen & Stephens, 2008). Consequently, they are in favour of a more restrictive higher education system, as it is mainly people within their electorate that have the possibility to participate in higher education especially when rates of enrolment are low, due to the skewed access to higher education (Rauh et al., 2011). Given that their electorate draws a labour market advantage from their privileged access to higher education, conservative parties should focus more on the quality of the higher education system rather than widening access.

All in all, social democratic, green, liberal, and anti-establishment parties can be expected to prefer expansive higher education policies, while Christian democrats and conservatives should have a preference for restrictive higher education systems. These hypothesised expectations towards preferences of different party families along the re-distributive dimension in higher education are also supported by results of an analysis of party placements based on expert survey data (Garrizmann, 2014).

While Garrizmann's study is one of the more detailed analyses of partisan higher education policy so far, and while he and other authors that analyse higher education policy along a re-distributive dimension (e.g. Ansell, 2010; Busemeyer, 2007) are correct in their assessment that political parties differ in this respect, this is not the only dimension that can be expected to structure party competition. This thesis adds a second dimension to the analysis of partisan politics in higher education. This dimension is linked to the question of how and by

whom the control over the higher education sector is exercised, and it takes its theoretical foundation in literature that finds increased political competition on public governance in the aftermath of NPM and post-NPM reforms (e.g. Gingrich, 2011; Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Pollitt, van Thiel, & Homburg, 2007).

### **3.2.2. The public governance dimension in higher education**

Starting with the ‘partisan hypothesis’ and its further development, there has been heightened attention in recent years on the partisan politics of higher education. However, the existing literature can still be described as limited. First, few studies focus explicitly on higher education to start with. Second, most of the existing studies, with the notable exception of the work of Garritzmann (2014), do not provide an in-depth analysis of partisan preferences on higher education. The studies that follow the ‘parties matter’ approach and analyse changes in policy outputs based on the partisan composition of governments (e.g. Castles, 1989; Rauh et al., 2011; Schmidt, 2007), simply assume differing partisan positions on higher education based on theoretical ideas of the ideological core of party families. While such an approach seems reasonable for well-researched, core policy issues, where the left - right divide is still an ideological core issue summarizing diverse political positions (Walczak et al., 2012), politics linked to education is more complex (see for example: Bovens & Wille, 2009; Bovens & Wille, 2010). Therefore, it is questionable whether falling back on the general theoretical assumptions along the left - right continuum is very helpful in specialised policy areas, such as higher education, as more complex processes could be at play when parties formulate their preferences.

Therefore, this thesis will propose a two-dimensional approach to partisan preferences in higher education policy that expands the focus on re-distribution by adding arguments from the literature on NPM, public governance and public sector reforms. This second dimension is linked to the question of how and by whom control over the higher education sector is exercised. Its conceptual starting point stems from results of studies that find increased political competition on public governance in the aftermath of the rise of NPM (Gingrich, 2011, 2015) and actor-related variations in public sector reforms (Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010; Pollitt, 2001; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Pollitt et al., 2007). While these studies focus on the governance of public sectors in general, and do not specifically address higher education, this thesis will argue that their results nevertheless bear relevance for partisan preferences

and changes in higher education policy, especially if they are linked to some of the results from higher education policy studies.

The relationship between the government as the executive power of the state and public sectors, which includes higher education, has been challenged since the 1980s with the promotion of ideas and policies under the label of NPM, which were aimed at improving the efficiency of governments and their public services (Pollitt et al., 2007). The traditional “old” Weberian administrative logic based on an apolitical civil service that functioned within clear hierarchies and rules, built on stability, equality and internal regulations (Peters, 2001, p.4ff) was contested due to four changes: (1) economic problems that forced the governments to reduce costs in the public sector, (2) a demographic change that challenged the structure of the public sectors and demanded more efficient use of resources, (3) a growth of populist anti-government rhetoric from both the left and the right that put pressure on governments to be more accountable for their actions, and (4) more complex societies and public sectors that are harder to govern (Peters, 2001, p.14f). While the responses to these challenges were a departure from the ideas of classical public administration, the state and government still remained the main actor (Pollitt et al., 2007). This finding inspired some authors to claim that the pendulum of reforms swung towards a post-NPM model, which is supposed to be the new dominating governance ideal (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2006; Hood & Peters, 2004).

While some studies stress a general convergence of public governance towards an NPM- or post-NPM-inspired arrangement, there is a growing agreement that the convergence might be limited to labels, and that instead of a convergence of results or practices, one finds a discursive convergence (Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010; Pollitt, 2001). Analyses that focus on factors that create divergence in public governance between countries usually highlight several factors, of which two are found to be central: existing institutions and decisions of actors (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004, 2009; Pollitt et al., 2007).

The starting point for the argument that existing institutions matter is linked to prominent ideas from institutional theory, which highlight that legitimacy and appropriateness in a given institutional context are important for change processes (March & Olsen, 1996). Thus, context matters for national governance reforms (Peters, 2001, p.180ff) and existing institutional arrangements create path-dependencies that limit the potential for change

(Goldfinch & Hart, 2003; Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010). This argument is supported by studies that emphasise the variation in existing NPM- or post-NPM-inspired governance arrangements (e.g. Premfors, 1998). However, the existing institutional context matters not only in relation to inter-country comparisons; the institutional arrangement of a given public sector also has an impact on the potential for change in public governance in this sector and possibly results in intra-country differences (Freeman, 1985; Peters et al., 2001; Pollitt et al., 2007). In line with this argument in favour of sectoral effects in governance arrangements, several studies have already addressed the role of the existing institutional arrangement for changes in higher education governance, supporting the results from the more general public governance literature (e.g. Christensen, 2011; Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000; Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013; Paradeise, 2012; Paradeise, Reale, & Goastellec, 2009).

Using these studies as a starting point, the focus is on the second factor that potentially leads to divergence between countries, the role of actors in changes of public governance, and specifically political parties. Here the number of existing studies is much more limited, especially concerning higher education as a public sector. To the knowledge of the author, there has been no study that addresses the role of parties in governance changes. The studies that argue for the importance of actors in matters of change in public governance ignore several partisan approaches to these questions and highlight the role of powerful civil-society groups, civil servants and the administration, or competing levels of governance, among other things (Goldfinch & Hart, 2003; Green-Pedersen, 2002; Hood, 1996; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2009; Pollitt et al., 2007). A noteworthy exception from this is the work by Jane Gingrich (2011, 2015). In her analysis of market-oriented reforms of public sectors she argues that there is not one market for public sectors, but several variations of market-oriented reforms. These variations are systematic and policy-makers manipulate the variation strategically based on their interests and ideologies (Gingrich, 2011). She shows that the use of market-based governance approaches varies between public sectors as well as countries and concludes that different forms of markets are used by different political actors for different ideological reasons (Gingrich, 2011). Thus, there seems to be a political dilemma connected to structural choices with regard to public governance: to find a balance between ideologically motivated political control and the autonomy of a given public sector (Bezes, Fimreite, Lidec, & Læg Reid, 2013, p.151).

As NPM-oriented governance arrangements are not ideologically neutral concepts (Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010), and since different party families have diverging ideological interests in relation to the role of the state and the interplay between the state and public sectors, the ideological foundation of parties and the partisan composition of the government can be expected to matter for changes in public governance (Gingrich, 2011). Furthermore, a change in government has already been identified in the literature as one factor that might lead to changes in public governance (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2009). Thus, since it can be argued that changes in public governance do not only have to be legitimate and appropriate in relation to existing institutions (March & Olsen, 1996), but also in relation to the ideological background of the governing parties, adding a second dimension on public governance to the analysis of partisan preferences in higher education is a potentially valuable expansion of the existing approaches.

The idea that parties show preferences and thus compete not only in relation to the re-distributive dimension but also in relation to the public governance dimension also resembles more general arguments from the party politics literature. Here several authors stress that partisan competition takes place in a two-dimensional space that is organised along a re-distributive dimension and a dimension that captures partisan preferences linked to the difference between libertarian and communitarian values, or preferences concerning the distribution of power, authority and autonomy (e.g. Bornschieer, 2010; Kriesi, 1998; Kriesi, 2010). Given the ideological underpinning of public sector reforms, these general findings on party competition also translate into partisan preferences for public governance, addressing, for example, the tension between professional autonomy, state control, and subsidiarity. While there has not yet been a study that addresses the political conflicts concerning public governance in higher education, research on other parts of education policy shows that there are partisan political conflicts on the question of how centralised the control over the education system should be, and that these conflicts also shape the structure of the respective educational sector (e.g. Ansell & Lindvall, 2013; Gingrich, 2011).

When conceptualising partisan conflicts in relation to public governance, Gingrich's work (2011, 2015) especially provides a good point of departure. While arguing that partisan preferences on the welfare state not only address its size, but also the way the government controls it, she constructs several forms of marketization of public sectors that she links to



different partisan preferences. The argument for the second analytical dimension in this thesis follows a similar logic: political parties are seen to not only have specific preferences concerning the question of whether to have a restrictive or expansive higher education sector, but also concerning the question, how tightly coupled the state and the higher education sector should be. In this, the second analytical dimension also represents an attempt to offer a systematic conceptualisation of the politics of higher education governance as demanded, for example, by McLendon and Ness (2003).

This second analytical dimension spans between the ideal points of centralised control over the higher education sector and de-centralised control. To assess the partisan preferences on this dimension, four different steering modes used by the state for higher education, proposed by Gornitzka and Maassen (2000), will be used as indicators, as they describe differing power relations between the state and higher education as a public sector. The four indicators are:<sup>10</sup>

1. The dominance of the government in controlling higher education.
2. Governance through negotiation between stakeholder groups.
3. Autonomy of higher education institutions to steer themselves.
4. Governance based on market mechanism.

While the autonomy of higher education institutions and the use of market mechanisms indicate decentralised higher education governance, the dominance of the state and the negotiations between stakeholder groups are more centralised forms of control. However, these four approaches are not mutually exclusive, and it is possible to combine them in the formation of a specific preference for public governance (Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013).

Based on the literature and indicators it is possible to derive expectations for different party families. Given social democratic parties' preference for a strong state that actively shapes society and economy, reflected for example in Keynesian macroeconomic policies (Boix, 1997, 1998), and their support for societal re-distribution (Busemeyer, 2009), they have an

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<sup>10</sup> Also in relation to this dimension, each indicator was linked to three codes during the coding of the data, measuring increase, decrease or stability.

instrumental approach to higher education. Thus, they can be expected to prefer a dominant role of the government in its governance. However, as governance arrangements in higher education that focus on a dominant government have been strongly criticised in the context of NPM reforms (Christensen, 2011), social democratic parties can additionally be expected to combine this approach with governance mechanisms that allow for the influence of different stakeholder groups. Such a system resembles classical corporatist arrangements, and includes organised interests in the governance that are ideologically close to social democratic parties, such as student unions or trade unions. This provides the possibility for social democratic parties to uphold their interest to have an instrumental approach to higher education, while at the same time not appearing to be too invasive. Thus, overall social democrats prefer centralised control over higher education.

Anti-establishment parties on the left fringe of the political spectrum share the preference for an instrumental role of higher education that allows for more upward social mobility of the population and enhances re-distribution (Boix, 1997, 1998). Thus, they can be expected to prefer a dominant role of the government concerning the public governance of higher education. Anti-establishment parties on the right side of the political spectrum also prefer a strong role of the government in higher education governance. First, they traditionally do not have a strong representation within the higher education sector, and second their protectionist profile as well as their support for a national welfare state (Rydgren, 2007) give them a more instrumental approach to higher education. Therefore, anti-establishment parties can be expected to prefer centralised control over higher education.

Green parties can be expected to share the preference of the social democratic parties for a combination of a strong role of the government and the inclusion of stakeholder groups in the governance of higher education. On one hand, this preference is based on their rather diverse electorate (Rauh et al., 2011) that can be best catered to by facilitating negotiations between these different groups in the governance of higher education, and, on the other hand, on the preference of green parties to use higher education for societal re-distribution (Richardson & Rootes, 1995). Thus, green parties should also show a preference towards centralised public governance.

Liberal parties are in general seen to be in favour of a streamlined public sector and see a more limited role of the state (Franzmann, 2012). They do not share the strong instrumental

approach to higher education that social democratic parties have, for example, and they also do not see it as the responsibility of the state to use higher education for re-distributive purposes (Kirchner, 1988). Liberal parties rather care for the quality of higher education, while at the same time accepting heterogeneity within the sector. Thus, they can be expected to prefer decentralised control of higher education in the form of market mechanisms and autonomy of higher education intuitions to enable them to compete freely with one another.

Christian democratic parties have two partially conflicting ideological foundations that influence their approach to public governance. On one hand, Christian democratic parties support the idea of subsidiarity and giving authority to local authorities (Kalyvas & van Kersbergen, 2010). Therefore, they can be expected to support the autonomy of higher education institutions. On the other hand, Christian democratic parties also emphasise high quality and qualitative homogeneity of public sectors including higher education (Kalyvas & van Kersbergen, 2010), which demands a more active role of the government in public governance to ensure such homogeneity. Therefore, they take a middle position concerning the centrality of higher education governance leaning slightly more towards decentralised control.

Conservative parties have a general preference for a streamlined and small public sector and favour market competition (Boix, 1997, 1998; Gingrich, 2011). They are also not opposed to heterogeneity within the higher education sector, and thus they can be expected to prefer a public governance approach that combines autonomous higher education institutions with market mechanisms. Thus, conservative parties favour decentralised control over higher education.

All in all, social democratic, green, and anti-establishment parties are expected to prefer centralised control over higher education, while liberals, Christian democrats and conservatives should have a preference for de-centralised control over higher education. After presenting both dimensions separately it is now possible to merge them into a joint theoretical framework, and then briefly address other factors that potentially impact partisan preferences.

### 3.2.3. Combining both dimensions

With the arguments presented on the previous pages it was possible to develop theoretical expectations towards partisan preferences in higher education policy along two analytical dimensions (see also: Jungblut, 2014; Jungblut, 2015, under review-b). These expectations are based on the ideological background of the respective party family as well as their electorates, and the table below offers a summary of these expected preferences.

**Table 1. Theoretical expectations towards partisan preferences in higher education.**

		Re-distributive dimension	
		Expansive higher education	Restrictive higher education
Control dimension	Centralised control over higher education	Social democrats, green parties, anti-establishment parties	
	De-centralised control over higher education	Liberal parties	Christian democrats, conservative parties

These preferences for different party families are based on their respective ideological backgrounds and electorates. At the same time, partisan choices, including the formulation of preferences, do not occur in unconstrained environments (Gingrich, 2011, p.39f). While the concepts that informed the above expectations are key explanatory factors for partisan positions, they are not the only ones discussed in the literature. However, in the interest of available space and a parsimonious conceptual model, this study will put its focus on party ideology and constituents as major explanatory factors. To acknowledge the role of constraining factors, some of them will be briefly discussed and three major factors will also guide the selection of country contexts.

Existing institutions reflect results from previous distributional conflicts between different partisan actors. Following arguments from historical institutionalism, these institutional arrangements are the starting point for any policy discussion or formation of preferences within parties, because these existing institutions determine the costs that a potential change towards the ideologically preferred option has (Gingrich, 2011, p.39; Hall & Taylor, 1996; Thelen, 1999). Thus from a purely ideological perspective, parties might decide to state a preference for a sub-optimal preference, which still reflects their general ideological direction, but is less costly given the existing institutional arrangement (Gingrich, 2015). Therefore, three main factors can be identified that potentially constrain parties in the expression of their preferences. First, the existing structure of the skill regime, including higher education, determines the level of commodification and stratification of the education system. As Busemeyer (2015) argues, the different types of skill regimes reflect institutionalised results of previous (class) coalitions and thus also create meaningful differences in the partisan competition on higher education. Second, the historical tradition of higher education focuses specifically on the structure of the higher education system. As partisan preferences are also formulated in reference to the section of the public sector they concern (Ansell, 2010), the institutional structure of higher education that developed following its different historical traditions in Europe potentially creates meaningful differences that constrain partisan dynamics. Finally, it is argued that the polarisation of the party system, i.e. the number of effective parties in parliament, affects partisan competition, as more active parties lead to more polarisation, politicisation of a larger number of topics, and competition along multiple cleavage lines (Dalton, 2008; Sartori, 1976; Strøm et al., 2008).

All these factors and the related existing policies create legacies and path dependencies that constrain partisan preferences (Busemeyer et al., 2013; Gingrich, 2011). This idea of constrained partisan preferences also resembles the idea of the path dependence of the welfare state across time as described for example by Pierson (Pierson, 1993, 1996), who argues that the influence of partisanship is limited due to the buffering effects of existing social programs against changes. In this approach the existing institutional structure of the higher education system shapes the preferences of voters through feedback effects, which make it more costly for parties to pursue radical changes and thus might constrain their preferences (Garrizmann, 2015). Additionally, recent arguments from institutional theory

also stress that institutional change is neither exogenous to political institutions nor completely prescribed by path dependence, but rather it is a complex interaction between existing institutional structures, preferences of actors, path dependencies or legacies of previous policies, and opportunity structures that allow for changes (Streeck & Thelen, 2005; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010).

Therefore, even though this thesis takes its analytical starting point in the theoretical expectations towards party families as formulated above, it also acknowledges the possibility of inter-country differences between parties of the same family due to these additional factors. After outlining the conceptual approach to the analysis of partisan preference, the next section will turn towards the processes of coalition formation and subsequent policy-making to complete the theoretical framework for this thesis.

### ***3.3. From preferences to policies – manifestos, coalition agreements, policy proposals***

The parts of the theoretical framework that have been presented so far acknowledge the idea behind the ‘partisan hypothesis’: parties, their ideological background, and their preferences matter for policy. At the same time, the framework also accepts that parties face certain constraints when formulating their preferences, due to legacies of previous policies, or path dependencies of existing institutional arrangements. Thus, so far the theoretical framework helps to explain how partisan preferences are formulated, but it does not address the process of transferring these preferences into policy-making.

While partisan preferences, as they are formulated in party manifestos, are the parties’ input to the political system and the policy-making process,<sup>11</sup> they are not always the basis for government activities even if a party is part of the government. Especially in multi-party consensus democracies there is often a need to form coalition governments of several parties

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<sup>11</sup> Election manifestos are not the only input of political parties to the policy process. Especially in countries with a tradition of having rather short manifestos, other statements, such as campaign pledges, also play a role in describing a party’s preferences. However, the focus in this thesis will be solely on manifestos. On the one hand, they represent the most authoritative statement of preferences of a party and are also the dominant object of research. On the other hand, it can also be questioned whether higher education as a policy area is already salient enough to be in the focus of campaign pledges.

(Lijphart, 1999; Strøm et al., 2008), which require negotiations between parties that have to agree on a common program for the incoming government.<sup>12</sup> In this process, the transfer of partisan preferences does not happen in a straight-forward way, except in those rare situations where all participating parties show a similar preference. Due to the need for inter-party negotiations there is the possibility that partisan preferences will be replaced by a coalition position, which is the outcome of these negotiations and forms the basis for the activities of the incoming government (Martin & Vanberg, 2014; Strøm & Müller, 1999; Zohlnhöfer, 2009). Most of the time, these negotiations take place in the aftermath of an election, and only in rare cases do parties agree on a joint coalition program before even entering into an election campaign. As the latter case is an exception, it does not fall within the focus of this thesis.

There are three approaches that are more common in conceptualising whose preferences prevail in situations of coalition policy-making: the median-voter theorem, cabinet ministers as central policy actors, and coalition policy as a compromise between the participating parties (Martin & Vanberg, 2014). This thesis follows the third approach. Neither the median-voter nor the median-party theorem are suitable due to their assumption that political competition is mono-dimensional. At first sight, the concept of ministers as key policy actors concerning issues that fall under their jurisdiction has a stronger link to the topic of this thesis, as the division of ministries between the participating parties is also part of the coalition negotiations, and thus parties with a focus on a specific issue could strengthen their grip on that policy area by trying to put one of their ministers in charge of it (Laver & Shepsle, 1990, 1994). However, given the empirical focus of this thesis on parties as units of analysis, and the fact that even if ministers have the main authority in drafting a bill, they still need to expect that it can be changed in the legislature and thus have to anticipate the position of the coalition. Additionally, ministers also have to anticipate the accountability through elections (Strøm et al., 2008). Therefore, they cannot deviate too much from the party line or threaten the track-record of a coalition government through their legislative activities. Thus, the approach that highlights the coalition compromise as

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<sup>12</sup> Following Strøm, Müller and Bergman (2008) only parties that participate in the government are seen as coalition parties, while parties that only cooperate with a governing (minority) coalition in the legislative arena are not considered to be coalition parties.

the central factor is the best suited for this study, also because this approach has a convincing empirical track record (e.g. Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988; Baron & Diermeier, 2001; Martin & Vanberg, 2014).

In all situations of coalition government, the direct enactment of partisan preferences into policies, as it is implicitly expected by the ‘parties matter’ literature (e.g. Boix, 1997; Hibbs, 1977), becomes more unlikely. This creates the need to analyse in more detail the process of transferring partisan preferences into policy-making, through government coalitions with coalition agreements as their foundational documents. This part of the theoretical framework will offer a conceptualisation of the transfer of partisan preferences into coalition positions and the interplay of both in policy-making. In this, it will differentiate between situations of policy-making where there are coalition positions that have been pre-negotiated and formulated in the coalition agreement (proactive policy-making), and those situations in which there are no pre-negotiated positions but nevertheless an issue needs to be addressed (reactive policy-making).

Public policy theories often stress the complexity of the interplay between structures and different types of agents (see for example Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Jones & Jenkins-Smith, 2009; Kingdon, 1984), partly similar to the arguments from historical institutionalism addressed at the end of the previous section. In these theories the role of political parties as actors is often marginalised, as they are seen as just one of many conflicting actors with just a limited room to manoeuvre (Lindblom, 1979). At the same time, different public policy theories also acknowledge the potential of political parties to disrupt this stability (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Zohlnhöfer, 2009). Both the advocacy coalition framework as well as the punctuated equilibrium theory, for example, see a change in government as one event that can trigger disruption and instability and through this lead to new policy (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Jones & Jenkins-Smith, 2009), and also the multiple-streams approach identifies a change in the governing parties as a way to open a policy window (Kingdon, 1984). Thus, even in theories that stress the stability of policies, changes in the partisan composition of the government are seen as key events opening up the possibility for change.

In this context the importance of the government’s policy agenda in the form of the coalition agreement becomes very visible. Contrary to partisan preferences, as they are expressed, for



example, in an election manifesto, coalition agreements form the concrete basis for the policy activities of a government, and thus organise the process of future policy-making (Strøm & Müller, 1999; Strøm et al., 2008). However, as the participating parties need to agree on this common set of policies, it is possible that in the frame of these negotiations, ‘pure’ partisan preferences get ‘diluted’ and replaced by coalition positions. To a certain extent, this is necessary, because once a party manages to enter the government, it is confronted by three challenges (Bergman, Ecker, & Müller, 2013): First, it has to keep the government stable and working; second, the party needs to make the government take decisions on policies; and third, it needs to provide good government by ensuring the quality of its decisions. In one-party governments, intra-party conflicts are the main problem that need to be overcome in this context, and election manifestos are a key tool that help to do so, by mediating these conflicts and binding different groups within a party to a common agenda (Bergman et al., 2013). However, these challenges will be even harder to tackle if a government is composed of multiple parties, because in these situations inter-party conflicts also arise. These are exacerbated by the very tool that limits intra-party conflicts: election manifestos.

While election manifestos help to limit intra-party conflicts, they can actually intensify inter-party conflicts. They are the result of negotiations between the different groups within a party prior to an election, and serve as the political agenda promised to the voters, once several parties enter coalition negotiations. The parties that plan to form a coalition need to consolidate their potentially diverging preferences in a way that is acceptable to all participating parties (Bergman et al., 2013). In this, the parties need to find the right balance between their partisan identity and the advantage of being in government. Coalition agreements, as the aspired result of these negotiations, are therefore *ex ante* tools to limit conflicts between and within parties and disincentives defection in the following process of governing.

The line from election manifestos to coalition agreements shows that party and government decisions are linked and that party preferences influence government activity (Zohlnhöfer, 2009). However, partisan preferences in this process are mediated through the coalition negotiations and the resulting agreement which, due to its character as the agenda for the incoming government, has a higher chance of being enacted than the ‘pure’ partisan

preferences as they are formulated in the election manifestos of the parties (De Winter & Dumont, 2006).

Coalition agreements have several functions for a government. First, they specify the agenda of the incoming government and make it transparent to the public. Thus, even though they are incomplete and non-enforceable contracts, they reduce the potential for conflicts and uncertainty between the participating parties (Bergman et al., 2013). Second, coalition agreements also allow for the number of intra-party conflicts to be reduced, since the parties have committed themselves *ex ante* to the specified government agenda and often have accepted the coalition agreement through a decision of a high decision making body within the party (Bergman et al., 2013). While the election manifesto of a party has to strike a balance between the party's ideological core and the existing political reality, coalition agreements and the policies presented in them are concrete plans for government actions (Moury, 2011). It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the partisan preferences of the single parties and the negotiated government positions conceptually and analytically.

Given that parties in multi-party consensus democracies need to find potential coalition partners, how a party decides with whom it will attempt to form a coalition becomes a central question. The existing literature highlights that parties try to minimise the number of coalition partners as this also limits the number of potential veto players, thus making the electoral and legislative strength of a party a decisive factor (Döring & Hellström, 2013). At the same time, parties are found to have a strong preference for partners with similar policies in their election manifestos (Döring & Hellström, 2013). This makes coalition negotiations easier and allows for a larger proportion of a party's preferences to get transferred into coalition positions, which in the end also makes the government more stable as its decisions are positively perceived by a larger proportion of the participating parties and their electorates. While it is not necessary to have fully-fledged active support from all parties for all parts of a coalition agreement, there is at least the need for all parties to accept the content of the agreement to be able to form a government. Therefore, it is likely that only those policies that are not actively opposed by any of the participating parties become part of the coalition agreement.

*It can thus be expected that a coalition between parties with more similar partisan preferences in a specific policy area will lead to a more encompassing part of the coalition agreement that addresses this policy area.*

Since coalition agreements help to negotiate and agree *ex ante* on certain positions that then define the government's agenda, they are also a tool that helps to introduce significant policy change (Herweg, Huß, & Zohlnhöfer, 2015; Zohlnhöfer, 2009). By outlining a position in the coalition agreement, the participating parties create a situation where, on the one hand, internal veto opportunities are limited, and, on the other hand, a follow-up to the position becomes necessary for the positive evaluation of the government's work. Additionally, in situations where a political issue has a higher salience for the governing parties it is also more likely that they will manage to overcome potential administrative resistance and path dependency, since addressing the issue is of vital importance to the parties (Baekgaard et al., 2014). Thus, in such a situation of proactive policy-making it is possible to address grand challenges and propose a policy based on more socially contested issues (Peters et al., 2001).

*It can therefore be expected that if a policy issue is addressed in a coalition agreement, it is more likely that there will be a follow-up to it during the term of the government. However, due to the character of the coalition agreement as a collection of negotiated positions, it is more likely that the policy proposal will follow the coalition position instead of a partisan preference of one of the parties.*

While an inclusion in the coalition agreement increases the chances for follow-up activities of the government, due to the above mentioned reasons, it does not necessarily mean that the policy output will be in line with the goal specified in the coalition agreement, due to the potential problems connected to the implementation of policies (see for example: Gornitzka, Kogan, & Amaral, 2005; Hupe, 2011; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). As already outlined in the introduction, this study does not examine the phase of policy implementation, but rather stops at the point where a policy is formulated, thus supporting the idea that while policy formulation and implementation are processes that are empirically tightly connected, it is important to keep them analytically separate (Gornitzka, 1999). At the same time, policy proposals are regarded as texts in their own right that serve as blueprints for future activities and thus also warrant an analysis as self-standing expressions of policy (March & Olsen,

1995, p.195). Therefore, the process of implementation with all its complexity will neither be included in the theoretical framework nor in the following analysis.

A different dynamic that allows for the introduction of significant changes of policy is reactive policy-making that follows an internal or external shock (Peters et al., 2001; Zohlnhöfer, 2009). External shocks are situations in which an unforeseen policy issue rises and enters the political agenda during the term of a government for which there is no pre-negotiated government position in the coalition agreement. Internal shocks describe situations where a policy issue is deliberately left out of the coalition agreement by the governing parties, but nevertheless rises and enters the political agenda during the term of a government (Peters et al., 2001). There can be several reasons why parties decide to deliberately leave an issue out of a coalition agreement. One possibility is that the parties were not able to agree on a common position and therefore left the issue out of the agreement. A second possibility is that the parties do not want to be forced to address an issue during their term in office, as the coalition agreement is the basis for the public's evaluation of the government's performance. A third reason for not including an issue in the coalition agreement is an attempt to avoid blame for unpopular decisions by treating them as shocks that need to be addressed and thus portray the situation in a way that suggests that there is no alternative. A final reason, why parties might treat an issue as an internal shock is to test the public opinion or gather additional information during the term in office instead of prescribing a position in the coalition agreement at the beginning of the term of the government.

In such a situation of reactive policy-making, where there is no pre-negotiated coalition position on a policy issue, governing parties have the opportunity to fall back to their partisan preferences and promote those. This is especially relevant in situations where the issue that arises had been addressed in the election manifesto but was not covered by the coalition agreement. By promoting their partisan preference, governing parties can use situations of reactive policy-making to distinguish themselves from their coalition partners, strengthen their party identity, and with this please their membership.

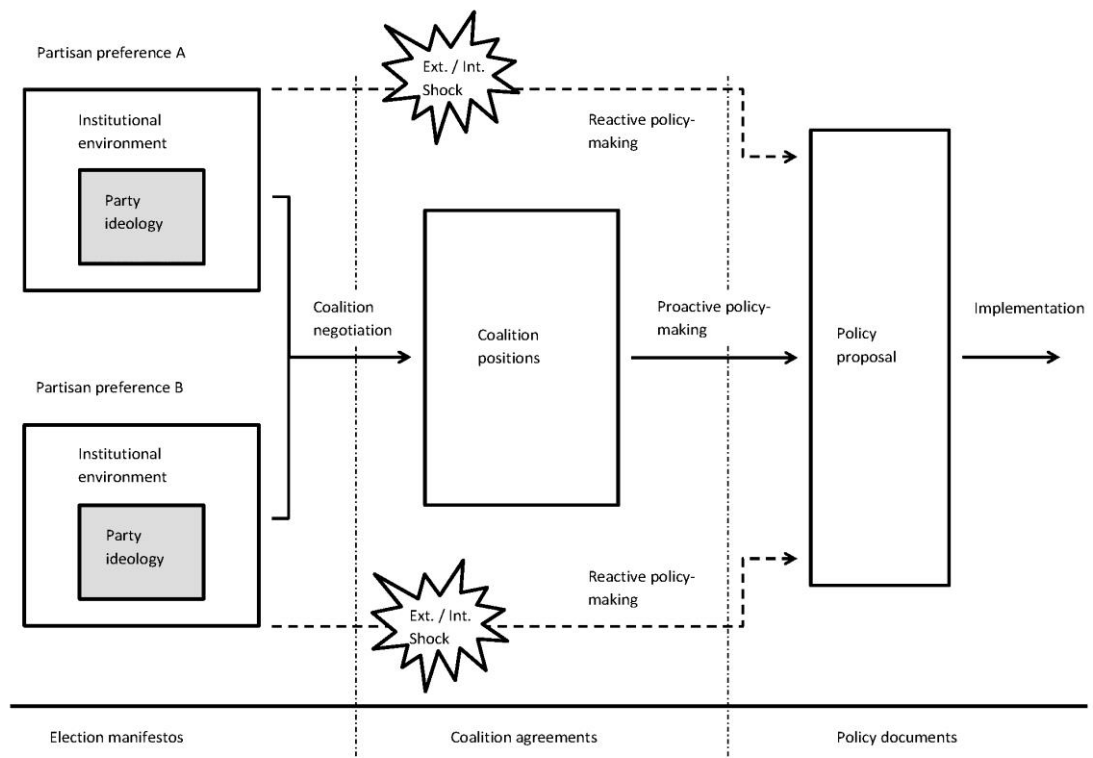
*It can therefore be expected that in cases of reactive policy-making governing parties will promote their partisan preferences. However, due to the lack of a pre-negotiated government position and the potential of conflicting partisan preferences, it is less likely*

*that there will be an agreement between the governing parties, and thus it is also less likely that there will be a successful policy proposal during the term of the government.*

All in all, the process of transferring partisan preferences to policy proposals in multi-party parliamentary democracies can be conceptualised in the following way. In the first step, the governing parties will have to negotiate a coalition agreement. This negotiation is based on the parties' preferences as laid out in their election manifestos. It can be expected that the more similar the policies of the negotiating parties are in a specific policy area, the more encompassing the respective part of the coalition agreement will be. Based on theoretical assumptions about the behaviour of parties in these governing situations, subsequent policy formulation can happen in two different ways. In the case of proactive policy-making, where the policy issue is addressed in the coalition agreement, it is more likely that there will be a follow-up. However, due to the nature of the coalition agreement, it is also more likely that this follow-up will be based on the position of the coalition, instead of the preferences of one of the parties. In the case of reactive policy-making the governing coalition has to react to internal or external shocks as the issue on the agenda is not included in their agreement. In these situations it can be expected that the governing parties will be more likely to promote their partisan preferences instead of a government position. This will make it less likely that there will be a policy proposal, due to the potential disagreement between the governing parties.

### ***3.4. Overview of the theoretical framework***

To sum up the conceptual considerations presented so far, Figure 1 presents an overview of the theoretical framework for this thesis.



**Figure 1. Overview of the transfer of partisan preferences to policy proposals.**

On the left, the partisan preferences of the parties are formed based on the party families’ ideology constrained by the institutional environment. In this process, parties are expected to show differing preferences along the two dimensions explicated in section 3.2 and summarised in Table 1. These preferences are then represented in the respective election manifestos.

To be able to realise their preferences the parties need to enter the government. In the process of coalition negotiations, the partisan preferences are partly transferred to coalition positions that are formalised in the coalition agreement, making it necessary to distinguish between partisan preferences of the single parties and the negotiated government positions. During these negotiations it is likely that only those policies that are not actively opposed by any of the participating parties become part of the coalition agreement.

After the new government is formed and the coalition starts working, two forms of policy-making can be distinguished. If a policy is addressed in the coalition agreement, proactive

policy-making makes it more likely that there will be a successful policy proposal during the term of the government. However, due to the character of the coalition agreement, as a collection of negotiated positions, it is more likely that the proposal will follow the coalition position instead of a partisan preference of one of the parties. If a policy issue arises that is not covered in the coalition agreement but is rather triggered by an external or internal shock, the governing coalition has to refer to reactive policy-making. In these situations it can be expected that the governing parties are more likely to promote their partisan preferences. This is due to the lack of a pre-negotiated position in the coalition agreement, and the resulting need to have ad hoc negotiations in the collegium of the government and between the parties. This in turn will make it less likely that there will be a successful policy proposal.

The overall theoretical framework presented here was employed in the context of the articles by segmenting it. While the first article (Jungblut, 2015) and the second article (Jungblut, under review-b) focused on partisan preferences and thus the left third of Figure 1, the third article (Jungblut, under review-a) addressed the transfer of partisan preferences to coalition positions and the subsequent policy-making. Having presented the theoretical framework, the following chapter turns to the research design, methods and case selection and data of the thesis.

## **4. Research design, methodological approach and data**

This chapter presents a discussion about the research design and the methodological approach chosen for this study. It starts off by describing the ontological and epistemological foundation of the work, before continuing to the research design and case selection. This is followed by the presentation of the methods and the data used for the study, and a discussion on the reliability, validity and limitations of the chosen approach as well as the way in which research ethics have been addressed in this thesis.

### ***4.1. Ontological and epistemological starting point of the thesis***

Political science is in general characterised by a large variety of ontological and epistemological approaches that call for diversity and dialogue within the discipline, and for positioning oneself in this context (Stoker & Marsh, 2002). This pluralism of approaches should not lead to isolation or unifying harmonisation, but rather should be an interactive relationship between the different approaches. This is especially the case, since ontology and epistemology, while often being only implicitly acknowledged, still shape the work and cannot be altered by a researcher, as they represent core beliefs about the basic foundation of research (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Thus, this section will position the thesis and its author in terms of ontological and epistemological starting points.

Questions related to ontology are mainly about what is and what exists. These meta-theoretical issues in political science include the foundational question of what is actually seen as ‘political’ (Stoker & Marsh, 2002). In the context of this thesis, the understanding of ‘political’ is a reference to a specific social arena and a set of institutions capturing the formal operation of politics as a struggle over power (Stoker & Marsh, 2002), or as Easton (1965) formulates it, the authoritative allocation of values. The ontological starting point of this thesis is in the foundationalist understanding of the world, acknowledging that a real world also exists, independent of our knowledge of it (Stoker & Marsh, 2002). While this is often associated with a positivist epistemological approach, this thesis instead follows a realist understanding. In this, the foundational belief is that not everything is directly observable, and that there are structures that are not observable but have crucial effects on social outcomes (Sayer, 1992; Stoker & Marsh, 2002). Following the realist tradition, the



thesis builds on the understanding that social structures have a causal power and thus it is possible to make causal claims (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). At the same time, the thesis also takes its philosophical starting point from the conviction that research in political science needs to be characterised by value-free neutrality, and that there needs to be a certain detachment between the world of politics and political science (Stoker & Marsh, 2002).

The research presented here acknowledges the realists' understanding that pure forms of individualism as well as collectivism should be rejected, and that instead ontological depth and epistemological breadth of different approaches are the proper way to analyse complex and open social systems, deeming the knowledge gathered by one scholar following one approach to a certain extent as being incomplete (Burnham, Gilland, Grant, & Layton-Henry, 2004). However, while this thesis is positioned in the realist camp, within the continuum of realist approaches it is situated closer to the border with post-positivist approaches than on the side of realist approach that follow, for example, a Marxist understanding of the world (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). In the understanding applied in this study, structures are seen to constrain actors rather than determine their actions, and knowledge based on theoretically guided analysis of reality is fallible, if the theoretical starting point of the analysis is wrong or incomplete (Marsh & Furlong, 2002; Sayer, 1992). Given the position in the realist camp with a tendency towards post-positivist approaches, no hypotheses have been formulated in the context of the theoretical framework, instead theoretical expectations have been derived that will be assessed using the empirical material.

Given the emphasis of the realist approach on the idea that not everything is directly observable, and that observation is mediated through theoretical starting points, theory is seen to affect both the facts that are focused upon and the way how they are interpreted (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Theory, in the understanding used in this thesis therefore shapes the research questions asked, is critical for the anticipation of answers in the form of theoretical expectations, and provides a repository of previous research results (Rueschemeyer, 2009). Theory thus helps to formulate questions, conceptualise phenomena, make connections between observed aspects, and suggests causal links. Even though this thesis takes its starting point in a foundationalist understanding, it does not use grand or meta-theories to guide its work, but rather employs mid-range theories (Merton, 1968) that

address delimited and partial explanations in the context of a specific social and political area (Rueschemeyer, 2009).

While this study takes a theory-guided entrance to the research problem, the problem was not chosen because of its good fit with the theory, but rather out of a genuine interest for the topic (Shapiro, 2002). Therefore, the thesis can be characterised as problem- rather than theory- or method-driven, since the gap in the existing literature was the main motivation, which was followed by a decision on the design and method that would have the best fit for the questions at hand (Shapiro, Smith, & Masoud, 2004).

Another framework in which it is helpful to position this study is the division of three approaches to the practical philosophy of science presented by Mjøset (2009). These three approaches are determined by both philosophical orientations as well as actual research methods employed and depict ideal positions that help to structure debates on the philosophy of science. First, the standard attitude resembles the philosophy of natural science and is anchored in mathematical modelling as well as statistical analyses of large data sets. Within this attitude there are two distinct types of theory: the idealizing notion sees theory as thought experiments applying mathematical equation systems, while the law-oriented notion tries to find regularities in datasets through investigations on hypotheses (Mjøset, 2009). Second, the social philosophical approach results from the philosophy of humanities, hermeneutics, structuralism and post-structuralism and is based on interpretative analyses. Finally, the contextualist attitude towards philosophy of social science is derived from the philosophy of the social sciences and is based on qualitative methods using a direct or indirect involvement with the studied cases (Mjøset, 2009). This approach is closely connected to case studies. In this context, a case is seen as the outcome of a process, selected according to the research interest, embedded in a specific environment and context. The contextualist approach is problem driven and delivers clarifications related to the context of the employed research questions, thus creating local research frontiers and explanation based theory (Mjøset, 2009).

In the context of this framework, this study can be situated at the intersection of a law-oriented middle-range standard approach that focuses on regularities in the studied data, and the contextualist approach that offers formal explanation-based analysis, focusing on an in-depth study of a limited number of cases. As this thesis focuses on a small set of cases that

have been studied in great detail, in line with the contextualist approach, generalisation might be seen as a problem. However, from a philosophy of science standpoint, contextualist research strategies also allow for some generalisation. Generalisation and specification are not seen as opposites in the contextualist approach, as generalisation here also means to generalise in a specific context, often by means of comparison (Mjøset, 2009). As specifications are made in this context, results feed back into more general knowledge on the analysed issues, potentially leading to better typologies, concepts or models of contextualisation (Mjøset, 2009). By using concepts with a high level of internal validity to investigate a small number of cases, it becomes possible to transfer the results into more general knowledge without expanding the number of cases studied. The relationship between internal and external validity in the specific context of this thesis will be further discussed in the last section of this chapter. The next section presents the research design and the cases selected for the thesis.

#### ***4.2. Research design and case selection***

The research project presented in this thesis is based on a qualitative research design that compares a small number of cases. This choice is anchored in the conviction that the design of a research project and the methods used should follow the research interest and support the researcher in answering the research questions instead of limiting their scope. As there only a limited number of studies have been done that properly capture the preferences of political parties in higher education policy<sup>13</sup>, this study presents an explorative assessment of this issue. Since a qualitative research design is especially helpful when researching topics for which the knowledge base is still preliminary and incomplete (Strøm et al., 2008, p.405), using such an approach seems appropriate in the light of the aim and focus of this thesis. Qualitative studies help to understand specific patterns of politics in particular settings (Strøm et al., 2008, p.34), and facilitate the generation of hypotheses, as they help to develop conceptual understanding in areas that are not yet sufficiently conceptualised and aim to discover previously neglected variables or dimensions (Lijphart, 1971).

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<sup>13</sup> Actually Garritzmann's work is so far the only existing study focusing explicitly on partisan preferences in higher education.

As will be discussed in the next section, a second reason why this study uses a qualitative research design is the unavailability of the standardised data that are necessary for quantitative approaches, which could sufficiently capture the partisan dynamics in higher education policy. Therefore, this research project builds on a qualitative content analysis of documents that have been originally coded, to ensure a high level of construct and internal validity of the results, and to provide a detailed exploratory study on which future analyses can build on.

This approach is also in line with the specific strengths of a qualitative research designs and its core assumptions with regard to data, research objective, methods, and models of the research process (Hammersley, 1997). Qualitative research relies on non-standardised data that have not been pre-structured, such as texts or interviews. It summarises and categorises these original data to make sense of them and understand their content, with the objective of exploring a specific phenomenon. Thus, qualitative research is especially well suited for the exploration and detailed analysis of “new” phenomena that have not been studied intensively. It is therefore a good starting point to develop new categorisations or conceptual approaches that afterwards can serve as a basis for broader inquiries involving a larger number of cases.

At the same time, a qualitative research design also comes with specific limitations that need to be acknowledged. These limitations are mainly linked to the data used and the number of cases included in qualitative studies. Concerning the data, the main problem is that the basis for qualitative research is non-standardised data, which allows for differing interpretations by different researchers. This needs to be controlled by ensuring reliability and validity in the process of categorizing or standardizing the data during the analysis.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, this study uses multiple types of data and a range of documents as well as interviews, to gain a proper understanding of the content and limit the possibility of misinterpretation. Another problem connected to non-standardised data is the possibility of facing a data overload. This can be controlled by ensuring that the study is guided by theory

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<sup>14</sup> Details on measures taken during this study to ensure reliability and validity can be found in the last section of this chapter.

and concepts that help the researcher to identify and focus on relevant parts of the data, and providing a basis to structure the data for the purpose of the analysis.

The second specific weakness of a qualitative design is linked to the number of cases. Here the potential problems are the limited transferability and external validity of the results, as well as the potential of cherry-picking cases that provide desirable results. To limit the negative influence of these weaknesses it is important to base the case selection on conceptual arguments, explicitly highlighting the reason why specific cases have been included in the study. While a certain limit to the external validity of the results has to be accepted when using a qualitative approach, it is also possible to draw conclusions beyond the scope of the involved cases, if the analysis is properly grounded in the existing literature and the results are related to other findings that provide arguments for their transferability. In particular, generalising beyond the empirical scope of the study is possible with regard to the development of new conceptual approaches and identification of so far insufficiently addressed variables and dimensions (Lijphart, 1971). Even if it is not possible to get to probabilistic theories through the analysis of a small number of cases, it is still possible to develop models, concepts, or medium-ranged theories that can serve as the basis for future studies when comparing different cases that have been carefully selected and whose selection is based on theoretical considerations (Liebersson, 1991). This kind of theory building, which is “close to reality” avoids the problem of concepts being too far from the field that they are supposed to be applied and avoids problems of operationalisation (Kelle & Lüdemann, 1998). Another important specificity of qualitative research concerns the selection of cases. Contrary to quantitative approaches, sampling in qualitative research does not aim to project the full-range of possible distributions but rather involves cases that are selected according to relevant criteria (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). These criteria are based on the concepts and theory that are used in the study, and cater to the meaningful heterogeneity of cases along certain variables that are of interest (Lijphart, 1971).

As already mentioned, the units of analysis for this study are political parties from different party families in national settings with differing higher education systems. Thus, when arguing for the case selection for this thesis, one has to address both the choice of country as well as which parties have been included in the respective countries. When selecting the

countries for this thesis some early decisions limited the potential pool of cases. As addressed in the introduction, the focus of this thesis is on parliamentary democracies and on situations of coalition government. While those are not the only possible governing arrangements, they are the most common form of government in Western Europe, which is the regional focus of this thesis (Strøm et al., 2008). Presidential and semi-presidential systems have been left out of the analysis since the more personalised politics around the president make partisan dynamics work differently (Müller & Narud, 2013), and such an additional focus would partially distract from the core aim of the thesis. Furthermore, in line with the arguments presented by Busemeyer et al. (2013) the analysis focuses on multi-party systems in Western Europe, because of their similar socio-cultural and historical background as well as resulting political conflict structures. This allows for certain variation in the institutional context of the parties without leading to vastly differing conflict structures that would over-shadow partisan competition in the policy area that is of interest for the study.

There is an additional reason for the regional focus on (North-) Western Europe. As one of the interests of this thesis is to study how partisan preferences get translated into policy proposals through coalition agreements, it is important to focus on countries that have a similar tradition concerning the way these agreements are used. In Europe there is a north-south pattern with regard to the usage of coalition agreements as *ex-ante* tools to limit partisan conflicts, with northern countries more often relying on detailed coalition agreements, while southern countries have less developed agreements and instead use junior ministers from different parties as *ex-post* control mechanisms (Strøm et al., 2008, p.409).

Given the limitation to Western European parliamentary democracies, the choice of countries was guided by a desire for variation along three important criteria that could be expected to shape the partisan dynamics on higher education. These three criteria represent key characteristics of the institutional framework in which parties formulate their preferences in, and they were already introduced in Chapter 3. Thus, variation in these characteristics allows for a better understanding of the interplay between the partisan ideological background of a party and the institutional setting in the process of preference formation.

First, the selected countries in which parties have been studied vary with regard to their skill regime. The institutional context in which parties formulate their preferences has the potential to constrain “pure” ideological positions, as feedback effects and path dependencies prevent certain changes, thus limiting partisan preferences (Busemeyer, 2015; Garritzmann, 2015). Busemeyer (2015) identifies three skill regimes that are driven by differences in the commodification and stratification of education, which correlate with the three classical types of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Since the skill regimes and the types of welfare states represent institutionalised results of political (class) coalitions (Busemeyer, 2015), whether a country is part of the liberal (Anglo-Saxon), the statist (Scandinavian), or the corporatist (Continental) education system will create meaningful dissimilarities with regard to the partisan competition on education (see also: Willemse & de Beer, 2012).

The second criterion for the case selection is somewhat linked to the first one, but focuses more specifically on higher education. As outlined in the theoretical framework, partisan preferences are conceptualised to be constrained by the institutional environment including the higher education sector in relation to which partisan preferences are formulated (e.g. Ansell, 2010). Since there are different historical traditions of higher education in Western Europe that influence the institutional setup of a given higher education system, the cases in this study cover a variety of these historical backgrounds. This includes Nordic, Humboldtian and Anglo-Saxon higher education systems (Christensen et al., 2014; Clark, 1983; Nybom, 2007).<sup>15</sup>

The final criterion for the selection of cases was the number of effective parties in parliament. As party systems are comparatively stable institutions that also determine the behaviour of parties that participate in them (Lijphart, 1999; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Peters, 2005), the number of parties that regularly manage to gain a significant representation in the national parliament shapes the partisan dynamics in a given political system (Sartori, 1976; Strøm et al., 2008; Zohlnhöfer, 2009). Thus, if new parties enter the parliamentary arena, this also has an effect on the existing parties’ policy preferences (Franzmann & Kaiser, 2006). Therefore, it has been argued that the polarisation of the party system, i.e. the

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<sup>15</sup> In the selected cases the first and second selection criterion correlate to a certain extent. However, as this is not a given, both criteria were kept conceptually distinct.

number of competing parties, can affect partisan competition, as more active parties lead to more polarisation and competition along multiple cleavage lines, also affecting the way higher education policy is addressed (Busemeyer et al., 2013). Table 2 summarises the cases included in this research project and their specification along the criteria for case selection.

**Table 2. Countries included in the research project.**

Country	Skill regime	Higher education system	Number of parties
Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia)	Corporatist	Humboldtian	5
Netherlands	Mixed	Humboldtian	9
Norway	Statist	Nordic	7
United Kingdom (England)	Liberal	Anglo-Saxon	3

The case selection for two of the countries shown in Table 2 demands some additional specification. As this thesis focuses on higher education policy, which in federal countries is often dealt with at the sub-national level, the analysis of partisan preferences also has to take place at this level. The authority to decide on higher education policy in Germany lies with the *Bundesländer*. As North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is the *Bundesland* with the largest population, it was chosen as the specific case for this thesis. In the United Kingdom the focus will be on England, as Scotland and Wales have the authority to (partly) diverge with their higher education policy from the decisions taken in the House of Commons. Thus, the contexts in which parties are studied are not necessarily based on different countries, but on different higher education systems and the political arenas that regulate them, be it nationally or sub-nationally.

The cases selected for this study are not only explained and analysed individually but are also included in multiple levels of comparison. In this, the study moves beyond the descriptive stage and aims more towards concept generation and explanations



(Goedegebuure & van Vught, 1994, 1996). Thus after analysing the preferences of single parties in different contexts, two kinds of comparisons have been performed. First, intra-country comparisons have been made between parties from different party families, and second inter-country comparisons have been made of parties from the same party family in different national contexts. This has mainly been done in the second article of this research project. For the analysis of the transfer of partisan preferences into policy proposals, as presented in the third article of this project, inter-country comparisons of different coalitions as well as of situations of reactive and proactive policy-making are performed, introducing a new analytical level to the study. The next section presents the specific methodological tools used for the analyses as well as the data that was gathered and analysed for this study.

### ***4.3. Data and methods***

The available data sources for the assessment of partisan preferences in higher education policy support the previously argued case in favour of a qualitative research design. The existing data sets that offer standardised data for partisan preferences, (first and foremost the prominent CMP data (Volkens et al., 2014)), are not suitable for answering the research questions raised in this study. There are several reasons for this. First, the CMP only includes election manifestos and thus would only be of help for the first empirical analysis of partisan preferences and not for the study of coalition positions. Second, even though there is a large body of literature that has used the CMP data, there is also significant criticism to the CMP's approach linked to the structure and stability of the coding scheme, the inability for CMP data to be used in specific policy areas, and the fact that proxy-documents have been used when the researchers were unable to collect election manifestos (see: Budge, 2001; Gemenis, 2012; Gemenis, 2013; Hansen, 2008; Mikhaylov, Laver, & Benoit, 2012; Pennings & Keman, 2002; Strøm et al., 2008).

Third, the coding of the CMP data is not specific enough for an analysis of higher education policy. Even though some studies, for example the ones by Ansell (2010) or Busemeyer et al. (2013), use the data as a proxy to analyse partisan competition on higher education, the coding of the CMP actually only has one code that measures support for educational improvement as well as expansion, without differentiating between levels of education (e.g.

primary, secondary, or tertiary).<sup>16</sup> Contrary to the situation with secondary education, access to tertiary education is skewed towards the more affluent part of the population (Lucas, 2001; Raftery & Hout, 1993); the differences between levels of education creates meaningful dissimilarities. Additionally, by focusing on educational expansion the CMP coding only covers the re-distributive party conflicts on education and offers no information whatsoever regarding the public governance dimension. This makes the overarching coding of the CMP unsuitable for the analyses used in this research project.

A possible alternative to the CMP approach that would also use standardised data is a method that treats texts as a collection of word data and extracts data from word frequencies to estimate policy positions (Laver, Benoit, & Garry, 2003), or similar computer-based methods of analysis (Pennings & Keman, 2002). Most of these approaches use reference texts with known political positions and their word frequencies to analyse the so called “virgin” texts they are studying. Such approaches rely heavily on the precision and availability of reference texts, and a proper reference text should use the same lexicon, span all necessary policy dimensions and contain many different words to allow for precise measurements (Strøm et al., 2008). As such a reference text is not available for higher education policy this approach was not an option for this study.

Finally, expert surveys on party positions could be an alternative for generating standardised data. While Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012) have produced expert survey data that include partisan higher education policy preferences, which was used by Garritzmann (2014) for his analyses, this type of data also has some shortcomings. First, there is a limited number of available country experts, many of whom are already rather busy and thus spend only a limited amount of time filling in these surveys (Strøm et al., 2008). Additionally, it is impossible to assess how much time an expert has spent filling in a questionnaire, and thorough answers will be treated similar to less thorough ones. Therefore, declining quality in the answers throughout a survey is actually a greater threat to data reliability than a low response rate. Also, not all experts are equally knowledgeable on all parties; combined with problems linked to the response rate or the quality of answers throughout the questionnaire this might lead to significant reliability problems (Strøm et al., 2008). Additionally, expert

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<sup>16</sup> The code that covers education policy is per506 «Education Expansion».

surveys in general create a more stable judgment of a party's preference, which is often strongly influenced by the party's performance, thus introducing measurement error (Volkens, 2007). Furthermore, expert surveys are only available for limited points in time and certain sets of countries, and it is impossible to do retrospective expert surveys as they would not lead to the production of reliable results (Benoit, Bräuninger, & Debus, 2009).

Due to the insufficient alternatives and the limited literature on partisan preferences in higher education, this thesis has used qualitative content analysis to study partisan preferences, coalition positions, and policy proposals in different texts. In this, it follows the argument that even though the methodological toolkit for the analysis of texts has significantly expanded in recent years, the expert analysis of party documents is still an important method for addressing specific questions in previously neglected contexts (Strøm et al., 2008, p.423). The corpus of texts for this analysis includes three categories: (1) election manifestos, (2) coalition agreements, and (3) policy proposals or documents. While election manifestos are mainly relevant for the analysis performed in the second article, the other types of documents were mainly used in the third article. For the latter analysis an additional set of interviews was conducted, which will be discussed in more detail below.

The election manifestos that are part of this study cover all relevant parties at two recent elections in the four higher education systems that have been selected as the context for the study. A party is considered to have been relevant if it was represented in the parliament in both instances and received at least 2.5% of the votes. The choice of election manifestos as a data source for analysing the electoral preferences of political parties is based on the general agreement in the party politics literature that manifestos represent the most authoritative statements of a party's preferences. This is based on the public character of these documents, the fact that they are geared towards a broader audience, written in a clear manner to convince voters to support the party, and that manifestos are often accepted by the highest decision making body of a party (Budge, 2001; Volkens et al., 2014).

The inclusion of manifestos from two consecutive elections that led to differing governing coalitions helps to create a more robust and encompassing dataset, since manifestos differ in their tone if a party runs for an election after being in government or opposition (Strøm et al., 2008; Tapper, 2007, p.101). The focus on two recent elections is based on the interest of the thesis to map partisan preferences in today's higher education policy. While tracing

historical development of partisan preferences by comparing manifestos from the 1950s with those from today, for example, would also be an interesting topic, but it is not the focus of this study. Table 3 provides an overview of the manifestos that are part of the analysis as well as the total number of coded positions per manifesto.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 3. Overview of the included manifestos.**<sup>18</sup>

Country	Election year	Parties	Total number of coded positions per manifesto
England	2005	Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats	7, 11, 4
	2010	Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats	5, 20, 10
North Rhine-Westphalia	2005	SPD, CDU, FDP, Grüne, WASG <sup>19</sup>	13, 24, 47, 13, 10
	2010	SPD, CDU, FDP, Grüne, Die Linke	23, 10, 58, 34, 6
Norway	2009	AP, FrP, Høyre, KrF, SenP, SV, Venstre	24, 24, 32, 40, 41, 36, 38
	2013	AP, FrP, Høyre, KrF, SenP, SV, Venstre	23, 22, 22, 40, 13, 39, 26
Netherlands	2010	CDA, CU, D66, GL, PvdA, PVV, SGP, SP, VVD	25, 12, 25, 14, 24, 6, 17, 10, 16

<sup>17</sup> A detailed overview of all documents that have been included in the thesis is provided in the appendix.

<sup>18</sup> An overview of the parties, their acronyms and their respective party family is provided in the appendix.

<sup>19</sup> In 2005 both the WASG and the PDS ran as separate parties, with WASG being the more successful one. In 2010 both parties merged into the new party Die Linke.

	2012	CDA, CU, D66, GL, PvdA, PVV, SGP, SP, VVD	16, 20, 24, 12, 34, 3, 18, 15, 26
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The manifestos were retrieved from three sources: (1) the raw (un-coded) data from the CMP, (2) the database of polidoc.net, and (3) directly from the parties.

Coalition agreements have been chosen as documents to analyse the governments' positions on higher education since they represent contract-like agreements between the governing parties that outline an incoming government's policy agenda (Strøm & Müller, 1999; Strøm et al., 2008; Strøm, Müller, & Smith, 2010). Furthermore, they are public documents that are available to the electorate, and thus create accountability for the governing parties as they need to follow up on the proposals made in the agreements. Finally, coalition agreements are often voted upon by decision making bodies of the participating parties, also making these agreements highly relevant for intra-party accountability. The coalition agreements and policy documents that have been used for the analysis undertaken for the third article were collected from the web sites of the participating parties, national governments and ministries. They include the higher education part from the coalition agreements of the governing coalitions in North Rhine-Westphalia, Norway and the Netherlands each at both points in time, as well as matching higher education policy documents such as reports from expert commissions or policy proposals. For the analysis in the framework of the third article, England was excluded due to two reasons. First, coalition governments are an extremely rare phenomenon in British politics. Even though the 2010 election led to such a government, as the system is not used to coalition agreements as tools in the policy-making process the analysis focused on the three remaining cases. Second, as will be discussed in more detail below, it was also impossible to gather the necessary interview data in England.

The methodological tool selected for analysing the texts is a qualitative content analysis. Content analysis in general is defined as: "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2012, p.24). While a text is always qualitative data to start with, content

analysis can basically be used in two forms, either quantitative or qualitative (Krippendorff, 2012, p.88). In a qualitative content analysis textual units are categorised to structure a text according to a given research interest, contrary to that quantitative approaches use numbers instead of categories to organise the text (Krippendorff, 2012). However, both approaches have in common that they sample a text, unitise it, contextualise it and use it to answer specific research questions. Qualitative content analysis was used in this study, mainly because quantifying was perceived as too abstract to do justice to the difference in governance approaches, especially the second analytical dimension. Thus, instead of using quantified measurements along the two dimensions, the textual units have been categorised based on the coding scheme described below. However, the qualitative approach used in this thesis is based on a critical realist starting point. Therefore, the categories used for the coding have been deduced from the existing literature and the coding of the corpus does not feedback into a reformulation of the research questions, as is done in more constructivist or hermeneutic studies (Krippendorff, 2012). By having a strong foundation in the existing literature, the coding scheme allows to structure the texts according to indicators that are central for answering the research questions (Neuendorf, 2002).

The overall design of the content analysis is similar to the approach described by Krippendorff (2012, p.94) as “comparing similar phenomena inferred from different texts”. As manifestos, coalition agreements and policy documents are treated as different categories of texts pertaining to differing steps of the policy process, they have been included in the same corpus and analysed using the same tools. However, the analyses of these three types of documents were conducted separately to do justice to the different steps of the process that translates preferences to policies. Thus, the texts for the corpus were selected using a relevance sampling approach (Krippendorff, 2012), as they represent all relevant texts in relation to the research questions. Following the most common approach in the studies of partisan manifestos, quasi-sentences were chosen as the coding unit for the analysis.

The coding scheme is based on the two analytical dimensions, each with four indicators that have been derived from the relevant literature. For each of these eight indicators, three codes have been included in the coding scheme, capturing an increase, a decrease or stability. This leads to a coding scheme as it is outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4. Overview of the coding scheme.**

Dimension	Indicator	Code
Re-distributive dimension	Public spending	Increase
		Stability
		Decrease
	Access	Increase
		Stability
		Decrease
	Private spending	Increase
		Stability
		Decrease
	Student support	Increase
		Stability
		Decrease
Control dimension	Dominance of the government	Increase
		Stability
		Decrease
	Governance through stakeholder	Increase
		Stability
		Decrease
	Autonomy of higher education	Increase
		Stability

		Decrease
	Governance through markets	Increase
		Stability
		Decrease

The coding was performed by a single human coder. In this process, the coder used the MAXQDA software to organise the coding of each relevant quasi-sentence with the matching code(s). Afterwards, all the quasi-sentences in each document coded with a specific code were combined and put in relation to the quasi-sentences coded with the two other possible codes to assess the position of the text in relation to each indicator. Three months after the initial coding an intra-coder reliability test was performed, the results of which are reported in the following section.

In addition to the qualitative content analysis of the corpus of texts, the researcher also conducted a set of interviews. These interviews were mainly used for the analysis presented in the third article of this thesis. The aim of the interviews was to get a better understanding of the role of the previously analysed documents for the policy-making process. In this, the interviews are supposed to provide a context for the documents and also look beyond the role of the documents, allowing the respondents to address additional factors that might be relevant to the research questions. The interview respondents were purposefully chosen (Bryman, 2012), and include experts for higher education policy from different parties. Due to limitations in resources and time, the major party of the right and the left in each country was contacted by the researcher with a request to be put in contact with their expert on higher education policy. The researcher was successful in getting the necessary interviews in three of the four countries included in this study. Unfortunately, even after several attempts through multiple channels it was impossible for the researcher to schedule interviews in the UK. Since it was left to the political parties to identify their key person for higher education policy, the respondents include both members of parliaments and professional party staff.



**Table 5. Overview of interview respondents.**

Country	Party	Role
North Rhine-Westphalia	SPD	Staff member
	CDU	Member of parliament
Norway	AP	Member of parliament
	Høyre	Member of parliament
Netherlands	PvdA	Staff member
	VVD	Member of parliament

The interviews were semi-structured and based on an interview guide, which can be found in the appendix to this thesis. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, were conducted and voice recorded by the researcher and afterwards professionally transcribed for the analysis. The treatment of all respondents was in line with common standards of research ethics, as is outlined in the next section, which addresses issues related to reliability, validity and ethics.

#### ***4.4. Reliability, validity, and research ethics***

To ensure that the research design and methods previously described in this chapter deliver trustworthy results necessary to answer the research questions of this study, this section presents a description of the ways in which the study catered to issues related to reliability and different forms of validity. Additionally, the section also presents the way in which ethical considerations have been involved in the study.

Reliability refers to “the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials” (Neuendorf, 2002, p.112). Therefore, “a research procedure is reliable when it responds to the same phenomena in the same way regardless of the circumstances of its implementation” (Krippendorff, 2012, p.267). Reliability thus demonstrates the trustworthiness of the mode of analysis of the data and its replicability. To ensure that the process of data analysis was conducted in a way that can be perceived as reliable according to professional standards, several forms of reliability test can be performed. These tests share a common approach, as they are all based on repeating the research effort in different conditions, for example using different coders or coding at different points in time, and then compare the results to the original research effort (Krippendorff, 2012).

However, reliability in general ignores the world outside the specific research process, and thus only indicates that the procedures can be trusted and replicated in relation to the data included. It does not address the truthfulness of the measurement with regard to real world phenomena (Krippendorff, 2012). This is assessed by several forms of validity, which will be discussed below. While reliability of the research instrument is not a sufficient condition for validity of the same instrument, it is however a necessary one, as unreliability limits the chance for an instrument to deliver valid results (Neuendorf, 2002).

To assess the reliability of the coding procedure performed for this study a test-retest approach was chosen. Since the corpus was coded by a single coder an intra-coder reliability test was conducted. For this, three months after the initial coding, 10% of the corpus was coded a second time by the same coder. The results of both coding process were then compared using two different and well-established measures of reliability. Based on Holsti’s (1969) method, the proportion of agreement observed was .80. Krippendorff’s alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007; Krippendorff, 2012) was calculated at .798. Both measures of reliability indicate that the coding performed for this thesis adheres to the conventional standards and thus can be perceived as reliable (Neuendorf, 2002, p.142ff).

In contrast to reliability, validity addresses the relation of the methodological tools and data to the real world phenomena that the research aims to address. In this, validity is concerned with the truth of a research project, something that cannot be ascertained through repetition, but rather requires a different set of approaches (Krippendorff, 2012, p.268). There is discussion in parts of the literature about whether validity as a concept applies to qualitative

research or whether there is a need for different concepts (Kleven, 2008). Thus, several alternative terms have been crafted, some of which claim that there is an inherently different approach to validity in qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). However, the concept of validity is based upon ontological and epistemological positions which are shared by both quantitative and qualitative researchers. At its core, validity is a property of inferences and the relevance of different forms of validity depends on what kind of inferences one draws and not the data used for this (Kleven, 2008). Thus, validity is best described as the approximate truth of the inferences drawn from a research project, and consequently matters for both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Following Kleven's (2008) typology one can distinguish four forms of validity that are used in quantitative studies, but also matter for qualitative work. First, construct validity addresses the step from indicators to constructs and is concerned with the question of how far the chosen indicators are the best possible choice of all indicators to make a concept measurable. In the context of this research project, construct validity was assured through a strong foundation in the research literature, especially regarding the indicators used to operationalise the two analytical dimensions (see Chapter 3). The second type of validity is statistical validity. It is concerned with the co-variation of variables and the question whether an observed tendency is worthy enough to be interpreted. While this might seem to be more relevant for quantitative research, the question whether an observed change in an indicator is strong enough to be of interest for the study also matters for qualitative work. At the same time, this form of validity is the hardest to prove in qualitative studies, as it relies mainly on a researcher's judgement of the data. However, qualitative researchers have very detailed case knowledge making it easier for them to judge whether an observed tendency is relevant for their study. Through making the process of analysis transparent and being open about, why and on which grounds a change in an indicator is deemed to be relevant, it is possible to ensure statistical validity. This is also how this form of validity was ensured in the context of this study.

The third form of validity according to Kleven (2008) is internal validity, and it encompasses the step from observed co-variation to causal interpretation. While in general one should also be careful when claiming causality, in qualitative research, it is especially important to evaluate alternative possibilities before presenting results as causal (Kleven,

2008, p.227). The central factor to ensure internal validity is a good and properly fitting research design. However, one should always remember that even if the data fit well, the causal model can still be wrong. While experiments are generally considered to be best suited for causal descriptions, qualitative work is especially well suited for causal explanations (Kleven, 2008). Several strategies can be used in qualitative research to strengthen internal validity, and some of these have been applied in the context of this thesis.

One of the strategies that was employed is structural corroboration, which describes the use of multiple sources of data for one project to triangulate and strengthen the interpretations (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). In this thesis, two types of data, documents and interviews, have been used to strengthen the internal validity. A second strategy that was used to increase the internal validity is rhizomatic legitimisation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). It describes a research process in which the data are not only described but also mapped and the structure observed by the researcher. In the context of this research project, the researcher structured the data in the various steps of the analysis using the analytical framework that was previously designed. The third strategy used was a strong focus on theoretical validity (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). By demonstrating the fit between the data, its interpretation and previously generated theoretical expectations it is possible to increase the internal validity of a study. In this research project, a set of expectations towards different party families was deduced. Later they were tested with the empirical material, including discussions about the fit between expectations and results, in order to ensure theoretical validity and through this strengthened its internal validity. The final strategy that was used to strengthen internal validity was the limitation of observation bias, which describes problems stemming from insufficient or biased data or case selection (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). This was controlled in the framework of this study by selecting both multiple country context in which parties are studied and two consecutive elections as points in time at which documents have been collected. Furthermore, the already mentioned reliability test also has a positive impact as it ensures stability of the coding process. Overall, the internal validity of this study has been ensured by using multiple strategies and consideration for issues related to internal validity have been present early on in the design of the project.

However, internal validity is always local and linked to the studied context, therefore to be able to assess the transferability of results one needs to take the fourth form of validity into consideration. It is called external validity and covers the transfer of the results from the context of the study to the wider population. While this is done through statistical generalisation in quantitative work, qualitative studies rely on non-statistical generalisation, which is based on rational arguments instead of numeric measures (Kleven, 2008). While it is also possible to generalise in qualitative research, over time or context, to a certain extent all generalisation has to be preliminary as it is based on arguments and there is no final proof. However, in a Popperian sense even statistical hypotheses are never accepted as final proof, as only falsification of a hypothesis can be final. Therefore, qualitative results can reach the same level of external robustness as quantitative ones. Even if one accepts that findings of qualitative work can only be generalised in a more preliminary fashion, this would still fit the explorative character that this thesis has, as it sets out to analyse and conceptualise a so far insufficiently captured issue.

To ensure the external validity of this study, four strategies have been used. First, by communicating the results at multiple stages of the process with the scholarly community, through conference presentations and the publication of the research articles linked to this thesis, the communicative validity of the findings was strengthened, as the results were discussed within the wider scholarly community (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b, p.237). Second, by ensuring the quality of craftsmanship in the research process with regard to methods, design or case selection (amongst other things), investigation validity was strengthened (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). The third strategy used to increase external validity is an emphasis on interpretive validity. This describes the ability to understand the context and group under study. In the framework of this study, the interviews especially helped to strengthen the understanding of the specificities of the studied subject, and thus helped to increase the transferability of the results. The fourth and most important strategy to increase external validity is a focus on temporal, ecological and population generalisability (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). Here the thesis's strong foundation in the scholarly literature, the theory-guided selection of indicators and cases as well as the cross-border comparisons provide a good basis for generalising the results of this study. This is also in line with the proposal by Lijphart (1971) to use qualitative research to develop new conceptual approaches, and identify so far insufficiently addressed variables, which then

provide options for generalising beyond the empirical scope of a study. However, at the same time this study is also limited, as it focuses only on recent elections that took place in Western European parliamentary democracies. Thus, one has to be open about these limitations and modest in the conclusions drawn beyond the included cases. A discussion of the limitations of this study is presented in the final chapter.

Following a discussion about the measures taken to ensure the reliability and validity of this research project, the remainder of this section addresses considerations with regard to research ethics. Here two subjects need to be covered. First, everyone undertaking research in higher education in a wider sense encounters the problem of self-referencing research. Since all professional researchers are part of the academic community, research in this field is always research of one's own work place. When analysing questions of how universities act or how higher education policy should be shaped, it is especially hard for researchers to ensure a more or less neutral approach to the topic, since all of them are involved with these issues on a daily basis. Thus, they most probably have specific opinions on many issues. However, this can also have advantages, since having inside knowledge supports research activities. The tension between having inside knowledge and being active in self-referencing research has been addressed by Kalleberg (2007), who states in reference to Merton that in social science to be able to understand the reasons of actors in their specific contexts, one has to imagine him- or herself in the same situations as the actors studied, since even the bare description of reasons for actions require that the researcher is able to evaluate them. However, at the same time it is necessary to be as indifferent and as open as possible to the content studied, even though it might relate to one's working environment. To do so, this thesis follows the Norwegian Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and Humanities in which it is stated that: "*Researchers shall adhere to research ethics standards, for example, requirements regarding honesty, impartiality and willingness to accept their own fallibility*" (Forskningsetiske-Komiteer, 2006, p.8).

The second relevant issue concerning research ethics in this thesis concerns the data gathered for the analysis. While the documents that were part of the corpus are all public documents and thus bear no potential ethical implications, the interview data are more sensitive. To ensure the proper treatment of the interviewees as well as the appropriate storage of the data, the research project followed the regulations of the Norwegian Social

Science Data Services (NSD). In this process, the project was registered with NSD, a process that also includes receiving comments on the interview guide. Furthermore, all interviewees were properly informed about the scope and the aim of the research project, the duration of the interview and the intended usage of the data. Participation in the interviews was voluntary, and the anonymity of the respondents was assured, as it was guaranteed that they would be identified only by party affiliation and professional status (e.g. Member of Parliament or staff member). Given the public character of the interviewees' occupations, all of them agreed to this treatment. Additionally, each respondent received a signed note assuring them about the appropriate treatment of the data, and after each interview the researcher collected the respondent's written consent to use the data for the project.

## 5. Summary of the articles

This chapter provides short summaries of the three articles that are part of this study. Each summary includes the research aim and questions, the theoretical and methodological approaches used in the article as well as the role of the article in the framework of the overall thesis.

### 5.1. Article 1

Jungblut, Jens (2015). "Bringing Political Parties into the Picture – a Two-Dimensional Analytical Framework for Higher Education Policy." *Higher Education* 69(5): 867-882.

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The first article takes the lack of research on the role of political parties on changes in higher education policy as a starting point, to argue for the inclusion of analytical tools from political science into higher education studies. To do this, the article draws on existing studies of partisan dynamics in higher education policy and constructs a two-dimensional analytical frame, illustrates it by referring to ideal higher education systems, and creates hypotheses on the preferences of different party families in relation to the two analytical dimensions. Finally, potential constraints on partisan preferences are discussed and a research agenda outlining further steps towards a better understanding of the role of political parties for higher education policy is presented. In doing this, the article answers two research questions: (1) How can political parties' preferences in higher education policy be conceptualised? (2) What could possibly constrain partisan competition in higher education policy?

The first step in addressing the research questions demands going back to the existing literature in political science and mapping what the literature on partisan politics offers with regard to partisan preferences in higher education. The main argument of the partisan politics literature on higher education is that parties have different preferences in higher education mainly along a dimension that covers socio-economic conflicts and the redistributive potential of higher education. While there seem to be contradicting findings with regard to the question, whether a left- or a right-wing party is more likely to spend more public money on higher education, a closer look reveals that partisan support for



public spending in higher education is actually contingent on the existing level of access to higher education. Finally, the level of private spending on higher education is also identified as a key factor in determining the re-distributive potential of higher education, and thus the partisan preferences linked to it. The results of the existing literature are summarised by constructing the first analytical dimension, the re-distributive dimension, which encompasses partisan preferences between the two ideal points of favouring a restrictive or an expansive higher education system. Parties of the political left are theorised to show preferences towards the expansive end of the continuum, while parties of the right should rather be on the restrictive end.

In the subsequent analytical step the theoretical framework is expanded by constructing the second dimension that captures conflicts over the public governance of higher education. Based on literature on public sector reforms and the role of political parties, it is argued that the relationship between the state and segments of the public sector has been opened up in the wake of NPM reforms, and that this led to conflicts between parties about the appropriate way to steer the public sector. It is also argued that this affects higher education, and based on the previously described conceptualisation by Gornitzka and Maassen (2000), the control dimension is constructed with the two extreme points of centralised control over higher education or de-centralised control. Parties of the left are theorised to show preferences towards the more centralised aspects of the dimension, while parties of the right are expected to prefer de-centralised forms of control.

The final step of constructing the analytical framework combines the two dimensions and illustrates the ideas behind the framework by presenting four higher education systems that represent the four corners of the two dimensional frame. As this article is a conceptual one, no real methodological approach or empirical material was used, thus the illustrative examples are the only empirical component. After presentation of the four higher education systems, these systems are linked to party families that can ideally be expected to prefer such a system. This is limited to four types of party families - social democrats, conservative parties, liberal parties, and Christian democrats – as both anti-establishment and green parties are considered to be harder to include in the framework. As a summary of the link between the framework and the expected partisan preferences four hypotheses are formulated towards the four party families (Jungblut, 2015, p.876):

*“If a political party belongs to the group of Social Democratic Parties, then it is more likely to favour an expansive and centrally controlled higher education system.*

*If a political party belongs to the group of Christian Democratic Parties, then it is more likely to favour a restrictive and centrally controlled higher education system.*

*If a political party belongs to the group of Conservative Parties, then it is more likely to favour a restrictive and de-centralised higher education system.*

*If a political party belongs to the group of Liberal Parties, then it is more likely to favour an expansive and de-centralised higher education system.”*

Finally, the article discusses potential constraints on these hypothesised ideal partisan preferences. These constraints are mainly expected to stem from path dependencies of the existing higher education system, as changes in the existing system create winners and losers, and existing institutions structure the political opportunities for change, and thus potentially limit parties in their preferences. Additionally, the article points to the need to assess separately partisan preferences from the positions and actions of a government with regard to higher education, as the translation of preferences into policies faces even more constraints that potentially limit visible change.

In relation to the overall thesis, the function of this article is to present the two-dimensional analytical framework, argue for the necessity of both dimensions to understand partisan preferences in higher education, and the way to operationalise these two dimensions. Additionally, the article presents the existing political science literature on the politics of higher education to the community of higher education researchers. In this, the main results of the article are the analytical framework, the connected hypothesis on the preferences of different political parties, the possibility that parties face constraints from their institutional environment, and the general shift of focus from structure-oriented approaches in higher education policy analysis towards a greater emphasis on agency. Based on these results, the article also presents a research agenda that calls for empirical analyses of partisan preferences based on the proposed framework, and explicitly suggests the study of party manifestos to gather more empirical knowledge on party positions in higher education. Furthermore, a more detailed investigation of the question of how a change in government

affects higher education policy is proposed. Both questions are taken up in the next two articles of this thesis, highlighting the connection between the different building blocks of the overall project. However, it is also necessary to point to two additions to the theoretical framework that occurred after the first article was published, and which are reflected both in the third chapter and the other two articles. First, the position concerning student support systems was added as an additional indicator for assessing partisan positions on the first dimension. Second, in the context of the following articles, both green and anti-establishment parties have been included in the conceptual expectations as well as the empirical analysis. Furthermore, the position of Christian democratic parties with regard to the control dimension was slightly corrected, anticipating that they take a more decentralised position.

## **5.2. Article 2**

Jungblut, Jens (under review). "Re-Distribution and Public Governance – the Politics of Higher Education in Western Europe." *European Politics and Society*.

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The second article continues where the first one ended and presents an initial empirical analysis. Starting with the assessment that there are many assumptions with regard to partisan preferences on higher education policy but very few empirical studies, the article argues that those existing studies also fall short of portraying the complete picture of partisan dynamics, as they only focus on re-distributive issues. Furthermore, it is argued that the empirical basis for most analysis is rather weak as it relies, for example, on the CMP coding, which is not sufficiently detailed to address partisan positions on higher education properly. To address these gaps the second article presents the two-dimensional analytical framework, including a set of conceptual expectations towards positions of different party families in relation to it, and later puts these expectations to the test. For this, election manifestos of all relevant parties in four European countries (England, North Rhine-Westphalia, the Netherlands, and Norway) are analysed using qualitative content analysis, and the identified party positions are then compared to the conceptual expectations.

The theoretical starting point of this article is similar to that in the first article, but the second article has a more explicit foundation in partisan politics. In this, it is argued that different constituencies have different preferences and that these preferences are aggregated

by political parties that shape policies accordingly, once they are in government. Consequently, one can formulate expectations towards the preferences of different party families in higher education based on their ideology and matching electorates. Using the two previously described analytical dimensions the article derives four indicators for each dimension to assess partisan preferences. For the re-distributive dimension these are: (1) public spending on higher education, (2) access to higher education, (3) private spending on higher education, and (4) student support. For the control dimension the indicators are: (a) the dominance of the government in controlling higher education, (b) autonomy of higher education institutions to steer themselves, (c) governance through negotiations between stakeholder groups, and (d) governance based on market mechanisms. While indicators (b) and (d) indicate de-centralised control of higher education, indicators (a) and (c) point towards centralised forms of control. Based on these indicators theoretical expectations about the preferences of different party families are formulated, which are anchored in their ideological background. The summary of these expected preferences was presented in Table 1 in Chapter 3.

After formulating these expectations, the article briefly discusses alternative factors that might influence partisan preferences. These factors include path dependencies and policy legacies that stem from the existing higher education system in relation to which parties formulate their preferences, and which can lead to constraints on said preferences. A second factor that is discussed is the feedback effects from the existing structures on the preferences of parties' electorates that in turn make it more costly for parties to pursue certain changes. Finally, the polarisation of the party system in the form of the number of competing parties is also highlighted as a factor that influences partisan competition on higher education.

Methodologically the second article is based on a qualitative content analysis that uses original data and a coding scheme that is based on the eight previously mentioned indicators. For each indicator, three codes are used measuring an increase, decrease or stability. The corpus consists of election manifestos of all relevant parties in the four countries for two recent elections. The results of the analysis can be summarised by comparing all parties included, along the two dimensions. The following table provides such a comparison including a further separation of each of the four original cells to highlight differences within a cell.

**Table 6. Overview of the empirical results.**

		Re-distributive dimension			
		Expansive higher education		Restrictive higher education	
Control dimension	Centralised control over higher education	Grüne; WASG/Linke; SV; GroenLinks; SP;			
		SPD; AP; PvdA;	<i>Labour*</i> ; <i>KrF</i> ; Senter Partiet;		
	De-centralised control over higher education	Liberal Democrats;			CU;
		Venstre;	FrP; <i>Høyre</i> ; D66;	Conservatives; CDU; <i>FDP</i> ; CDA; <i>VVD</i> ;	SGP;

\*Labour does not describe a preference on the control dimension.  
Parties in italics deviate from the theoretical expectations.

Comparing the theoretical expectations towards the different parties with the empirical results, it can be said that the two-dimensionality of partisan dynamics in higher education is supported by the empirical data. Thus, both with regard to the re-distributive characteristics and the public governance of higher education political parties from different party families show systematically different preferences. Furthermore, many of the expectations towards the preferences of different party families have been fulfilled. In this, parties from the social democratic, green, and anti-establishment party families have been found to prefer an expansive higher education system and more centralised control. Liberal parties are more in favour of expansive higher education system and de-centralised control. Finally,

conservatives and Christian democrats tend to prefer restrictive higher education systems that are de-centrally controlled.

However, there is also a fair amount of variation within party families and between countries, which suggest that the institutional context in which parties formulate their positions is clearly of relevance. Two party families showed an especially high level of variation in their preferences concerning higher education policy. Liberal parties observed a large variation along the re-distributive dimension. An explanation for this lies in the ideological diversity within this group of parties, which encompasses more neo-liberal and social-liberal parties. Christian democrats were found to be more diverse with regard to their preferences on the control dimension. This is argued to be connected to the tension between the party family's preferences for subsidiarity and assuring a common quality for public services throughout a country.

Based on these results it can be concluded that the ideological background of a party family leads to systematically different partisan preferences of single parties along the two dimensions, with the liberal and Christian democratic party family especially showing greater ideological diversity. However, the context in which specific parties formulate their preferences also has an influence on the observed preferences of single parties in different national contexts. As parties articulate their preferences in relation to the higher education and party system in which they act, this context constrains the parties in articulating ideologically ideal preferences.

In the context of the overall thesis, this article and its results serve several functions. First, the empirical analysis moves beyond the mere conceptual considerations on partisan conflicts in higher education and provides an empirical test of the conceptual framework as well as the related expectations towards different party families. The results of the article clearly show that parties compete in higher education along two dimensions, and that the party family with its ideology and matching electorate leads to systematically different partisan preferences on higher education policy. Thus, this is a first empirical indication for the relevance of political parties in shaping higher education policies. However, parties are also constrained in the formulation of their preferences and do not always articulate ideal ideological positions, especially if these positions would be politically too costly. In this context, policy legacies and the level of partisan competition are found to be relevant factors,

mainly the institutional environment of a party in relation to the structure of the higher education sector. These environmental factors that constrain specific parties in their preferences lead to varying positions across countries within the same party family. Overall, the analysis in the second article focuses on the processes on the far left side of the theoretical framework as it is depicted in Figure 1: the interaction between a party's ideological background and its institutional context as well as the resulting partisan preferences in higher education. Thus, the results of this article create the basis for the following analysis of the process how these partisan preferences are then translated to policy proposals in situations of coalition government.

### **5.3. Article 3**

Jungblut, Jens (under review). "From Preferences to Policies in Coalition Governments – Proactive and Reactive Policy-Making in Higher Education Policy." *Journal of Public Policy*.

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The final article of this thesis focuses on the process of policy-making that follows the formulation of partisan preferences. It contains the second empirical analysis and addresses the middle and right part of the theoretical framework as presented in Figure 1. Based on theories from party politics and public policy the analysis takes the different partisan preferences in higher education as a starting point and focuses on the transfer of these preferences into policy proposals within the context of parliamentary multi-party democracies. It is argued that especially in these contexts, the negotiation between the different parties that form a governing coalition make the direct transfer of partisan preferences into policy proposals more unlikely. Therefore, the article aims to unpack the process of how parties and their preferences influence policy proposals, and in how far coalition agreements help to translate partisan preferences into policies. To do this, the article addresses two research questions: (1) How do partisan preferences transfer to coalition positions? and (2) How do partisan preferences and coalition positions influence policy proposals in situations of proactive and reactive policy-making?

For the theoretical framework the analysis combines knowledge from the party politics literature with public policy theories. In situations of coalition government, "pure" partisan preferences can be expected to get "diluted" by the negotiations of the different parties for a

common agenda of the government; the direct enactment of these preferences therefore becomes more unlikely. Thus, it is necessary to analyse the relationship between partisan preferences and coalition positions to capture the role that partisan preferences have for policy-making activities of a multi-party government. In this, coalition agreements play a central role as they are the key tool to overcome inter-party conflicts and limit the likelihood of veto during the government's term. These agreements present *ex-ante* tools that describe the agenda of the incoming government, limit conflicts, and provide a disincentive for defection. Thus, they increase the chances of the government successfully pursuing policy changes. As coalition governments force parties with differing preferences and interests to agree on a common set of positions for the incoming government, parties with similar preferences are more likely partners than those that have more diverging interests. Furthermore, to be able to form a government parties do not need to agree on all policy areas, however, only those policies that are not actively opposed by any of the participating parties will make it into the coalition agreement. The first expectation of the article is therefore that more similar preferences with regard to higher education policy of parties in a coalition will lead to a more encompassing section on higher education policy in the coalition agreement.

Following the formulation of coalition positions, the article conceptually differentiates between two situations of policy-making: proactive and reactive. In proactive policy-making a coalition outlines a desired change in policy in its agreement, and thus creates a situation where internal veto possibilities are limited and a follow-up to the agreement becomes necessary for a positive evaluation of the government. In these situations it can be expected that such a follow-up is more likely, but that this proposal follows the negotiated coalition position rather than a partisan preference. Contrary to that, reactive policy-making describes a situation in which an issue gets onto the agenda for which there is no pre-negotiated policy position. This is usually caused by unforeseen circumstances that arise during a term in office and which are described as shocks. As there are no agreed-upon positions for the government to fall back on, governing parties can be expected to promote their partisan preferences, especially if they address the issue in their manifestos. It is expected that in these situations a policy proposal to follow up on the issue is less likely, since the governing parties promote their diverging preferences and thus there is no agreement between them.



The article uses a qualitative comparative design and qualitative content analysis to study two types of data for three countries (North Rhine-Westphalia, Norway, and the Netherlands). First, documents covering all three steps of the process of translation of partisan preferences are analysed using the previously developed two-dimensional framework. These documents include election manifestos, coalition agreements and policy proposals. Second, to get a better understanding of the role of these documents in the policy process a set of semi-structured interviews have been analysed, which were conducted with experts for higher education policy from the two major parties in each of the three countries.

The results support the different expectations. First, an analysis of the level of agreement between the preferences of the different governing parties in higher education policy and the corresponding section in the coalition agreement shows that the more similar the preferences of the governing parties are, the more encompassing the matching section of the agreement will be. The following table summarises the findings for six governing coalitions in the three studied countries.

**Table 7. Agreement between parties and detailedness of coalition agreements.**

Case	Agreement between parties	Detail of coalition agreement
North Rhine-Westphalia (2005)	High	High
North Rhine-Westphalia (2010)	High	High
Norway (2009)	Low	Low
Norway (2013)	High	High
Netherlands (2010)	High	High
Netherlands (2012)	Medium	Medium

Based on the results of the first step of the empirical analyses, the second step focuses on the process of policy-making that follows after a coalition has been formed. Using both interviews and documents, empirical examples of the two conceptually different situations of policy-making are presented to analyse the role of partisan preferences and coalition

positions in these circumstances. In proactive policy-making, where a policy is in the focus that is included in the coalition agreement, two instances are used as examples, the comprehensive higher education reforms in North Rhine-Westphalia and the reform of the student support system in the Netherlands.

In both situations significant higher education reforms followed the outlined positions in the coalition agreements. While in North Rhine-Westphalia the introduction of tuition fees and the de-regulation of the relationship between higher education and the state were implemented by the Christian democratic – liberal government in 2005, the social democratic – green coalition that followed in 2010 abolished the tuition fees again and partly re-tightened the link between the state and the higher education sector. Both policy changes have been implemented by ideologically homogenous coalitions that previously agreed on respective plans in their coalition agreements.

In the Dutch case, the changes in the student support system by the coalition of the liberal VVD and the social democratic PvdA show that even in cases where parties might have differing ideological foundations, a settlement in a coalition agreement can help to overcome these differences and lead to the proposal of a joint policy. Additionally, the article uses one example of reactive policy-making to illustrate dynamics in cases when a coalition tries to propose a policy that has not been pre-negotiated. Here the example is the proposal of the Norwegian government to introduce tuition fees for students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA). The two-time failure of the government to introduce these tuition fees and harmonise their policy with the other Nordic countries underlines the importance of including the intended change in policy in the coalition agreement. In the Norwegian case, the proposal never made it to the parliament since it became clear that parties, whose support was necessary to realise the policy change, withdrew their support and instead promoted their partisan preferences, which contradicted the government's proposal.

The results of the third article offer a detailed account of the transfer of partisan preferences to coalition agreements and subsequent policy proposals with regard to higher education. They show the central importance of the coalition agreement in multiparty consensus democracies, and the conceptual difference between coalition positions and partisan preferences. While partisan preferences are central in the process of coalition formation, the

coalition agreement indicates where substantial policy change is more likely, due to the limited veto possibilities. If a policy is included in the coalition agreement, it gains higher salience, since following up on it will become more important for governing parties as they know they will be held accountable by their voters based on the government's success. Therefore, the breadth and detail of the coalition agreement is a good indicator for the chances of a government to be able to propose significant policy change.

After the first two articles showed that parties do have significantly different preferences with regard to higher education policies, and described how these different preferences are structured, this article offers an insight into the way in which partisan preferences matter for policy-making in coalition governments. In the context of the overall project, it therefore offers both the conceptualisation of the process of how preferences are translated through coalition agreements to policy proposals, as well as an empirical test of these ideas. The results not only support the previous findings that party families structurally differ in their preferences in higher education, they also go beyond that. The article theoretically differentiates between partisan preferences and coalition positions and argues that parties need to make sure that their preferences are transferred to coalition positions to be able to follow up on electoral preferences, as these are the basis for the policy-making activity of the government.

The empirical examples clearly show that parties with more similar preferences find it easier to agree on more encompassing policies in their coalition agreements, which are then also followed up by policy proposals, as, for example, in the case of North Rhine-Westphalia. However, even in situations of coalitions between parties of differing ideological background, a coalition agreement can help to facilitate significant policy changes, as the coalition position supersedes the partly contradicting partisan preferences, as is visible in the Dutch case. If a coalition tries to propose a policy without having a pre-formulated agreement, as in the Norwegian case, it encounters more difficulties as it has to deal with a greater number of veto players and a follow-up policy proposal is less likely. Overall, this reiterates that parties and their preferences are relevant for higher education policy-making. At the same time, the relationship between higher education policy and parties in government is more complex than just linking the partisan preferences of governing parties to changes in policy. As the composition of the governing coalition and the level of detail of

the higher education section in the coalition agreement are central factors that influence where a policy can successfully be proposed during a government's term, they have a mediating influence on the realisation of partisan preferences.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

This final chapter summarises the main findings of the study. Based on the results presented and discussed in the three articles, this chapter presents a discussion of the findings in light of the overall thesis and reflects on the contributions as well as implications of these results on theoretical, methodological and empirical levels. Additionally, this chapter addresses the generalisability of the findings in the light of the study's limitations. Finally, several avenues for further research are presented that address both opportunities to enlarge the analytic frame as well as the expansion of the empirical focus.

### ***6.1. Results***

This research project set out to overcome the “benign neglect” (McLendon, 2003, p.186) that political parties face in higher education policy analysis, and to highlight that parties can also be relevant actors in this context (Tapper, 2007). To do this, the thesis focused on the question of how political parties and their preferences contribute to policy-making in higher education.

The general results of the study demonstrate that parties can play a role in higher education policy-making, and that a partisan perspective is a valuable addition to the existing analytical approaches used in higher education policy studies. When addressing the first research question, it was established that party families can be expected to show differing preferences in higher education policy, both with regard to higher education's re-distributive characteristics and the way in which the higher education sector is controlled. These differing preferences are based on the parties' ideology and respective electorates.

The expected partisan differences in higher education policy have not only been theoretically argued for, but also empirically identified in parties' election manifestos. The analysis of these documents in the context of the second research question supports the idea of a two-dimensional structure of partisan dynamics in higher education and many of the theoretical expectations towards party preferences of the different party families. However, parties from the same party family that formulate their preferences in different national contexts also show variations in their preferred policies. This result highlights that parties

face constraints from their environment, mainly the structure of the existing higher education system as well as the level of partisan competition, as they formulate their preferences in relation to the institutions that exist in the countries in which they act. This encourages parties to formulate preferences which are not ideologically “ideal”, but which will be easier to realise as they are less politically costly.

In the analysis that addressed the third research question, it has been shown that in the transfer of partisan preferences to policy proposals in situations of multi-party governments, coalition agreements are of central importance as they represent a way to initiate substantial change through proactive policy-making. However, these agreements are also found to be based on negotiated coalition positions instead of “pure” partisan preferences. Thus, they have a mediating effect on the realisation of partisan preferences as they are stated in parties’ manifestos. In reactive policy-making, when issues need to be addressed that have not been pre-negotiated and agreed upon by the coalition, partisan preferences are found to play a more central role. However, due to the increased number of potential veto-players in these situations, the chances for a policy proposal to follow-up on the preferences are rather small, as disagreement even among the parties that form the government is more likely.

These results clearly show that a partisan perspective can add important explanatory factors to studies of higher education policy. Furthermore, by excluding political parties from such analysis, one ignores a group of actors that plays a crucial role especially in the phase of policy formulation and whose preferences have a privileged position in the political arena. This is even more relevant given the recent changes in higher education linked to its increase in salience and politicisation. In cases of multi-party coalition governments the results of the analysis show that it is important to not only investigate parties and their preferences, but also to include the higher education section of a coalition agreement. This helps to identify policies which are more likely to be tackled by the coalition during their term in office and thus have a higher chance of undergoing significant change. These overarching results have a set of more detailed implications, which are the focus of the following section.

## ***6.2. Implications***

The implications of the results of this study can be structured on three levels: (1) a theoretical, (2) a methodological and (3) an empirical level. On the theoretical level, the focus on political parties and the introduction of knowledge and concepts from party politics presents a novel approach to higher education policy studies. It shifts the focus from more structural analyses (e.g. Bleiklie & Michelsen, 2013) towards a focus on actors, while still accounting for institutional constraints. The theoretical framework that emphasises the role of parties and their preferences throughout different parts of the policy cycle is one of the first encompassing a conceptualisation of partisan preferences in higher education policy-making. It thus introduces to the literature that parties and their preferences are a factor for understanding changes in higher education policy, and highlights that parties have differing positions in higher education and that these differences are meaningful for policy-making in this area.

The combination of theoretical approaches to the different steps of transferring partisan preferences into policy proposals is not only a potentially innovative approach that unpacks steps of the transfer that so far have been treated as ‘black boxes’, it also introduces the conceptual difference between partisan preferences on the one hand, and coalition positions on the other. While some of the quantitative policy output analyses attempt to capture the role of coalitions through measurements that weight the impact of different parties based on their seats (e.g. Garritzmann & Seng, 2015), these are rough proxies of the process of transforming partisan preferences, and the qualitative analysis offered in this thesis provides a first detailed empirical assessment of the relevance of this process for higher education policy.

A central contribution of this thesis is the conceptualisation of partisan preferences as being aligned along two dimensions. Through expanding the usual focus on re-distribution by addressing partisan dynamics concerning the governance arrangement that is used to govern higher education, the thesis provides a more complete picture of the role of parties in higher education policy processes. This has possible implications for both party politics and higher education policy literature. For party politics, the inclusion of partisan conflicts on the governance and control of higher education as a part of the public sector represents a previously ignored area of partisan competition, and thus genuinely new analytical tools.

Furthermore, the conceptualisations are also significant for other social policies, as the question of control is relevant for the relationship between the state and other public sectors and parties also play a central role in shaping these governance arrangements (see for example: Ansell & Lindvall, 2013; Gingrich, 2011). So the approaches proposed in this thesis offer the potential to be transferred and tested in relation to other public sectors, and by comparing partisan politics in higher education governance with partisan politics in the governance of other social policies, it is also possible to get a better understanding of the specificities of higher education governance.

The findings of this thesis, especially the role of coalition agreements for the subsequent policy-making, also have implications for public policy studies. While political parties and changes in the government have already been identified, amongst other things, in the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the multiple-streams or the punctuated equilibrium approaches as a potential source for policy change (e.g. Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Jones & Jenkins-Smith, 2009; Kingdon, 1984), the role of partisan preferences and especially coalition positions in these approaches has not been sufficiently conceptualised (Zohlnhöfer, 2009). As the policies that are included in the coalition agreement are found in this thesis to have a high chance of being followed-up during the term of a government (proactive policy-making), coalition agreements could indicate where more substantial policy change is possible during the government's term. While the process of policy implementation still holds numerous opportunities for derailing or limiting the potential amount of policy change (see: Hupe, 2011; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973), the coalition positions can be seen as a set of proposals that have already passed the earlier hurdles by being accepted by all participating parties in government as a part of the government's agenda. As politics is found to overrule possible administrative blockage in areas which are politically salient (Baekgaard et al., 2014), and since the success of a government depends on its ability to follow-up on its coalition positions, the content of the coalition agreement can therefore offer a new entry point for the analysis of policy. At the same time, such a form of partisan politics also offers an approach that has a more positive view of the potential of democratic governance (Ingram & Smith, 1993). Since parties, as the main organisations that aggregate public interests, are given a central role in shaping policy, especially in relation to other actors, such as organised interests or the bureaucracy, the relevance of elections and the opinion of the electorate are strengthened. This comes with a shift away from more



mechanical understandings of policy-making towards a greater acknowledgement of public interest.

The conceptualisation of differing partisan preferences on the public governance of higher education is a more specific theoretical contribution. It offers the possibility for higher education studies to investigate how far the different national approaches to the governance of higher education that are identified in the literature (e.g. Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000; Olsen, 2007; Paradeise, Reale, & Goastellec, 2009) can be traced back to the preferences of specific political parties and their participation in government (see e.g. McLendon & Ness, 2003). Such an approach based on the role of partisan preferences for the steering of higher education could also advance the study on hybrid steering modes (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000; Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013), as hybrids could be theorised as the result of either negotiations between different parties or changing parties in government that lead to layering processes, due to policy legacies or path dependencies from the previous government's actions.

Another more specific theoretical implication of the results of this thesis is that the literature that discusses convergence of higher education policy due to Europeanisation (Vögtle et al., 2011; Vögtle & Martens, 2014) or global scripts (Meyer et al., 2007; Schofer & Meyer, 2005) might need to revisit some of its assumptions. As parties and their preferences are found to shape national higher education policy-making, they can also be expected to have an impact on possible convergence processes. In this, parties could be theorised as selectors that decide which ideas that originate on the European or international level get taken up nationally. Thus they could act as a form of national filter that influences the nature of multi-level policy-making (see also: Christensen et al., 2014).

The methodological implications of this thesis relate to the data used for the analysis. On the one hand, the study of coalition agreements as documents that link partisan preferences with policy proposals, and thus provide an insight into the incoming government's political agenda, is a rather novel approach for both higher education studies as well as the party politics literature. This type of data is readily available most of the time, and this study shows that it provides an important point of reference for analyses of higher education policy-making. On the other hand, data triangulation through a combination of document analysis and interviews with experts from political parties for the study of partisan

preferences and their role for policy-making, proved to be a good way to avoid relying solely on documents as a data source. Furthermore, it provided an important insight into the role of diverse documents during different stages of the life-cycle of a governing coalition (Strøm et al., 2008). Such an approach comes with limitations concerning the number of cases one can include in an analysis. For example, studies that aim to cover a larger group of countries would have to combine different sets of data. Here, for example, expert surveys and different forms of text analysis could be triangulated to get a more complete assessment of partisan dynamics and in more specialised policy fields. This is especially interesting for areas that are not sufficiently covered by the existing standardised datasets, such as the CMP.

Finally, the results of this study also have empirical implications. First, partisan preferences of the different parties in higher education policy did vary according to their party family and along both the re-distributive and the control dimensions. Generally speaking, parties from the family of social democrats, greens and anti-establishment parties have been found to prefer an expansive and centrally controlled higher education system. Parties from the liberal family preferred an expansive and de-centrally controlled higher education system, often with some form of private contribution to the costs of higher education. Parties from the Christian democratic and conservative family wanted more restrictive and de-centrally controlled higher education. Given the key relevance of parties for upstream policy formulation, governments can also be expected to have differing preferences regarding their higher education policies based on their partisan composition. Furthermore, the central role that policies that are included in the coalition agreement can play in higher education policy change, as highlighted by the empirical examples from North Rhine-Westphalia and the Netherlands, show that higher education policy analysis needs to pay attention to these partisan dynamics. This would allow both retrospective explanations of policy changes as well as prospective projections about the influence of upcoming changes in the partisan composition of governments.

Additionally, while there have been many assumptions in the party politics literature on partisan preferences in higher education policy, there have been few studies that empirically analyse these positions, especially focusing exclusively on higher education. Here the only exception is the work of Garritzmann (2014), who relied on data from expert surveys to assess partisan preferences with regard to a part of the re-distributive dimension of higher

education, namely tuition fees and student support. Therefore, the detailed analysis of partisan preferences presented in this research project is an important addition to the literature, as it provides a test for assumptions on partisan preferences using data which more clearly relate to party positions than expert surveys can. By showing that parties do hold differing preferences in higher education which can be structured along two dimensions, the analysis broadened the empirical knowledge on this matter.

Another important empirical result is linked to the transfer of partisan preferences into coalition agreements, and the role of these agreements for subsequent policy proposals. Analysing coalition agreements in the same way as election manifestos has been relatively uncommon in the literature. Therefore, the empirical findings concerning the link between the level of agreement between the partisan preferences on higher education, and the level of detail of the resulting section in the coalition agreement has clear implications for future studies. So far, studies have captured coalition situations through some form of measurement of the ideological composition of the government weighted in relation to the number of seats (e.g. Garritzmann & Seng, 2015). These approaches might produce reliable data when analysing a large number of cases, but they overlook the possibility that a lack of agreement in the preferences of governing parties can actually lead to a short and non-specific section in the coalition agreement, and thus only limited policy proposals will be agreed to. So, the analysis of coalition agreements provides important empirical insights into the positions of a coalition government and offers a unique way to trace the role of partisan preferences and their relation with coalition positions.

The empirical findings are also in agreement with many other existing studies of partisan politics in higher education, which is a good sign for the validity of the study's results. As the analysis highlights that partisan differences exist in higher education policy and different party families have systematically differing positions, it supports the part of the literature that stresses party divergence (e.g. Busemeyer et al., 2013; Garritzmann, 2014) and questions those arguing for convergence (e.g. Jakobi, 2011; Meyer et al., 2007; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). However, at the same time the study shows that there are meaningful dissimilarities between parties from the same party family with regard to their preferences in higher education, echoing a similar finding from an earlier study (Garritzmann & Seng, 2015). Nevertheless, even with processes like Europeanisation or global scripts at play in

higher education, parties still offer different policies to the electorate, which vary both with regard to their re-distributive effects and the way in which the higher education sector should be governed. This highlights the ongoing importance of partisan actors in higher education policy-making. Additionally, the more detailed results of this thesis are in line with previous studies. The findings with regard to the re-distributive dimension, for example, mirror the results of Garritzmann's work (2014, 2015) on the politics of tuition fees and student subsidies, as left-wing parties are found to be more supportive of expansive higher education, while the right tends to be more restrictive. Finally, another example of agreement with the existing literature is the relative lack of interest of anti-establishment parties towards higher education (Ansell, 2010; Busemeyer et al., 2013).

### ***6.3. Limitations and transferability of the results***

While this study provides multiple contributions with important implications on a theoretical, methodological and empirical level, it is also necessary to be modest with regard to some parts of the generalisability of the findings, and openly discuss them in light of the limitations of the project. These limitations stem mainly from the more explorative character that parts of this thesis have. Since this study uses a rather novel theoretical perspective - party politics - for the analysis of higher education policy, it puts a strong focus on conceptual work and the development of theoretical expectations as well as their empirical assessment by using a detailed qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to uncover patterns in the data, identify important variations, and generate new conceptualisations. Therefore, this study developed conceptual understanding in an area that was so far not sufficiently conceptualised (Lijphart, 1971). To do so, it was necessary to use qualitative research methods that involved the time-intensive original coding of documents. This occurred for several reasons, including the unavailability of relevant standardised data. This imposed limitations on the number of contexts and points in time during which partisan preferences could be analysed. It is therefore necessary to discuss the generalisability of the findings of this thesis with regard to the countries included, the time frame covered and the policy area in focus, to make potential limitations transparent.

The selection of country contexts in which partisan preferences have been studied was limited due to the intensive procedure of data analysis. This created potential challenges for the ecological generalisability, as it raises a question about how far the results can travel

beyond the contexts directly covered through the analysis. The countries in which parties have been studied have three biases. First, the thesis focuses on parliamentary democracies because the role and function of parties for policy-making differs both in non-democratic countries and in presidential democracies. Second, the thesis had a regional focus on Europe. While this is a rather common bias, both in higher education studies and studies of partisan politics, it is also justifiable in the case of this project, since focusing on Europe makes for similar cultural backgrounds and therefore a similar structure of political conflicts between parties. Third, this thesis has a regional emphasis within Europe, as it focuses on countries from the north and west of the continent. This last focus especially has potential implications for the transferability of the results. As was pointed out in the fourth chapter, the selection of countries in which parties have been studied was theoretically driven, but also influenced by practicalities. However, there are meaningful regional differences within Europe that potentially affect one or several findings of this study, if they were to be directly transferred. For example, the different role of coalition agreements in southern Europe compared to northern Europe might lead to different findings with regard of the process of transferring partisan preferences into policy proposals (see: Strøm et al., 2008), or the different structure of partisan competition in Central-Eastern Europe (Kitschelt, 1995) could lead to deviant preferences of party families. Due to such problems, the generalisability of the detailed empirical findings of this thesis beyond north-western Europe should be exercised carefully.

At the same time, the theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis still make it possible to travel beyond the countries selected, and can serve as the basis for further comparative analyses. Since the theoretical framework for this study is based on well-established results from previous research, it offers a good starting point also for analysis beyond the empirical context included in this thesis. This includes the expectations towards the different party families as well as the two-dimensional structure of partisan preferences. Furthermore, the already described agreement between the empirical results from this thesis and those from a number of earlier studies strengthens the claim that an application of the conceptual contributions of this thesis in a different context is a good starting point from which to evaluate the generalisability of the empirical contributions through further research. Therefore, while one has to be modest about the ecological generalisability of the empirical results beyond north-western Europe, the conceptual and methodological contributions can

travel beyond the direct empirical scope of this study. As the aim of this analysis was to produce results with a high level of internal validity to get a good understanding of a part of higher education policy-making that previously had only been conceptualised, this thesis is in line with Lijphart's idea of using qualitative approaches to generate conceptual understanding that can later be tested in follow-up research (Lijphart, 1971).

The transferability of the results of this study is also limited with regard to the temporal dimension. In line with the research aim and questions guiding it, the analysis performed for this thesis focuses on two consecutive contemporary elections and rather recent data in the countries was included. Therefore, the contributions of the analysis are related to today's partisan competition and cannot be easily transferred to more historical or longitudinal studies, as some of the assumptions underlying the expected partisan differences (for example) would not hold in such a setting. As partisan preferences are found to be contingent on the institutional environment in which they are formed, it is reasonable to expect that the preferences of parties in the 1950s would differ from the preferences of the same parties in the 2000s for reasons that include the massive change that higher education systems throughout Europe experienced during that time. Furthermore, it is questionable whether there were any partisan conflicts with regard to the public governance of higher education systems in the post-war years, since the relationship between the state and public sector, at least in continental Europe, was still strongly state-centred and existing differences in governance structures linked to the structural underpinnings of national higher education systems rather than partisanship. However, while the results of this study are not directly transferable to historical analyses, they nevertheless offer a reference frame which can be used to trace the development of partisan preferences in higher education over time. A concrete suggestion for such a research endeavour will be presented in the final section. Furthermore, the results still provide an option for temporal comparisons in more recent settings, such as comparing the 1990s with the 2000s.

A final set of limitations on the transferability of the results of this study relates to the more general partisan politics literature and is connected to the question of whether the findings on partisan preferences in higher education are specific for this policy area or if it is possible to generalise them to other areas of social policy. There are two main factors that limit the generalisability of the results of this analysis to other policy areas. First, while higher

education policy has gained political salience and is more and more politicised, it is still not as salient as other areas of the welfare state, such as healthcare or welfare benefits (Garritzmann, 2014, p.260). Additionally, there are indications that the educational background of voters is strongly related to the salience that higher education policy has for them (Bovens & Wille, 2009, 2010), an effect which is less pronounced with regard to other welfare state measures. Therefore, transferring the empirical results regarding the partisan competition on higher education to other social policies can be problematic.

While those limitations call for caution when attempting to transfer the findings and approaches reported in this thesis to other policy areas, two points nevertheless hold the potential to be applicable beyond this study's empirical scope. First, the two-dimensional approach to partisan preferences that addresses both re-distribution with, and the public governance of, higher education, can also be applied in the context of other policy areas. Partisan conflict about re-distribution is a usual analytical dimension with regard to social policy, but also the idea that parties promote different preferences on public sector steering is identified in studies addressing other parts of the public sector (Gingrich, 2011; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the two-dimensional structure of partisan preferences applied in this thesis has the potential to be transferred to other areas of social policy. However, whether the preferences of different party families would follow a similar structure as in higher education is a different question, and due to the differences between higher education policy and other social policies it is possible that partisan positions fluctuate.

A second result of this study that has the potential to be transferable to other social policies are the conceptual considerations regarding the role of the coalition agreement for subsequent policy-making. Being based on the general process of coalition formation as well as the function of the coalition agreement as a document, the theoretical contributions of this study are not specific to the area of higher education. While they are limited to multi-party consensus democracies, as coalitions are less frequent in other political systems, there is no reason to expect that the process of transferring partisan preferences to coalition positions and their subsequent role for policy-making is different in other areas of social policy. Thus, the methodological implication of the thesis, that suggests putting a stronger focus on coalition agreements as data for the analysis of partisan politics in multi-party

governments, is also relevant for other policy areas as similar dynamics can be expected to be at play.

Overall, while the key findings of this study - the two-dimensional structure of partisan preferences, the expected positions of party families, the importance of the institutional environment and as the central role of coalition agreements - are clearly identifiable in the analysed cases, they potentially offer an analytical starting point and conceptual frame for follow-up studies with a different or broader empirical scope, and open several options for follow-up research, which will be outlined in more detail in the next section.

#### ***6.4. Possible further research***

There are multiple options for further research that can build on the results of this study, the focus of which can be on expanding the conceptual approach or the empirical material covered. As the empirical results and contributions of this study face some limitations when it comes to their generalisability, an expansion of the empirical focus using a conceptual lens similar to the one employed in this study would offer a first basis for further research. By using the theoretical framework of this study on a larger set of country contexts and thus also political parties, it would be possible to test whether the empirical results of this thesis can be replicated. This would lead to a set of empirical results that could claim more external validity and empirical generalisability beyond the north-western European focus that this project has. Testing the theoretical framework on a larger set of contexts and parties might require a different design and methodological approach. One option could simply be to increase the number of cases studied with the same qualitative content analysis and coding scheme applied in this study. As this requires intensive manual labour, an increase of the cases would call for multiple properly-trained coders that collaborate to generate the data for the subsequent analysis. Another methodological option could be the development of a more standardised way of measuring partisan preferences in documents. Here approaches like semantic network analysis (van Atteveldt, 2008) or automated content analysis (Pennings & Keman, 2002) could be helpful to widen the empirical scope also without the need for additional human coders. A necessary prerequisite for such an analysis would be that the documents used as a basis for the analysis are comparable in their content as well as their meaning for the parties (see for example: Hansen, 2008).



Another empirical expansion that offers interesting follow-up research to this thesis could focus on the limits to temporal generalisability that have been previously discussed. As this thesis concentrates on contemporary partisan dynamics in higher education policy, a more historical study that maps the development of partisan preferences of one or multiple party families during a longer period of time would be a valuable addition of the existing literature. While in the early 1950s higher education systems were relatively similar across North-western Europe, for example, with regard to participation rates or their institutional setup, today these systems show a large variety of types of institutions and a range of levels of participation. Therefore, such an analysis could provide a better insight into the relationship between a party family's ideology and the institutional environment for a party's preferences in higher education, as it would allow for mapping the shifts in preferences parallel to shifts in the national higher education systems. This approach is comparable to existing historical institutionalist analyses of the origin of skill systems (Busemeyer, 2015) or the development of tuition fee and student subsidies regimes (Garritzmann, 2014; Garritzmann & Seng, 2015).

Employing more instruments from historical intuitionism could also lead to a better understanding of the interaction between agency and structure in higher education policy-making, and offer the possibility to identify critical junctures at which partisanship had a lasting effect on the setup of specific higher education systems (see also: Streeck & Thelen, 2005; Thelen, 1999; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). Contrary to studies that use such an approach (e.g. Busemeyer, 2015; Garritzmann, 2014; Garritzmann & Seng, 2015) historical analysis that is based on the theoretical framework developed in this thesis could not only account for (a part of) higher education's re-distributive characteristics, but also account for the evolution of partisan preferences on the governance of higher education.

With regard to further research that would widen the conceptual approach for the analysis of partisan politics in higher education policy-making, one could include a larger set of actors in the analytical framework. While this study focuses on parties and their preferences and thus highlights the core of democratic governance, parties are not the only actors that influence policy. Amongst others, ministers, organised interests, or the bureaucracy have also been found to matter in policy-making (e.g. Baekgaard et al., 2014; Laver & Shepsle, 1994). Therefore, based on the results of this study, a possible additional research interest

could be to disentangle the role of these different groups of actors for higher education as well as other social policies to assess which actor matters in which circumstances or phases of the policy process. Given the focus of this analysis on parties and their role for the aggregation of interests, an approach that addresses the interplay between different groups of actors, and potentially also the relation between actor preferences and path dependencies, could additionally contribute to the intensive discussion on the end of representative democracy and the rise of ‘post-democracy’ (e.g. Crouch, 2004; Rosanvallon, 2008; Schmitter, 1994). One of the key arguments in this discussion is that the growing importance of organised interests and the resilience of the bureaucratic apparatus have led to a decreased relevance of those actors that actually carry a democratic mandate – i.e. political parties. By unpacking the role of these different groups of actors in different phases of the policy process it might be possible to get a more nuanced view on the nature of democratic governance in today’s policy-making environment.

Another possible conceptual expansion would be to broaden the analytical framework by including stages of the policy cycle beyond policy proposals. For example, this would include questions that examine what happens to governmental policy proposals during the legislative process or during implementation. Such an expansion would allow for analysing the differences between partisan preferences, coalition positions, and the final policy output or even outcome. The final possibility for further research that expands the conceptual approach, based on the results of this study, could consider the role of political parties with regard to higher education’s multi-level characteristics. As higher education policy in Europe is increasingly developed in a multi-level policy arena, where processes of both policy uploading and downloading from one level to the other are taking place, parties could be conceptualised as possibly also playing a role in these processes. A potential research question along these lines would address different levels of policy-making. In this, it could investigate whether there is a partisan factor that influences the level of, or area in which political parties in government are responsive to. In addition, this research interest could provide links between a party’s higher education preferences and their preference concerning European integration.

A final empirical expansion of the results of this study could consider that higher education institutions as the key components of their segment of the public sector and main providers

of higher education services are also responsible for other public tasks such as research, and possible other tasks, such as knowledge-based public services and innovation. As this thesis demonstrated that political parties hold different preferences on higher education policy, it is reasonable to expect that partisan preferences could also differ with regard to the other functions of higher education institutions. However, science policy and innovation policy have some characteristics that vary from higher education policy. Amongst other things, these policy areas often have less political salience, as they are not directly relevant for most parts of the electorate and used to be strongly regulated by professional expertise. However, recent years saw a growing role of political steering in science and innovation policy visible, such as in the shift from block grants to targeted research funding that follows national priorities (see: Lepori, 2006; Lepori et al., 2007). Thus, these recent changes created the possibility for more influence by political actors in science and innovation policy, and also gave parties incentives to take differing positions, especially since the institutional linkage and potential resource conflicts between the education and research functions of higher education might cause parties to favour one above the other. As higher education, science, and innovation policies are all addressing the same segment of the public sector they are strongly interconnected and to get a good understanding of party politics in this knowledge sector, it is also necessary to analyse the partisan preferences behind science, innovation, and other relevant policy areas, such as technology.

Overall, these possible avenues of future research can be expected to strengthen the understanding of the role of parties and their preferences for social policies in general and higher education policy-making in particular. Parts of the foundation for such a research agenda can lie in the results, methods and theoretical framework presented in this thesis, which illuminate both the role of parties for higher education policy and of higher education policy for political parties.

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## **PART II - ARTICLES**



## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix 1 - List of documents

- Arbeiderpartiet, Sosialistisk Venstreparti, and Senterpartiet (2009). Politisk Plattform for Flertallsregjeringen 2009 - 2013.
- Arbeiderpartiet (2009). Skape og dele. Arbeiderpartiets program 2009 – 2013.
- Arbeiderpartiet (2013). Vi tar Norge videre. Arbeiderpartiets program 2013–2017.
- CDA (2010). Slagvaardig en samen. Verkiezingsprogram 2010-2015.
- CDA (2012). Iedereen. Verkiezingsprogramma 2012-2017.
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Koalitionsvereinbarung von CDU und FDP zur Bildung einer neuen Landesregierung in Nordrhein-Westfalen.
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- D66 (2010). We willen het anders. Verkiezingsprogramma D66 voor de Tweede Kamer 2010 - 2014.
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- FDP (2010). Aufsteigerland NRW. Das Programm zur nordrhein-westfälischen Landtagswahl 2010.
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Kristelig Folkeparti (2009). KrFs program 2009 -2013.

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VVD and PvdA (2012). Bruggen Slaan. Regeerakkoord VVD - PvdA.

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## **Appendix 2 - List of parties, their acronyms and families**

Arbeiderpartiet (AP) – Norway, social democrats

Christen-Democratisch Appèl (CDA) – the Netherlands, Christian democrats

Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU) – Germany, Christian democrats

ChristenUnie (CU) – the Netherlands, Christian democrats

The Conservative Party (Conservatives) – the United Kingdom, conservatives

Die Linke (die Linke) – Germany, anti-establishment party of the left

Politieke Partij Democraten 66 (D66) – the Netherlands, liberals

Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP) – Germany, liberals

Fremskrittspartiet (FrP) – Norway, anti-establishment party of the right

GroenLinks (GL) – the Netherlands, green party

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Grüne) – Germany, green party

Høyre (Høyre) – Norway, conservatives

Kristelig Folkeparti (KrF) – Norway, Christian democrats

The Labour Party (Labour) – the United Kingdom, social democrats

Liberal Democrats (Liberal Democrats) – the United Kingdom, liberals

Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) – the Netherlands, social democrats

Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) – the Netherlands, anti-establishment party of the right

Senterpartiet (SenP) – Norway, farmers' party

Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (SGP) – the Netherlands, Christian democrats

Socialistische Partij (SP) – the Netherlands, anti-establishment party of the left

Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) – Germany, social democrats

Sosialistisk Venstreparti (SV) – Norway, anti-establishment party of the left

Venstre (Venstre) – Norway, liberals

Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) – the Netherlands, liberals

Wahlalternative Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit (WASG) – Germany, anti-establishment party of the left

## **Appendix 3 - List of respondents**

- (1)** Member of parliament of the CDU in NRW
- (2)** SPD staff member responsible for higher education
- (3)** Member of parliament for the VVD
- (4)** PvdA staff member responsible for higher education
- (5)** Member of parliament for Høyre
- (6)** Member of parliament for AP



## **Appendix 4 - Interview guide**

Introduction: Explain the research project and the role of the interviews within the frame of the project; inform the interviewee about the statement of anonymity and sign it.

### **Thematic Block 1: Position in and role of higher education policy**

1. What are the most important policy issues for your party concerning higher education?
2. What are your party's positions on these policy issues, how have these positions changed over the last 5-10 years and how do your party's positions compare to those of other parties?
3. How important is higher education for your party in comparison to other policy areas?
4. In your opinion, how important is higher education for your electorate and which part of higher education is most important for your electorate (i.e. quality, access, public costs etc.)?

### **Thematic Block 2: Creation of the Manifesto**

1. How are policy positions concerning higher education created and where are they formalized? What is the formal procedure and who is involved in the formulation of the party's positions? (For example, how was the section on higher education in the last election manifesto written & decided upon?)
2. How have the policy positions of the party developed since the formulation of the manifesto, did new issue arise, did positions change?
3. How does the expert staff for higher education of the party, the party's members of parliament and the ministry cooperate when it comes to higher education policy making?
4. What role do societal actors or the social partners play in the generation of higher education policy within the party?
5. What role do actors from the higher education sector play in the generation of higher education policy within the party and which part of the higher education sector does your party mainly link to (professors, staff, students etc.)?

### **Thematic Block 3: Impact of Manifesto**

1. How well does the existing coalition agreement reflect the positions of the party concerning higher education policy and what role did higher education policy have in the coalition negotiations?
2. How do the political positions in the election manifesto and the coalition agreement influence government policy regarding higher education? Have you had recent examples that you can use to illustrate the transition from party position to government program and implementation?
3. What are factors limiting the transferability of party positions into governmental programs and policies and how do you deal with them?
4. Is there feedback from the day-to-day governmental policy making in higher education into the creation of positions on higher education for upcoming elections manifestos of the party?

Concluding remarks: Ask the interviewee whether there is anything that s/he would like to add. Thank the interviewee and inform him/her about the following research process; ask him/her whether s/he could sign the consent form.

## **Appendix 5 - NSD registration**



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Vår dato: 09.12.2013

Vår ref: 36368 / 2 / JSL

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

## TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 19.11.2013. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

36368                                      *Do political parties matter in higher education policy?*  
Behandlingsansvarlig                      *Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder*  
Daglig ansvarlig                              *Jens Jungblut*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.12.2016, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim

Juni Skjold Lexau

Kontaktperson: Juni Skjold Lexau tlf: 55 58 36 01

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

*Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.*

*Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:*

*OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no*

*TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no*

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## Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

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Prosjektnr: 36368

According to the notification form there will be obtained written consent based on written information about the project and the processing of personal data. The Data Protection Official presupposes that the following will be added in the information letter:

- Participation is voluntary.
- That the project will be ended in 2016.
- That the data material can be used in follow up studies.
- That the data material will be fully anonymised or deleted no later than December 31st 2021.

Please send the revised Letter of Information to [personvernombudet@nsd.uib.no](mailto:personvernombudet@nsd.uib.no).

There will be registered sensitive information relating to racial or ethnic origin, or political, philosophical or religious beliefs, cf. Personal Data Act § 2, no. 8 a).

The participants will be identifiable through position, political party and country. We recommend that they are allowed to approve before you use direct citations in the final publications.

When the project is completed, by 31.12.2016, the data material will be kept for 5 years for possible follow up studies.

The data will be made fully anonymous, by 31.12.2021, by deleting directly and indirectly identifying variables, and audio-recordings will be deleted. In order for the data to be fully anonymised, all directly identifying data, such as names/reference numbers must be deleted, and indirectly identifying data in the remaining material must be deleted or changed.

If the researcher will embark on a follow up study later on, a new Notification form must be sent for evaluation.

## Errata List

Page iii:

Article 2 has been published in a revised version in *European Politics and Society*:

### **Article 2**

Jungblut, J. (2016). Re-distribution and Public Governance - The Politics of Higher Education in Western Europe. *European Politics and Society*, online first.

Article 3 is under review with *Public Policy and Administration*:

### **Article 3**

Jungblut, J. (under review). From Preferences to Policies in Coalition Governments – Proactive and Reactive Policy-Making in Higher Education Policy. *Public Policy and Administration*.